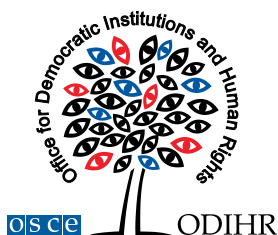


Disability Quotas for Parliamentary Elections

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1 Introduction

OSCE participating States (pSs) agreed as early as 1991 to “take steps to ensure the equal opportunity of persons with disabilities to participate fully in the life of their society” and to “promote the appropriate participation of such persons in decision-making in fields concerning them.”¹ Fifty-four of the 57 OSCE participating States² have also ratified the 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), an international human rights instrument that affirms the fundamental human rights of people with disabilities, including the right to political participation.³

Despite these commitments, people with disabilities remain under-represented in political and public life worldwide, including in OSCE pSs. This limits their ability to advocate for their interests and contribute to decision-making processes. To address this disparity, disability quotas have emerged as a mechanism for increasing the representation of people with disabilities in national parliaments. These quotas, a form of affirmative action, aim to ensure a fair and inclusive political system by reserving seats in political bodies for people with disabilities or by setting targets for political parties (and other nominating organizations taking part in elections) to nominate people with disabilities as candidates.

¹ Document of the Moscow Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE, (Moscow Document), OSCE, 4 October 1991, para. 41.2.

² The Holy See, Tajikistan and the United States of America have not ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

³ United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, UN General Assembly, A/RES/61/106, 12 December 2006.

1. INTRODUCTION

This guide examines the **three types of quotas used for parliamentary elections: reserved seats, legislative quotas, and party quotas**. It views quotas as temporary special measures to boost the political participation of under-represented groups. Quotas cover a range of affirmative measures that can be adapted to different political realities, such as different political or party systems. They can be established by legislation, including electoral law and constitutional amendments, or by party statutes.

Research on **quotas for under-represented groups** has typically focused on gender quotas, already established in more than 130 countries worldwide⁴ and, recently, on quotas for youth. Thus, where data on disability quotas is sparse or unavailable due to the paucity of research, the guide draws on insights from studies of quotas for other groups, especially women, to understand the potential impacts and challenges associated with disability quotas in different political contexts. Additionally, while the focus of this publication is on the OSCE region, it also draws on selected, global, non-OSCE examples where necessary, given the extremely limited use of disability quotas among OSCE participating States. We found no examples of reserved seats for people with disabilities in the OSCE region. One OSCE pS, **Kazakhstan**, has legislative quotas for people with disabilities. **Kyrgyzstan** applied a legislative quota from 2012 until 2025, but it is no longer applied in the new electoral system introduced in 2025. There are also two examples of political parties in the OSCE region with voluntary disability quotas — the **Liberal Democrats in the United Kingdom** and the **Liberal Party in Canada**. However, identifying

⁴ [Equal Representation? The Debate Over Gender Quotas](#), Harvard International Review, 29 November 2021.

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examples was challenging due to the limited data available, and it is possible that other political parties in the region also have disability quotas that were not captured in our research.

Given its exploratory nature, the guide takes a qualitative approach, drawing on a wide range of data sources. Information on disability quotas and other supportive measures was collected from academic articles and studies on the political representation of people with disabilities as well as open-source data. Where necessary, interviews were used in case studies of disability quotas in the OSCE region.⁵ Where available, national electoral laws and party statutes were also studied. Where data simply did not exist, the guide draws on insights from the research on quotas for other groups, including women and youth. These comparative insights provide valuable perspectives on the dynamics and challenges of implementing disability quotas.

The guide has six chapters. Following the Introduction, Chapter 2 provides some background on the political participation of people with disabilities, including a review of international commitments and standards. Chapter 3 discusses the three types of disability quotas in use around the world: reserved seats, legislative quotas and party quotas, including their institutional set-up and some examples of how they are implemented, both in the OSCE region and beyond. Chapter 4 presents case studies of disability

⁵ Interviews were conducted with Dastan Bekeshev (Member of Parliament, *Jogorku Kenesh*, Kyrgyzstan) on 28 November 2023 and 22 March 2024 via email, Senator Lyazzat Kaltayeva (Senate of Kazakhstan) on 8 November 2023 via email, Kathy Bates (Disability Policy Expert, Disability Labour, United States) on 9 November 2023 via Zoom, Margaret Joachim (Chair, English Candidates' Committee, Liberal Democrats) on 29 October 2024 via Zoom and Katharine Macy (Chair, Disability Association, Liberal Democrats) on 11 December 2024 via Zoom.

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quotas introduced in the OSCE region. Chapter 5 explores the wider impact of introducing disability quotas, analysing their intersectional effects and how they have shaped the policymaking process as well as societal attitudes towards people with disabilities. Chapter 6 offers recommendations for policymakers, advocacy groups and international organizations working on disability rights and political inclusion.

2 Background

The political participation of people with disabilities is a fundamental human right, as enshrined in Article 29 of the CRPD.⁶ This right includes voting, joining political parties, the right to “stand for election, to effectively hold office and perform all public functions at all levels of government” (Article 29.a.ii). Central to this perspective is the **human rights model of disability**, which recognizes disability as a natural part of human diversity and asserts that societal barriers, rather than individual impairments, are the primary obstacles to full inclusion. Additionally, people with disabilities must be guaranteed the same rights as everyone else in society, and disability must not be used as a justification for denying or restricting people’s rights. This model challenges outdated approaches that viewed people with disabilities as objects of charity or solely in need of medical intervention.⁷ Instead, it advocates for their empowerment as equal participants in all aspects of life, including political decision-making.

Despite advancements, the **political under-representation of people with disabilities remains a global challenge**. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 16 per cent of the world’s population currently has a disability,⁸ yet these people are often excluded from political office. As an example, a review of disability and candidate requirements for elections to the European Parliament found that only eight European Union (EU)

⁶ Notably, Mexico came forward with the proposal for the CRPD at the urging of a disability rights advocate, Gilberto Rincón Gallardo, who had himself run as a presidential candidate in 2000.

⁷ [Guidelines on Promoting the Political Participation of Persons with Disabilities](#), OSCE/ODIHR, 15 March 2019, p.22.

⁸ [Disability and Health](#), World Health Organization, 7 March 2023.

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Member States — Austria, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Croatia, Italy, the Netherlands and Sweden — guarantee all people with disabilities the right to stand for office, without restrictions.⁹ Barriers to the right to run for elected office include stigma, accessibility challenges and discriminatory candidate eligibility requirements, such as restrictions based on intellectual disabilities or the lack of official recognition for sign language where candidates are required to speak the country's official language.

This near-absence of people with disabilities in political office means that **their legislative and policy needs are likely to be overlooked**. The fact that 16 per cent of the world's population has a disability highlights the need to include people with disabilities in all decision-making processes and challenges the notion that disability issues are narrow, special interests of a tiny subset of the population.¹⁰ Moreover, evidence suggests that laws and policies originally designed to support people with disabilities often benefit the broader population.¹¹ Providing ramps for wheelchair access in parliament buildings, for example, also helps those who are pushing baby prams or wheeling other heavy items. Using visual images and Easy-to-Read language can be introduced to help elected officials who might have learning disabilities or require assistive technologies. These accommodations, however, can also assist people with low levels of literary, non-native speakers or those who want to

⁹ [Human Rights Report on Political Participation of Persons with Disabilities](#), European Disability Forum, 2022, p. 14.

¹⁰ Amber Knight, [Disability as Vulnerability: Redistributing Precariousness in Democratic Ways](#), *Journal of Politics*, Vol.76, 2014.

¹¹ Ami Hamraie, [Building Access: Universal Design and the Politics of Disability](#), (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

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read the document quickly.¹² The principle of universal design is often used when discussing increasing the accessibility of parliaments and political institutions. This means that products, services and environments are designed so that they can be used by everyone, even if initially inspired to increase access for people with disabilities. By employing universal design, parliaments can better meet the needs of all citizens.

Finally, increasing the number of people with disabilities in politics raises their visibility in society as a whole and creates opportunities to combat negative stereotypes.¹³ Political participation communicates that people with disabilities are equal citizens, helping to reduce the stigmas surrounding disability and improving both the public perception of people with disabilities and their own perception of themselves.¹⁴ Furthermore, the political representation of people with disabilities should encourage other candidates with disabilities to stand in future.¹⁵ While fulfilling pSs' human rights commitments, promoting the political representation of people with disabilities advances both equality and democracy in significant and substantial ways.

¹² OSCE/ODIHR, [Guidelines on Promoting the Political Participation of Persons with Disabilities](#), p. 42.

¹³ Chelsea Arnett, Differently Abled Politicians and the Impact of Their Abilities on Their Lives, Careers, and Policies in Dana Lee (editor), *Disability and U.S. Politics*, (Denver: Praeger, 2017), vol.1, pp. 115-136.

¹⁴ Martha Nussbaum, [The Capabilities of People with Cognitive Disabilities](#), *Metaphilosophy*, Vol. 40, 2009; János Fiala-Butora, Janet E. Lord, & Micheal Ashley Stein, [The Democratic Life of the Union: Towards Equal Voting Participation for Europeans with Disabilities](#), *Harvard International Law Review*, Vol. 55, 2014.

¹⁵ Mitzi Waltz & Alice Schippers, [Politically Disabled: Barriers and Facilitating Factors Affecting People with Disabilities in Political Life within the European Union](#), *Disability & Society*, Vol. 36, 2021.

2.1 International commitments

In the OSCE region, the CRPD is the pre-eminent human rights instrument on the political participation of people with disabilities. In ratifying the Convention, States Parties are obliged to align their legal frameworks with its general principles, including respect for inherent dignity and individual autonomy, non-discrimination, full and effective participation and inclusion, respect for difference, equality of opportunity, accessibility, equality between women and men, and respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities (Article 3.a-h).

Article 29 of the CRPD recognizes the **right of persons with disabilities to participate fully in political and public life**. It commits States Parties to ensuring that people 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” (Article 29.a). Additionally, it mandates support for people with disabilities “to stand for elections, to effectively hold office and perform all public functions at all levels of government,” including through the “use of assistive and new technologies where appropriate” (Article 29.a.ii). Article 29 also protects the rights of people with disabilities to vote (Article 29.a), to participate in political parties (Article 29.b.i) and to form and join Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) at international, national, regional and local levels (Article 29.b.ii).

CRPD General Comment No. 1 (2014)¹⁶ reinforces the rights guaranteed in Article 29:

“A person's decision-making ability cannot be a justification for any exclusion of persons with disabilities from exercising their political rights, including the right to vote, the right to stand for election and the right to serve as a member of a jury.” (Paragraph 48)

“States parties [should] guarantee the right of persons with disabilities to stand for election, to hold office effectively, and to perform all public functions at all levels of government, with reasonable accommodation and support, where desired, in the exercise of their legal capacity.” (Paragraph 49)

Within the OSCE framework, key documents bolster these commitments. The **Copenhagen Document** (1990) affirms “the right of citizens to seek political or public office, individually or as representatives of political parties or organizations, without discrimination”.¹⁷ The following year, the **Moscow Document** (1991) called on participating States to “take steps to ensure the equal opportunity of [people with disabilities] to participate fully in the life of their society”¹⁸ and “to promote the appropriate participation of [people with disabilities] in decision-making in fields concerning them”.¹⁹

¹⁶ [CRPD General Comment No. 1 - Article 12: Equal recognition before the law](#), OHCHR, 2014.

¹⁷ [Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference of the Human Dimension of the CSCE](#), (Copenhagen Document), OSCE, 29 June 1990, para. 7.5.

¹⁸ OSCE, [Moscow Document](#), para. 41.2.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, para. 41.3.

2.2 Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a key consideration in understanding the barriers faced by people with disabilities in politics, which are often exacerbated by other forms of discrimination, such as those based on sex, gender, ethnicity and national minority status, socio-economic background/status or age. Recognizing these intersecting factors is essential for developing inclusive policies that address the diverse needs of candidates with disabilities. For example, Article 6 of the CRPD acknowledges that women with disabilities may face multiple forms of discrimination, creating additional barriers to their full and equal political participation. Taking intersectionality into account when examining the political participation of people with disabilities requires a deeper understanding of these layered inequalities. This approach ensures that policies and measures, such as quotas, are inclusive and respond to the variety of challenges faced by individuals at the intersection of multiple identities.

In 2018, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly adopted the **Berlin Declaration**, noting that people with disabilities “remain widely under-represented in parliaments across the OSCE region” and urging participating States to ensure “participatory processes for persons with disabilities in all phases of developing legislation or policies in the spheres of political and public life.”²⁰

ODIHR supports these commitments through its programmatic work. Its Advisory Panel on the Political Participation of Persons

²⁰ [Berlin Declaration and Resolutions](#), OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, 11 July 2018, para. 149.

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with Disabilities, a majority of whose members are people with disabilities, provides expert guidance to ODIHR and OSCE participating States.²¹ This ensures that disability inclusion is informed by lived experiences and reflects the priorities of people with disabilities. In 2023, in consultation with the Advisory Panel, ODIHR published the **Dublin Recommendations**, a comprehensive set of recommendations to ensure the full and equal participation of people with disabilities in political and public life.²²

In addition to the commitments outlined in the CRPD and the OSCE commitments, various international organizations have highlighted the need for targeted measures to enhance the political participation of people with disabilities. One prominent example is the **Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe**, which has actively advocated for the adoption of disability quotas and other mechanisms to address systemic under-representation.

²¹ [ODIHR Advisory Panel on the Political Participation of Persons with Disabilities.](#)

²² [Recommendations on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to Participate in Political and Public Life,](#) (Dublin Recommendations), OSCE/ODIHR, 1 December 2023.

Advocacy for Disability Quotas: the Role of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe²³

In 2017, Resolution 2155 on the Political Rights of People with Disabilities called on participating States to:

- Consider the establishment of quotas to increase the representation of people with disabilities in parliamentary and local elections (Article 7.6.2);
 - Systematize the collection of data on the political participation of people with disabilities (Article 7.6.1); and
 - Provide financial support to candidates with disabilities to cover additional costs incurred during electoral campaigns (Article 7.6.3).
-

While these frameworks lay a strong foundation, challenges persist. Many pSs have yet to fully implement the CRPD, and barriers remain widespread. These include restrictions on candidacy for people with intellectual disabilities and inadequate accommodations during election processes. To address these gaps, sustained efforts are needed to align legal frameworks with CRPD principles and foster societal and institutional change.

²³ [Resolution 2155, “The political rights of persons with disabilities”](#), Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, 10 March 2017.

The CRPD and temporary special measures

CRPD Article 4.1.e: “States Parties undertake to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination on the basis of disability by any person, organization, or private enterprise.”

CRPD General Comment No. 3 (2016), Paragraph 20: “In line with the Convention, States parties must take ‘all appropriate measures’ to ensure and promote the full realization of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all persons with disabilities. (...) Measures may be temporary or long-lasting and should overcome de jure and de facto inequality. While temporary special measures such as quotas might be necessary to overcome structural, or systemic multiple discrimination, long-lasting measures such as reforming laws and policies to ensure the equal participation of women with disabilities in all areas of life are essential prerequisites for achieving substantive equality for women with disabilities.”²⁴

²⁴ [General comment No.3 on Article 6 – women and girls with disabilities](#), OHCHR, 2016.

3 Types of disability quota

There are three types of disability quota: **reserved seats, legislative quotas** and **party quotas**.²⁵ Each reflects a different approach to achieving greater representation and is tailored to specific political and institutional contexts. In the OSCE region, disability quotas exclusively take the form of legislative and party quotas. However, in other regions of the world, reserved seat quotas are most common. (SEE TABLE 1)

Table 1. Examples of disability quotas in OSCE and world parliaments

Reserved seats	Kenya: two seats in the upper chamber ²⁶
	Rwanda: one seat in the lower chamber ²⁷
	Uganda: five seats in the parliament ²⁸
	Zimbabwe: two seats in the upper chamber ²⁹
Legislative quotas	Kazakhstan: 30% combined quota for women, youth and people with disabilities ³⁰

²⁵ For an in-depth discussion of these three types of quotas, applied to the case of women, see Mona Lena Krook, *Quotas for Women in Politics*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

²⁶ *Constitution of the Republic of Kenya*, 2020, Art. 98.1.d, (unofficial translation). Additionally, according to the Article 97.1.c, 12 seats in the lower house of the National Assembly are allocated to political parties in proportion to their representation in parliament in order to “represent special interest including youth, people with disabilities...”.

²⁷ *Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda*, 2003 (revised 2015), Art. 75.4, (unofficial translation).

²⁸ *Parliamentary Elections Act*, Republic of Uganda, 2005, Art. 8.2.d, (unofficial translation).

²⁹ *Constitution of the Republic of Zimbabwe*, 2013, Art. 120.1.d.

³⁰ *Law on Political Parties*, Republic of Kazakhstan, 2002, Art. 15.1.1, (unofficial translation).

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Party quotas	Liberal Party, Canada: requirement to consider candidates with disabilities ³¹
	Liberal Democrats, United Kingdom: option to use all-disabled shortlists ³²
	Japan: option for parties to voluntarily apply a 'special quota' ³³

3.1 Reserved seats

Reserved seats guarantee representation by **setting aside a specific number or share of parliamentary seats for people with disabilities**. Reserved seats disability quotas have been introduced primarily in post-conflict contexts and typically involve a very small percentage of seats, usually less than two per cent. This approach ensures direct participation in decision-making processes, often in contexts where people with disabilities have historically been excluded.

In Rwanda and Uganda, national OPDs elect members to these seats. In Rwanda, for example, the 2003 Constitution reserves one seat for people with disabilities in the lower house of parliament. Representatives are elected by the National Council of Persons with Disabilities,³⁴ but eligibility requires being a dues-paying

³¹ [National rules for the Selection of Candidates](#), Liberal Party of Canada, 2016, Law 7.1.a.i.

³² [Lib Dem plan for 'all-disabled' election shortlists](#), BBC News website, 14 March 2016.

³³ Sae Okura, [Political Underrepresentation of People with Disabilities in the Japanese Diet](#), *Social Science Japan Journal*, Vol. 24, 2021.

³⁴ [Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda](#), 2003 (revised 2015), Art. 75.4, (unofficial translation).

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member, potentially creating financial barriers. In Kenya and Zimbabwe, two members of the upper house of parliament are reserved for representatives of people with disabilities, although the selection mechanisms remain unclear.

While reserved seats guarantee representation, they can be criticized for limiting the scale of inclusion or potentially reinforcing tokenism. Nonetheless, they provide an immediate and visible mechanism for integrating people with disabilities into political institutions.

3.2 Legislative quotas

Legislative quotas require political parties (and all political entities that are putting forward candidates) to **include a minimum percentage of candidates with disabilities on their electoral lists**, usually between one and ten per cent. Unlike reserved seats, these quotas do not guarantee the election of a candidate with a disability but aim to enhance opportunities for people with disabilities to run for office. Political parties, in this context, act as gatekeepers for individuals with disabilities looking to enter politics. As a result, these legal requirements do not ensure that candidates with disabilities will actually be elected, as parties may place them in a position on party lists where they are unlikely to be elected or there may not be sufficient enforcement mechanisms to ensure their compliance with quota regulations.³⁵ However, the specific requirements vary across cases. In the OSCE region, legislative quotas are applied in **Kazakhstan**.

³⁵ See Krook, *Quotas for Women in Politics*, for a technical discussion of the case of gender quotas in this regard.

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In **Kazakhstan**, Article 15-1 of the Law on Political Parties specifies that, when approving party lists of candidates for the election of the lower chamber (*Mazhilis* of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan), “a political party shall include representatives of three categories in them: women, youth, and persons with disabilities - collectively in the amount of at least thirty percent of the total number of candidates”.³⁶ It is worth noting that, for local elections, party lists do not include any provisions for candidates with disabilities, only stating that lists should “include women and young people in aggregate in the amount of at least thirty per cent of the total number of candidates”.³⁷ The Law does not mention any specific sanctions in place for non-compliance with quota provisions. While quotas for women and young people were already in place, the Law was reformed in 2022 to include for the first time people with disabilities in the quota for parliamentary elections. A requirement was added to stipulate that the quota must also **be taken into account during the distribution of mandates after the election** (versus simply applying to candidate lists).³⁸ The quota does not apply to the Senate (upper chamber) elections.

This reform had its origins in events during the 2016 local elections in Almaty, the largest city in Kazakhstan, where ten candidates with disabilities ran for seats, and three were elected across municipalities in both the city and surrounding suburbs. After quotas were introduced for women and young people in May 2020, an informal roundtable, organized by ODIHR with

³⁶ [Law on Political Parties](#), Republic of Kazakhstan, 2002, Art. 15.1.1, (unofficial translation).

³⁷ *Ibid.*, Art. 15.1.2.

³⁸ [ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report: Republic of Kazakhstan Early Parliamentary Elections](#), OSCE/ODIHR, 19 March 2023.

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government and civil society representatives, discussed the possibility of extending similar provisions to people with disabilities.³⁹ However, the real impetus for reform came from a presidential address to the nation in September 2021, in which President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev proposed an electoral quota for people with disabilities. Both houses of parliament then approved the legal reforms in January 2022 to require the inclusion of people with disabilities on party lists for elections.

Kyrgyzstan applied a legislative quota until 2025. The proposal for a quota for candidates with disabilities was first made by Dastan Bekeshev — an MP who is legally blind — and received unanimous support from the deputies in parliament.⁴⁰ Article 60 of the Constitutional Law on Elections was revised in 2012 and again in 2021 to require political parties to include at least two candidates with disabilities, one of whom must be among the first 25 candidates on the list.⁴¹ There were also separate quotas for women, youth and ethnic minorities. However, the policy did not guarantee that candidates with disabilities were placed in electable positions. Given the size of the party lists and the structure of electoral competition, requiring inclusion within the first 25 candidates (previously 50) can be seen as more symbolic than a fully effective mechanism for increasing representation.

With the introduction of the new electoral system in 2025, the legislative disability quota is no longer applied. The new

³⁹ Interview with Senator Lyazzat Kaltayeva, 8 November 2023.

⁴⁰ Interview with Dastan Bekeshev, 28 November 2023.

⁴¹ Constitutional Law of the Kyrgyz Republic on elections of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic and the deputies of the Jogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic, un-official translation, 2 July 2011, Art. 60.3.

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electoral system replaced the national electoral lists and introduced 30 electoral districts, from which there will be always three MPs elected.

Although legislative quotas for people with disabilities have been introduced in only two countries in the OSCE region and remain in only one, the topic has been **raised in at least two other contexts**. In 2018, a deputy in the lower house of the **French** parliament, Laurent Furst, proposed that parties be required to include at least one candidate with disabilities on their lists for the 2019 European Parliament elections, where representatives are chosen in a single, nationwide constituency.⁴² In 2023, Radu Raicu, president of the Association of Persons with Disabilities “Egalitate” in **Moldova**, proposed introducing a ten per cent quota for people with disabilities, following the authorities’ decision to adopt a 40 per cent quota for women.⁴³

The **effectiveness of legislative quotas** depends not only on compliance mechanisms and sanctions but also on whether candidates with disabilities are placed in electable positions on party lists. Without clear positioning requirements, parties may technically meet quota requirements while relegating candidates with disabilities to lower, less winnable positions, limiting their actual chances of being elected. Another key factor is replacement procedures in the event of resignation. Experience with gender quotas in several OSCE countries has shown that, without a rule that requires a departing quota-protected candidate to be replaced by another from the same group, parties may pressure elected representatives to resign and substitute

⁴² [Quota or not quota?](#), *Yanous news* website, 16 February 2018.

⁴³ [NGO proposes electoral quotas for people with disabilities](#), *IPN Press Agency* website, 23 August 2023.

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them with individuals outside the quota category — undermining the quota's intended impact. Ensuring that people with disabilities keep their seats throughout the electoral cycle requires safeguards against such practices, reinforcing both the sustainability and credibility of disability quotas in the region.

3.3 Party quotas

Party quotas are **voluntary mechanisms adopted by political parties** to increase the representation of under-represented groups, including people with disabilities. Unlike legislative quotas, which are legally mandated and apply across all parties, party quotas are self-imposed and vary in scope and enforcement. Given the voluntary nature of these measures, it is often difficult to know exactly which parties have quotas and for which groups. Parties also vary in their size, such that quotas adopted by a larger party will often have a greater impact than quotas introduced by smaller parties that are unlikely to win many seats.

These internal party provisions can take a variety of forms, and this guide documented examples in the OSCE region and beyond. In the **United Kingdom**, the **Liberal Democrats** introduced a quota provision in the form of **all-disabled shortlists**. In 2016, the party conference adopted a motion to allow its local party associations to voluntarily decide whether to use an all-disabled shortlist when selecting a candidate for an election.⁴⁴ These shortlists function much like a party quota mechanism, but with an important distinction: they are optional rather

⁴⁴ [Lib Dem plan for 'all-disabled' election shortlists](#), *BBC News* website, 14 March 2016.

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than mandatory. Not all constituencies implement it but, where it is used, candidate selection is limited exclusively to people with disabilities, creating a systemic advantage for disability representation.

In **Japan**, an OSCE Partner for Co-operation, amendments to the Public Office Election Act in 2018 permitted parties to deviate from regular open-list election rules to establish a ‘special quota’ for candidates who “cannot be said to have a national support base but have the potential to contribute to national politics”.⁴⁵ This ‘special quota’ system, in this context, allows specific candidates designated by the party to have precedence; these candidates are elected regardless of the number of votes they receive. A new, left-wing minority party, *Reiwa Shinsengumi*, decided to exercise the voluntary ‘special quota’ option for people with disabilities in the 2019 elections, resulting in the election of two candidates with severe disabilities.

Some party measures simply mandate that **people with disabilities must be considered as candidates**. In **Canada**, the **Liberal Party’s** rules for selecting candidates specify that nomination meetings may not be called until the Electoral District Association has “demonstrated to the satisfaction of the National Campaign Chair that the association has conducted an acceptable search for Potential Nomination Contestants, including documented evidence of a thorough search for Potential Nomination Contestants from communities or backgrounds who are under-represented in Parliament — including but not limited to candidates who are women; Black, Indigenous, or people of colour; LGBTQ; people with disabilities; and marginalized communities,

⁴⁵ Sae Okura, [Political Underrepresentation of People with Disabilities in the Japanese Diet](#), *Social Science Japan Journal*, Vol. 24, 2021.

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or the Provincial or Territorial Chair has conducted such a search on its behalf”.⁴⁶ Liberal Party rules also stipulate that the National Campaign Chair or their designate shall make reasonable efforts to hold nomination meetings providing “reasonable accessibility to persons with physical disabilities, or, if a location is not reasonably accessible, a plan for alternate arrangements which will reasonably accommodate such persons”.⁴⁷

Party quotas offer flexibility and can adapt to the unique contexts of political parties. However, their voluntary nature often results in inconsistent application and limited impact.

⁴⁶ National rules for the Selection of Candidates, Liberal Party of Canada, 2016, Law 7.1.a.i.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, Law 9.3.c.

4 Examples of disability quotas in the OSCE region

4.1 Legislative quota in Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan's legislative quota includes people with disabilities as part of a combined system aimed at increasing representation for under-represented groups. This approach integrates quotas for women, youth and people with disabilities, collectively accounting for at least 30 per cent of candidates on party lists for proportional representation elections.

Implementation of the quota: In the 2023 parliamentary elections, all seven registered political parties complied with the combined quota requirement. This marked the first application of the 2022 legal reforms, which extended the existing quota for women and youth to include people with disabilities. The reforms also stipulated that the quota must be upheld during the allocation of parliamentary mandates, not just in the composition of party lists. Kazakhstan's electoral system for the *Mazhilis* (lower chamber) features a mixed model: 29 single-member constituencies, decided by majoritarian voting; and 69 proportional seats, where the 30 per cent quota applies. While all parties fulfilled the quota, the majority of candidates under the combined category were women (29 per cent), leaving relatively fewer opportunities for youth and people with disabilities.⁴⁸

Election outcomes: The quota's implementation led to the election of six members of the *Mazhilis* with disabilities, accounting for 6.1 per cent of the lower house. Additionally,

⁴⁸ OSCE/ODIHR, [Election Observation Mission 2023 Final Report](#), p. 2.

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one of the five senators appointed by the President to the upper house was a person with a disability.⁴⁹ Beyond the national parliament, 71 people with disabilities were elected to local councils.⁵⁰ Notably, no candidates with disabilities were elected in single-member constituencies, where quotas do not apply.⁵¹ This highlights the importance of such mechanisms for ensuring representation in proportional systems, as well as the limitations of relying solely on voluntary or competitive processes.

Impact of the quota: The election of people with disabilities to parliament has had tangible institutional and policy impacts:

- 1. Formation of the Inclusive Parliament Group:** Following their election, the six MPs with disabilities formed an informal caucus to promote disability rights.⁵² This group, which has since expanded to 18 members (including allies without disabilities), has played a key role in drafting two new disability-related laws.⁵³
- 2. Ratification of the CRPD Optional Protocol:** On the initiative of the Inclusive Parliament Group, Kazakhstan ratified

⁴⁹ Interview with Senator Lyazzat Kaltayeva, 8 November 2023.

⁵⁰ Ляzzат Калтаева: людям с ограниченными возможностями стало комфортнее в Казахстане (Lyazzat Kaltayeva: persons with disabilities are becoming more comfortable in Kazakhstan), Senate of the Republic of Kazakhstan blog website, 30 March 2023, (in Russian).

⁵¹ «Чтобы тихо отсиживались». В парламенте стало ещё меньше женщин ("To sit quietly" There are even fewer women in parliament), *Radio Free Europe Kyrgyz Service* website, 20 April 2023, (in Russian).

⁵² Interview with Lyazzat Kaltayeva, 8 November 2023.

⁵³ Депутатская группа «Инклюзивный Парламент» (Deputy Group "Inclusive Parliament"), Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan website, (in Kazakh).

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the Optional Protocol to the CRPD in 2023.⁵⁴ This allows the CRPD Committee to hear individual complaints about disability rights violations in the country.

- 3. Advocacy for structural reforms:** The caucus is pushing for the establishment of a government body dedicated to coordinating disability rights initiatives, as well as an independent mechanism to monitor CRPD implementation.⁵⁵

Challenges and lessons learned: Although the legislative quota has improved representation, several challenges remain. The grouping of women, youth and people with disabilities into a single category can, in practice, lead to competition among under-represented groups for a limited number of slots. The absence of quota provisions in single-member constituencies for the election of the lower chamber, and overall, for the election of the Senate, means that people with disabilities remain under-represented in these parts of the electoral system. Kazakhstan's experience illustrates the potential of legislative quotas to increase the participation of people with disabilities, while also highlighting the importance of careful design to prevent unintended effects. Future reforms could consider options for disaggregating quotas to promote more equitable opportunities for each group.

⁵⁴ [Факультативный протокол к Конвенции о правах инвалидов ратифицировал парламент Казахстана](#) (The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has been ratified by the Parliament of Kazakhstan), *Zakon.kz news* website, 25 May 2023, (in Russian).

⁵⁵ [Совет по инклюзии будет создан при Сенате](#) (Council on inclusion is created in the Senate), *Zakon.kz news* website, 26 September 2023, (in Russian).

4.2 Party quotas in the United Kingdom and Canada

The **Liberal Democrats in the United Kingdom** have historically employed innovative measures to address the under-representation of people with disabilities in politics.⁵⁶ In 2016, the party introduced all-disabled shortlists, which allowed local associations to exclusively shortlist candidates with disabilities for certain constituencies. Reserved shortlists are a flexible form of quota that enable the party to comply with the UK Equality Act, which does not oblige parties to apply quotas but permits temporary special measures for specific groups. Although less binding than traditional quotas, the Liberal Democrats' approach has demonstrated effectiveness in improving representation when integrated with legal provisions like the Equality Act.

Baroness Sal Brinton, the then president of the Liberal Democrats and a disability rights advocate, championed the use of all-disabled shortlists, emphasizing their potential to break down barriers for disabled candidates.⁵⁷ She described the measure as a natural extension of the party's commitment to diversity, mirroring the success of all-women shortlists in tackling gender inequality.

A key success of this initiative is Stephen Lloyd, who is hard of hearing and who was elected to Parliament in 2017 after being selected through an all-disabled shortlist. Lloyd's election was seen as a landmark achievement, demonstrating the importance of targeted measures to increase disability representation in politics.

⁵⁶ For more information, see the website of the [Liberal Democrat Diversity Association](#) (LDDA).

⁵⁷ John Pring, [Lib Dem conference: Party picks first Westminster candidate from all-disabled shortlist](#), *Disability News Service* website, 22 September 2016.

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In 2024, the Liberal Democrats introduced new selection rules to improve the flexibility and inclusivity of candidate selection processes.⁵⁸ The updated rules replaced all-disabled shortlists with a requirement that every shortlist must include a reserved place for a disabled applicant, should one apply. This ensures that disabled candidates are considered alongside others in every constituency where they apply, integrating disability inclusion into broader party practices while maintaining compliance with the principles of the Equality Act. The Liberal Democrats also provide additional support for candidates with disabilities, including accessible venues and reasonable accommodations during the candidate selection process as well as mentorship and guidance through the Liberal Democrat Disability Association, which assists both potential candidates and elected officials.⁵⁹ As of May 2024, 9.4 per cent of the party's candidates identified as people with disabilities. While the party has made strides, challenges remain in ensuring consistent implementation across its decentralized candidate selection system.

The **Liberal Party of Canada** takes a broader approach to diversity, embedding disability inclusion within its overall strategy for recruiting candidates from under-represented groups. Party rules require Electoral District Associations (EDAs) to demonstrate efforts to recruit candidates from marginalized communities, including people with disabilities, before finalizing their selections. The policy does not impose formal penalties for non-compliance.⁶⁰ Unlike the UK Liberal Democrats'

⁵⁸ Interview with Margaret Joachim, Chair, English Candidates' Committee, Liberal Democrats, 29 October 2024.

⁵⁹ Interview with Katharine Macy, Chair, Disability Association, Liberal Democrats, 11 December 2024.

⁶⁰ [National-Rules-for-the-Selection-of-Candidates.pdf](#), Liberal Party of Canada, 2022.

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reserved-place rule, the Canadian Liberal Party's policy does not mandate specific quotas or reserved places for people with disabilities. The success of this approach largely depends on the commitment of individual EDAs to prioritize diversity and inclusion in their candidate selection processes.

This broader approach has yielded limited measurable progress for candidates with disabilities. For instance, the party's 2021 election platform included no explicit reference to increasing the representation of candidates with disabilities.⁶¹ Research on similar voluntary diversity policies, such as those in the British Labour Party, shows that, while these measures encourage the consideration of under-represented candidates, they often fail to significantly increase the number of selected or elected candidates.⁶² The lack of enforceable measures or monitoring mechanism highlights the limitation of the Liberal Party's approach, even as it promotes a more inclusive political culture.

Comparison and challenges: The UK Liberal Democrats and the Liberal Party of Canada illustrate two contrasting approaches to disability inclusion. The Liberal Democrat's reserved-place rule reflects a structured and legally compliant approach to disability inclusion. While it ensures that disabled candidates are considered during every candidate selection process, its impact depends on the availability of qualified disabled applicants and the willingness of local associations to fully implement the rule. The Liberal Party of Canada's broader diversity framework reflects a general commitment to inclusivity but lacks enforceable

⁶¹ [Disability Statement](#), Liberal Party of Canada, 2021.

⁶² Mona Lena Krook & Mary K. Nugent, [Not Too Young to Run? Age Requirements and Young People in Elected Office](#), *Intergenerational Justice Review*, Vol. 4, 2016.

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mechanisms to ensure meaningful representation for people with disabilities. Both approaches highlight the importance of complementary measures, such as leadership training, financial support and targeted recruitment efforts to bridge the gap between policy intentions and outcomes.

5 The positive impact of disability quotas

Disability quotas, though relatively rare, have demonstrated their potential to increase the political representation of people with disabilities and, through **representation**, quotas can impact **poli-cymaking** and **societal attitudes**.

5.1 Increasing representation

The primary goal of disability quotas is to address the historical exclusion of people with disabilities from political office. Quotas have been successful in ensuring that individuals with disabilities gain seats in parliaments and other decision-making bodies. As discussed earlier, quotas have enabled people with disabilities to enter political office in participating States such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and the United Kingdom. These measures address structural barriers and promote representation, although challenges like strategic placement on party lists persist. For example, in Kazakhstan, MPs with disabilities now hold 6.1 per cent of seats in the lower house.⁶³ In the United Kingdom, the Liberal Democrats introduced intentional efforts, such as all-disabled shortlists in 2016, which played a significant role in promoting inclusivity within the party. These measures have contributed to 9.4 per cent of the party's approved candidates identifying as disabled as of May 2024, reflecting the impact of targeted policies on representation.⁶⁴

⁶³ Interview with Senator Lyazzat Kaltayeva, 8 November 2023.

⁶⁴ Interview with Margaret Joachim, Chair, English Candidates' Committee, Liberal Democrats, 29 October 2024.

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Studies on gender quotas reveal that effective **enforcement mechanisms**, such as **placement rules** and **sanctions for non-compliance**, are critical to achieving meaningful representation. Disability quotas could benefit from similar strategies to ensure candidates with disabilities are placed in winnable positions.⁶⁵

Insights from research on gender quotas

Research on gender quotas highlights three sets of factors determining their efficacy in boosting the number of women elected to political office:

1. Design of quota policies, in terms of the percentage specified, details regarding candidate placement and the presence of sanctions for non-compliance.
2. Broader political system factors, including the type of electoral system and the dynamics of the political party system.
3. Political will, in terms of the motivations of elites to ensure that quotas are (or are not) implemented.

In general, the most effective gender quotas are those that specify a high percentage for the under-represented sex (in reality women candidates), require parties to include women in winnable positions on party lists and/or in winnable single-member districts, and impose sanctions (such as the rejection of candidate lists) on parties that do not comply with quota requirements.

⁶⁵ For a comprehensive review, see Susan Franceschet, Mona Lena Krook, and Jennifer M. Piscopo, *The Impact of Gender Quotas*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

5.2 Shaping policymaking

Although the research on the political representation of people with disabilities is limited, some studies do provide evidence that politicians with disabilities make a difference to policymaking on behalf of people with disabilities. While not every person with a disability seeks to form a political identity around disability⁶⁶ or chooses disability rights as part of their political platform, and different types of disability create distinct needs,⁶⁷ evidence indicates that the **presence of politicians with disabilities can shape policymaking dynamics** in at least three ways:

- First, there is a strong match between the policy priorities of both politicians and citizens with disabilities, suggesting that representatives with disabilities can play an important role in bringing these issues up for political debate.⁶⁸ The fact that many politicians with disabilities have their roots in disability activism may also make this more likely, given their professional networks and longstanding commitments to such issues.⁶⁹
- Second, the increased participation of people with disabilities in political decision-making can bring a disability lens to policy- and lawmaking, highlighting perspectives that might otherwise be overlooked.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Ingrid Guldvik & Jon Helge Lesjø, [Disability, Social Groups, and Political Citizenship](#), *Disability & Society*, Vol.29, 2014.

⁶⁷ Stefanie Reher, [Do Disabled Candidates Represent Disabled Citizens?](#), *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 52, 2022.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Okura, [Political Underrepresentation of People with Disabilities in the Japanese Diet](#).

⁷⁰ Steven Fletcher, Jennifer Howard, Mario Levesque, Kevin Murphy, & David Only, [Roundtable: Disability in Parliamentary Politics](#), *Canadian Parliamentary Review*, Vol. 38, 2015; Richard K. Scotch & Sally Friedman, [Changing Times: Self-Disclosure and the Representational Styles of Legislators with Physical Disabilities](#), *Disability Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 34, 2014.

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- Third, the presence of legislators with disabilities may spur greater awareness and attention to disability issues among their colleagues without disabilities.⁷¹

Many elected representatives with disabilities have used their platforms to influence legislative agendas and advocate for systemic reforms. Below are few examples of individual actions and cross-party groups.

In **Kazakhstan**, the Inclusive Parliament Group, formed by MPs with disabilities, has been instrumental in driving disability-inclusive reforms. Senator Lyazzat Kaltayeva, a wheelchair user, has played a pivotal role in these efforts, using her platform to shape national policies and promote accessibility. Her contributions extend beyond Kazakhstan through her active participation in the ODIHR Advisory Panel on the Political Participation of Persons with Disabilities, where she continues to advocate for inclusive practices globally.

In **Ireland**, Senator Martin Conway, who is blind, has championed accessibility in political and public life. He has successfully advocated for the inclusion of disability training in the programmes offered to the parliamentary community in Ireland. As Chair of the ODIHR Advisory Panel on the Political Participation of Persons with Disabilities, Senator Conway has worked at the international level to advance reforms that ensure greater participation for people with disabilities. His advocacy under-

⁷¹ Paul Chaney, [Institutional Ableism, Critical Actors, and the Substantive Representation of Disabled People: Evidence from the UK Parliament 1940–2012](#), *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, Vol. 21, 2015; Brynne Langford & Mario Levesque, [Symbolic and Substantive Relevance of Politicians with Disabilities: A British Columbia Case Study](#), *Canadian Parliamentary Review*, Vol. 40, 2017.

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scores the importance of systemic changes to eliminate barriers in political systems.

In **Serbia**, the election of Gordana Rajkov in 2007 prompted the National Assembly to adopt measures enabling MPs with disabilities to engage personal assistants and receive travel reimbursements, setting a precedent for accessibility in parliamentary processes.

The **Disability Intergroup of the European Parliament**,⁷² established in 1980, is one of the longest-standing disability caucuses. It advocates for inclusive legislation on issues such as transport, accessibility, non-discrimination and employment. The Intergroup collaborates with the European Disability Forum, organizing debates, drafting amendments and raising awareness of disability issues across the European Union.

The **Bipartisan Disabilities Caucus in the United States Congress**, founded in 2001, fosters cross-party collaboration on disability rights. It connects legislators to stakeholders and has advanced key disability-inclusive policies over the years. Similar caucuses have been established in eight U.S. state legislatures, reflecting a growing trend in subnational advocacy.⁷³

In the **United Kingdom**, the **All-Party Parliamentary Group on Disability** serves as an informal cross-party group in Parliament. It facilitates discussion on disability rights, bringing together

⁷² [Disability Intergroup](#), European Disability Forum.

⁷³ [On the 32nd Anniversary of the ADA, Representatives Fitzpatrick and Dingell Named Two, New Co-Chairs of the Bipartisan Disabilities Caucus](#), Official webpage of United States Representative Brian Fitzpatrick, 27 July 2022.

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MPs and Lords to share insights and advocate for disability-inclusive policies.⁷⁴

These examples highlight how disability representation fosters systemic change. By leveraging their platforms and collaborating through caucuses, politicians with disabilities are shaping policies, transforming societal attitudes and ensuring that political systems reflect the diversity of their constituencies.

5.3 Impacting societal attitudes

By increasing the representation of people with disabilities, disability quotas can drive changes in societal attitudes by normalizing the presence of people with disabilities in leadership roles, reducing stigma and inspiring broader participation. Lessons from gender quotas illustrate the transformative power of representation. Research shows that increasing the number of women in political leadership helps to change harmful gender roles and reshapes public perceptions of leadership qualities. Similarly, disability quotas have the potential to demonstrate the capabilities of people with disabilities in decision-making roles, challenging outdated stereotypes and encouraging societal acceptance by normalizing the presence of people with disabilities in politics, showcasing them as equal contributors to public life.

For instance, research from the European Social Survey reveals that people with disabilities generally have lower levels of political trust and participation compared to the general population.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ [Register of All-Party Parliamentary Groups](#), UK Parliament, 30 May 2024.

⁷⁵ Stefanie Reher, [Mind This Gap, Too: Political Orientations of People with Disabilities in Europe](#), *Political Behavior*, Vol. 42, 2020.

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However, the visibility of elected leaders with disabilities can inspire others in the community to engage in public life and consider leadership roles.

In **Belgium**, former Member of the European Parliament, Helga Stevens, who is deaf, has been a trailblazer for disability representation, including as the first disabled individual to lead an ODIHR election observation mission in 2024. Her visibility has helped challenge stereotypes and demonstrate the leadership capabilities of people with disabilities.⁷⁶

The societal impact of disability quotas extends beyond the disability community. Research on American politicians with disabilities reveals that their visibility can lead to significant shifts in societal attitudes.⁷⁷ By openly discussing their disabilities, these leaders have helped reduce stigma and challenge stereotypes, fostering a more inclusive view of leadership.⁷⁸

Evidence from gender quotas suggests that inclusive leadership benefits society as a whole, fostering governance that is more representative and responsive. Similarly, disability quotas can help establish political institutions that better reflect the diversity of their constituencies, creating a ripple effect that promotes inclusivity across all sectors. By increasing visibility and breaking down stereotypes, disability quotas can pave the way for a society where people with disabilities are seen not as beneficiaries of charity but rather as active participants and leaders. These shifts

⁷⁶ Langford & Levesque, Symbolic and Substantive Relevance of Politicians with Disabilities.

⁷⁷ Friedman & Scotch, Changing Times.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

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in societal attitudes, while less tangible than legislative changes, are essential for building a foundation of equality and inclusion.

5.4 Intersectional impact of disability quotas

Disability quotas, while aimed at increasing the representation of people with disabilities, intersect with other forms of inequality, such as sex, gender, ethnic and national minority status, age and socioeconomic background/status. This intersection can either amplify or mitigate the impact of disability quotas, depending on how they are designed and implemented.

Addressing multiple forms of discriminations: Candidates with disabilities often face compounded barriers due to the intersection of disability with other factors. For example, women with disabilities may experience both gender and disability-based discrimination, making their political participation even more challenging. Evidence suggests that in countries like Kyrgyzstan, during the time when the legislative disability quota was applied, political parties attempted to meet multiple requirements with a single candidate — for instance, a young woman with a disability.⁷⁹ While this can increase diversity, it can also limit the broader representation of people with disabilities, as only candidates meeting multiple criteria may be selected. Additionally, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) found that, in Kazakhstan, introducing combined group quotas has not yet resulted in a signifi-

⁷⁹ Гендерное и инклюзивное развитие в кыргызстане: вызовы и рекомендации (Gender and Inclusive Development in Kyrgyzstan: challenges and recommendations), Public Association “Social Technologies Agency”, 2023, (in Russian).

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cant increase in the representation of targeted groups, including women.⁸⁰

Inclusive design: In countries like Morocco and Rwanda, gender parity is embedded within youth quotas, demonstrating the importance of explicitly addressing intersectionality in quota design.⁸¹ Disability quotas could benefit from similar measures to ensure equitable representation across intersecting identities.

Lessons from other quotas: Insights from gender, youth and other quotas illustrate how intersectionality can shape the effectiveness of representation. Rwanda reserves two seats in the lower house of Parliament for young representatives, under the age of 35, with a requirement that one must be a young woman.⁸² In Morocco, the law requires the alternation of men and women candidates on the youth lists.⁸³ These measures ensure that youth quotas do not inadvertently exclude women, a risk that combined disability quotas must also guard against. Studies from gender quotas show that clear placement mandates and replacement procedures result in the higher representation of women from diverse backgrounds. Applying similar requirements in disability quotas could ensure equitable representation for women with disabilities and other under-represented subgroups.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ [When quotas go wrong and what to do about it](#), Inter-Parliamentary Union website, 10 March 2022.

⁸¹ IPU, [Youth participation in national parliaments: 2023](#).

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ For a comprehensive review, see Susan Franceschet, Mona Lena Krook, and Jennifer M. Piscopo, [The Impact of Gender Quotas](#), (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

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Risks of intersectional exclusion: While intersectional approaches are critical, poorly designed quotas can inadvertently reinforce existing inequalities. For example, combined quotas risk placing an undue burden on candidates who must meet multiple criteria, such as being young, female and disabled. This can lead to tokenism and limit broader inclusion. Also, in some contexts, combined quotas may prioritize one under-represented group over another. For example, a quota aimed at both youth and disability representation may predominantly benefit young, non-disabled individuals, side-lining older people with disabilities.

6 Recommendations

As we have seen in this guide, disability quotas are still rare. However, where youth quotas have been adopted (also relatively recently), the outcomes suggest that the presence of quotas for other groups can be helpful when advocating for quotas for new groups such as people with disabilities. All countries with youth quotas have also adopted gender quotas, often years and even decades earlier.⁸⁵ The fact that more than 130 countries now have gender quotas of some sort presents a potentially important entry point for making the case for extending similar provisions to people with disabilities.

The following recommendations relate to a) **quota preparation and design**, and b) **quota implementation**, and they can be applied to both legislative quotas and voluntary party quotas. It is important that disability quotas are based on sound planning and data, informed by the lived experiences of people with disabilities. Once a quota is established, mechanisms must be introduced to support candidates with disabilities and create an accessible environment once they are elected, in consultation with those politicians with disabilities elected. Parliaments should also be receptive to the policy insights generated by politicians with disabilities.

⁸⁵ Jana Belschner, [The Adoption of Youth Quotas after the Arab Uprisings](#), *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, Vol. 9, 2021.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations concern **quota preparation and design**:

RECOMMENDATION 1: Recognize disability as a category of political representation, of equal importance to other identities or characteristics such as sex, ethnicity or age.

In recent decades, more attention has been paid to the political exclusion of a growing number of under-represented groups. However, it is difficult to advocate for new groups unless they are named and considered to be important categories of representation. Attention needs to be paid to disability as part of discussions on enhancing the political representation of historically under-represented groups. Parliaments should conduct outreach to local, regional and national OPDs for their input to inform discussions on the political participation of people with disabilities.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Collect statistics about people with disabilities who have run for or held political office, now or in the past, at local, regional and national level.

There is currently very little available data on the political representation of people with disabilities. Filling this gap is essential for understanding patterns of inclusion and exclusion, and for making evidence-based arguments to advance their political representation. To ensure that data collection is effective and respectful, OPDs should be consulted on how to gather data in a sensitive manner. Various strategies might be pursued at different levels. At the national level, a confidential survey of elected politicians could be conducted to determine how many self-identify as having a disability. This could be a standalone questionnaire or integrated into existing surveys of politicians. At party

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level, political parties could track data on candidates with disabilities, including those who run for office, to better assess the impact of party or legislative quota measures.

Additionally, to fully capture patterns of representation and exclusion, **data collection** should, whenever possible, be **dis-aggregated by key demographic categories** such as sex, age and other personal characteristics and identities. This would provide insight into whether multiple layers of under-representation affect the political participation of certain groups. Collecting data on the **type of disability** could offer valuable insights into whether representation is uneven across different disability groups. If pursued, it should be done with strict confidentiality safeguards and in consultation with OPDs to ensure ethical and respectful data collection. Data collection should specifically track the list placement positions of candidates with disabilities, post-election substitution patterns and success rates in different electoral systems.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Establish a robust enforcement mechanism for the implementation of quota provisions.

Before implementing disability quotas, consider developing clear sanctions for non-compliance, positioning requirements for candidate lists and safeguards against post-election substitutions of elected people with disabilities. Key components could include a rejection of candidate lists, financial penalties for parties that fail to meet quota requirements, mandatory placement of candidates with disabilities in winnable positions, legal protections against post-election substitutions and regular monitoring and reporting requirements.

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RECOMMENDATION 4: Prevent intersectional exclusion by disaggregating quotas.

It is important to note that states, or political parties in the case of voluntary party quotas, should consider disaggregating quotas instead of having one quota for multiple groups, for example, 30 per cent for women, young people and people with disabilities. By disaggregating quota provisions, implementing bodies within political parties will not be incentivized to try to find single candidates who meet all quota requirements. This will ensure that more people from under-represented groups are put forward as candidates but, specifically in regards to disability, that there is more varied representation of people with disabilities.

RECOMMENDATION 5: Increase the evidence base through institutional inquiries and commissioned, independent studies of the experiences of candidates with disabilities.

Efforts to advance disability representation in politics should include regular review of the experiences and insights of people with disabilities. Data collection should be comprehensive and conducted in consultation with OPDs. Ideally, OPDs should be given funding to study the political representation of people with disabilities. Reports and research done by OPDs should be given prominence in discussions about furthering the inclusion of people with disabilities in political life. Parliamentary committee inquiries or party-specific studies are a way forward.

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The following recommendations should be considered during the **quota implementation**:

RECOMMENDATION 6: Create mechanisms to assist with disability-related costs in elections.

The introduction of disability quotas also requires consideration of the extra, disability-related costs candidates might incur during the election. Measures such as the various forms of Access to Elected Office Funds⁸⁶ are valuable models for how this might be achieved, including in terms of how candidates might apply for funds, which accommodations might be covered and how to budget for and raise these funds to have the greatest impact.

RECOMMENDATION 7: Provide mentoring and training for potential candidates with disabilities.

Parliaments and political parties should consider setting up mentoring and training opportunities focused on boosting self-confidence among potential candidates with disabilities and developing their political skills. Training should also be provided once people with disabilities are elected to political office. Many institutions often already have similar programmes for women and young people and this could be adapted for people with disabilities, with a disability-specific focus, or those running the existing programmes could take special care to recruit people with disabilities.

⁸⁶ See an example of a fund: [United Kingdom Access to Elected Office Fund](#).

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Recommendation 8: Create an accessible environment in political spaces, taking into account the diversity of disability.

Once elected, politicians with disabilities should have access to an environment that enables them to fully and equally participate in political decision-making. Increasing accessibility to political spaces should not just be one-off solutions for individual politicians. Parliaments and political parties should instead take a more deliberate, systematic approach, anticipating how to make spaces more accessible for people with a wide range of disabilities. They should research best practices and consult closely with politicians, candidates or political party members with disabilities and OPDs on how to adapt the political environment to be more welcoming.

Recommendation 9: Support the establishment of disability groups.

Disability groups — whether within political parties or in the form of parliamentary, cross-party caucuses — can amplify the voices of elected officials with disabilities, provide moral and practical support, and drive legislative reform. These groups should be adequately resourced and empowered to review draft legislation from a disability perspective. If mechanisms are not already in place, studying the experiences of women's and youth caucuses, which already exist in many legislatures and political parties, may provide helpful insights for securing resources and finding ways to work effectively on behalf of people with disabilities.

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