

Comparative research report
Participation of people with disabilities in politics in neighbouring European countries



DISABILITY STUDIES

in Nederland



Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en
Koninkrijksrelaties

Colofon

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Summary

Although approximately 15 percent of people living in Europe have a disability, this diversity is rarely reflected in elected officials or political appointees. In keeping with the UN CRPD and the European Pillar of Social rights, barriers to political participation must be understood and removed.

To gain more information about both barriers and facilitating factors, data were collected through literature-based research and a series of interviews with elected officials, political appointees and political party activists (n=9) with disabilities in multiple European countries. Interviews covered the impact of national laws and policies on political participation, the (potential) role of political parties in facilitating inclusion, the influence of cultural and individual factors, and other topics.

Results

In no country was representation of people with disabilities in political roles found to exceed 2%; in some, fewer than 1% of elected officials or political appointees were people with disabilities. However, official data was usually not collected. Barriers found included limited access to inclusive education, especially regarding elite universities; physical barriers, including accessibility issues in political venues, on the campaign trail and while holding office; cultural beliefs regarding people with disabilities, including within political parties, such as beliefs that people with disabilities cannot be 'objective' about disability issues or are chosen to meet diversity targets rather than on their own merits; personal limitations, such as fatigue; and financial barriers, including some within benefits systems; and equalities legislation that did not cover office-holders.

Facilitating factors found included access to inclusive education; opportunities to build networks and skills through political parties, Disabled People's Organisations, business leadership or other public activities; personal characteristics, such as stamina and motivation; having the right support at the right time (for example, sign language interpretation or personal assistant services); equalities legislation that covered political roles; and funding for people with disabilities who are running for office. Some countries had quotas regarding employing people with disabilities. These might have an impact on career development for (future) appointees or office-holders, but in no case were these quotas being met, so their impact could not be determined.

Recommendations

Based on the literature and the experiences of those interviewed, recommendations were made that could be actioned by the Netherlands, other European Union states, or at EU level to improve representation of people with disabilities in political office and as political appointees. These included: Robust collection of data recognising and nurturing the leadership potential of people with disabilities; welcoming and supporting people with disabilities at the entry level of political life, for example party activism and local races; eliminating barriers created by benefits systems; ensuring that support services are available for people with disabilities who carry out political work, campaign or volunteer with a party or political organisation; establishment of mentoring schemes to recruit and develop potential candidates; targeted recruitment and support of promising leaders who have disabilities; facilitating job-sharing in public office and senior policy roles; strategic work within political parties to recruit and develop potential candidates, which could involve independent organisations; and experimentation with quotas within political parties and also at national level, including enforcement of existing quotas. The idea of an EU-level think tank focused on disability in politics to recognise, research and disseminate best practices was also suggested.

Abbreviations

ACAS	Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service
AEOF	Access to Elected Office Fund
CD&V	Christendemocraten & Vlaams (Christian Democrats Flanders) party
DPO	Disabled Persons' Organisation
ENIL	European Network for Independent Living
EU	European Union
FIPHFP	Fonds pour l'Insertion des Personnes Handicapées dans la Fonction publique (Fund for the Inclusion of People with Disabilities in the Public Service)
HRM	Human Resources Management
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
MP	Member of Parliament
NCD	National Council on Disability
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (part of the OSCE)
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-Operation in Europe
PA	personal assistant / personal assistance
PSAC	Public Service Alliance of Canada
SL	sign language
UN CRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States

Countries directly compared

Belgium (Flanders)
France
Germany
Denmark
United Kingdom

Introduction

The modern European body politic is diverse in terms of gender, socioeconomic status and ethnicity. Reflecting this diversity in national and European governments has been an ongoing struggle. However, representation of women and ethnic minorities in European Union as well as in national legislatures and ministries is recognised as important, and measurable strides have been made over the past 40 years.

However, the population also includes people with disabilities. Approximately 15 percent of people living in Europe have a disability—in many countries, the largest minority group. Disability also impacts the families and neighbours of people with disabilities, and the national and EU institutions that serve them. Political interest and talent can come in many different packages, and it therefore stands to reason that those who seek to represent their neighbourhoods, cities, regions and nations on the political stage should reflect diversity in terms of physical and mental shape and ability as well as gender and ethnicity.

The potential of people with disabilities in politics has not yet been tapped, and this is a loss for all citizens. Another result is that voters and political activists with disabilities often do not see themselves and their experiences reflected in the European Parliament, in their national parliaments and regional and local assemblies, or within the ministries where decisions affecting their lives are made. The consequences are especially stark when it comes to disability-specific decisions. As British journalist Frances Ryan, who specialises in disability issues, has written:

Watching [Conservative Secretary of State for Work and Pensions] Stephen Crabb and Labour battle over the cuts to disability benefits in the House of Commons on Monday, one thing was striking: the lack of disabled people in the room. As both party leaders and Secretaries of Work and Pensions spoke, and as backbench MPs got up to ask questions, it struck me over and over: none of them had a visible disability.

That's one of those things that's so normalised your brain often forgets to notice it, in the same way you can use a wheelchair every day but it takes a step in a restaurant to remind you that you're not viewed as an equal ... With each mention in the Commons of "disabled people" – what we need, what we feel, what we want – the scene felt more and more patronising ... The reality is, the politicians making decisions about disabled people's lives largely have no knowledge of what it is to be disabled. (Ryan, 2016)

In 2018, the Secretariat of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities responded to this situation with an official 'Note' regarding participation of persons with disabilities in political and public life (CRPD/CSP, 2018), which was further discussed by member groups this year as part of the ongoing work of the CRPD Conference. In keeping with the majority of research and action on political participation (e.g., Savery, 2015; Belt, 2016; OSCE-ODIHR, 2017), the focus of the Note was primarily on ensuring that people with disabilities have the right to vote and express political views—but it was also concerned with the right to be elected, or to serve one's nation in another official capacity. Political participation can also encompass a range of other roles: membership of a political party; forming or participating in civil society organisations, including organisations focused on disability; and various other forms of activism (Skelton and Valentine, 2003; Campbell and Oliver, 1996; OSCE-ODIHR, 2017). These roles are connected rather than forming discrete domains. For example, accessing the power to vote gives individuals the opportunity to influence which politicians are elected, but if they don't like the choices on offer, they can join a political party—and perhaps then run for office themselves. And while barriers to

participation at various levels are well-known (for example, Schur, 1998), factors that contribute to success are not as fully defined and can therefore be harder to replicate.

The CRPD/CSP Note highlighted the fact that in many countries, barriers to basic participation are often present. But what of those who seek to participate at a higher level: to become an elected official, a policymaker, a minister? While barriers also exist here, there are also individual successes, and the importance of fostering diversity in public life in order to fully represent the diversity of national populations is obvious. Therefore, this research project was launched to explore the experiences of people with disabilities in public life in several European nations, with a focus on factors that lead to success or that can form barriers. These factors may include processes, practices, policies or laws, as well as cultural beliefs about people with disabilities.

Research questions

Several research questions were set by the Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties (BZK) at the beginning of the research. These were:

1. What level of participation in politics and governance is found in other nations?
2. What are the policies in these countries with regards to political office holders with a disability (distinguished between appointees and elected representatives)?
3. Are there legal regulations to improve participation? Are provisions made for office-holders covered by the government? Have quotas been set in other countries?
4. Are the barriers similar to those found in the Netherlands?
5. What solutions have been chosen to overcome these barriers?
6. People with disabilities are active in Dutch society in many areas, but more often in care-related roles than in politics. As a result, we can only identify a limited number of government directors with a disability. When people with disabilities choose to get involved in politics, it is most often as an elected representative. Is the situation the same in other countries? Are there definitely current role models elsewhere?

Methodology

This report is based on a combination of literature research and interviews. An extensive literature review was undertaken in search of research evidence. This was augmented with reports from organisations and news articles.

Over 40 politicians with a disability in seven European countries (France, Germany, Belgium, United Kingdom, Sweden, Norway and Denmark) were approached for interviews, as were the Belgian, Hungarian and Greek presidents of the European Parliament's Disability Intergroup, and a former Federal political appointee from the US who has a disability. In addition, one European political party with a current national campaign to improve candidate and activist diversity on the basis of disability was approached, as was a local activist from that party.

In total, nine interviews with current or former politicians, ministers and political party activists who have disabilities were completed, representing the United Kingdom, Denmark, Belgium and Hungary. Interviewees had a variety of disabilities, ranging from mobility impairments to visual and/or hearing impairments to autism. Interview questions were developed based on the research goals provided by the Ministerie van BZK, and translated into English. All interviews were conducted in English, via either email or online videoconferencing. Respondents were provided with a consent form that allowed them to remain anonymous or be quoted by name in the research outputs. Where respondents chose to remain anonymous, care has been taken to avoid mentioning national origin or other details that might lead to accidental identification. Where attributed quotes have been used, respondents agreed to be named.

The research process took place during the autumn election period, so the majority of persons approached either did not reply or said they were unable to take part due to election/party activities. Two others contacted were unable to take part due to current health issues. To make up for the lack of direct interviews with politicians/political appointees from Germany and France in particular, material from previously published interviews with politicians who have disabilities was employed to reflect the situation in these countries, and was also used to explore key issues in others. Where quoted material was in languages other than English, translations were made by the first author of this report. Country reports related to the European Pillar of Social Rights and other materials prepared by the Academic Network of Disability Experts in 2017 were used to establish additional facts.

Results:

Literature review on barriers and facilitating factors

Participation of people with disabilities in political life has rarely been the topic of academic enquiry, except in relation to the careers of specific individuals, or to disability activism. For that reason, this literature review has drawn on a variety of academic and non-academic sources, including news articles, speeches, Websites, and published interviews with politicians who have disabilities. The literature review revealed that barriers and facilitating factors could be found in the following areas: Networks, mentoring, resources (money, time and energy), the “disability hierarchy,” and accessibility of political spaces and activities, as discussed in the following sections.

Networks

Barriers to political participation of people with disabilities that were identified in the literature include isolation and decreased resources. Participation in a political party, from the level of local activist or official on up to running as a candidate, requires time, energy and financial expense. Success begins with having a strong, large, well-connected personal network, a situation that naturally favours individuals from politically powerful families and those who have attended elite educational institutions.

France’s Sciences Po, the university that has educated almost all French prime ministers and presidents, as well as most of its national elected officials (and the majority of journalists covering French politics), offers perhaps the most extreme example. As noted in a recent research report on how social networks and political beliefs relate, “all the different generations of French political leaders have met for the first time on Sciences Po’s benches, and most of them have formed their more solid friendship and network relationship by that time” (Algan, Dalvit, Do, Le Chapelain and Zenou, 2015). And as with elite universities in other countries, the doors of Sciences Po had been firmly closed to students with disabilities until quite recently.

Barriers to political participation of people with disabilities therefore begin with lack of access to the political social capital and knowledge obtained during secondary and higher education. Addressing this barrier, through making elite institutions more accessible, by broadening the educational backgrounds of those entering public life, or by finding other ways to activate and include people with disabilities, is likely to facilitate participation. The fact that Damien Abad of the French centre-right party Les Républicains, who has a neuromuscular condition that limits his mobility, was both one of the first students with a disability to graduate from Sciences Po in 2004, and then the first French member of the European Parliament with a disability (Baudu, 2009), is an illustration. Abad’s connections and competency have enabled him to rise rapidly through the party ranks: having started his career with a municipal council post just three years after graduation, he is currently one of his party’s five national vice-presidents, as well as having achieved national office and serving in the European Parliament (Equy, 2013; 20 Minutes Politique, 2013).

As noted, persons with an impairment who come from wealthy and powerful families are far more likely to be able to pursue their political ambitions than equally passionate people with disabilities from a more humble background. The possession of connections and power can make up for perceived lower capability or bodily difference, as in the example of former US President Franklin Delanor Roosevelt, who became disabled due to polio but came from one of America’s wealthiest

families (Gallagher, 1994). The ability to hide one's disability can also be a facilitating factor in political success, as it was with Roosevelt, though it comes at the expense of the individual and may reduce their ability to lead effectively on related issues (*ibid.*).

Some politicians with disabilities develop political social capital through alternative means, including disability activism. For example, Horst Frehe, currently a Green member of the state parliament in Bremen, Germany, began his political career as a disability activist. He was one of the organisers of the well-known protests by Germans with disabilities during the UN International Year of the Disabled in 1981, as well as setting up or working in multiple Disabled Peoples' Organisations (DPOs), including the European Network for Independent Living (ENIL). Frehe has noted that the societal change of moving from a medical model of disability towards a social or human rights model is a crucial first step for empowering people with disabilities to have political influence, including as office-holders. He has also stressed the importance of developing candidates who have disabilities at state/provincial level in Federal countries like Germany (Frehe, 2008).

This echoes the experience of one of Europe's best-known politicians with a disability. David Blunkett, who is blind, was elected to Sheffield City Council while still a university student. It took 17 years in local and regional politics and party activism before he became a member of parliament. After the formation of a Labour government in 1987, Blunkett was named as Secretary of State for Education and Employment, and then promoted to Home Secretary, later serving as Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. He was widely considered to be in line to serve as Prime Minister. But his trajectory would have been impossible without the opportunity to build a network at local and then regional level, because Blunkett had attended special schools for blind pupils, and came from a working-class background (Blunkett and MacCormick, 2002).

Not every politically engaged person with a disability would wish to form their political identity around disability issues, but there is reason to believe that "claiming" disability, understanding that it is a common part of the human condition, understanding how impairment and social conditions intersect to produce disability, and recognising how having a disability means membership in an important minority group are key to political disability identity (Putnam, 2005). As Jean Cristophe Parisot de Bayard, a French politician at municipal level who is a wheelchair user and disability activist, has stated:

"I want the talents, the imagination, the fellowship [of people with disabilities] to be realities lived, wanted, defended. It is often our brothers, men who put barriers in front of us, without even knowing it or wanting to do so. But we are definitely living profound social change." (Parisot de Bayard, 2014)

Political parties and organisations can play a role in encouraging participation (Schur, *op cit.*) This has to date been far more notable in terms of party efforts to develop a larger pool of potential appointees and candidates who are female or from ethnic minorities. Most major political parties in Europe now have internal party caucuses or committees that are devoted to these goals, and which can provide a starting point for political neophytes from under-represented backgrounds. However, very few have made similar efforts regarding people with disabilities.

The UK's Labour Party is a notable exception in Europe, with an independent society known as Disability Labour in existence for about five years. Disability Labour has served the party as a policymaking group on disability issues, but now also aims to support and develop party members with disabilities to serve as policymakers, ministers and elected officials. To date, its goals have included providing disability equality training to local party branches and campaigning for improved

access to party activities for members with disabilities (including remote access to party conferences and annual general meetings), although its tenure has not been without controversy (Pring, 2018). An interview with the current co-chairs of Disability Labour has informed this report (see *Results—Nation by Nation*, p. 18).

Mentoring

Mentoring, either as part of a structured programme or on an unofficial basis, can offer another solution. France's Abad has noted that his rise in politics began with being noticed as a student orator by French member of parliament Hervé Morin, who encouraged him to get involved in the youth branch of his party, and that he has also received advice from the party leader, former French President Nicolas Sarkozy. Interestingly, Sarkozy's advice to Abad included a warning to not "allow himself to be confined to the subject of disability" (Equy, *op cit.*).

Many mentoring schemes exist that are aimed at fostering leadership skills amongst (usually young) people with disabilities, offering capacity-building, networking opportunities and often access to role models who also have disabilities (for example, see Office of Disability Employment Policy, 2018). Although information about formal mentoring schemes for people with disabilities seeking careers in electoral politics or policymaking was sought as part of this project, none were located. However, a number of politicians with disabilities have highlighted the need for mentors, including Welsh councilor Fenella Bowden, who has a spinal condition (Flint, 2018).

A productive mentoring project might resemble the model developed by EMILY's List, an American organisation founded in 1985 to promote pro-choice female candidates in Democratic Party races. EMILY's List began as a fundraising network, but in 2001 it started the Political Opportunity Program (now known as Run to Win) to directly recruit, train and support female candidates, having recognised the need for such assistance. With over 5 million dues-paying members, EMILY's List has become an important networking forum as well. It offers in-person training and an online training platform, and arranges mentorships. Over 10,000 prospective candidates have received support through the programme (EMILY's List, 2018).

Some recruitment and mentoring programmes exist for people with disabilities in public employment, a category that may include some potential political appointees. These are usually run by unions representing government workers. Unions also play a key role in collecting data about employees in public service who have disabilities (many of whom may not feel secure about officially declaring their disability status directly to employers), and about countering disability discrimination and providing effective support. The Public Service Alliance of Canada, which represents Federal and Provincial employees, is an example of a union that has a well-developed research, outreach and inclusion programme focused on "Equity Groups," a category that includes workers with disabilities (PSAC, 2018). Because leadership of unions and other civil society organisations is an alternative stepping stone into political life, successful efforts in this arena can contribute to developing future political leaders.

Mentoring was also a top recommendation in the *Lord Holmes Review* (Holmes, 2018) to redress poor representation of disabled people on public commissions in the UK. Holmes suggested that the UK government should "establish a mentoring programme to support talented disabled candidates" (*ibid.*, p. 8) to improve their readiness to apply. Holmes also suggested that disabled people should be proactively sought and encouraged to join an existing mentoring scheme run by the Cabinet

Office, which includes job shadowing of current commissioners and membership of advisory boards (*ibid.*, p. 24).

Money, time and energy

The UK was the only country found where state funds have been made available to compensate candidates with disabilities for additional disability-related costs during political campaigns, although the effort has been limited (see *Results—Nation by nation: UK*). This is an area where political parties themselves, DPOs or other civil society organisations could also innovate.

One notable result from the interviews conducted for this report is that the way personal assistance (PA) services provided by EU states are run and funded can have a major impact on political participation. If PA services are strictly limited to providing support for “activities of daily living,” e.g. eating, dressing, bathing and using public transport, people with disabilities who want to volunteer for a political party, attend political meetings or hit the campaign trail will be disadvantaged (see *Results—Nation by nation* for further details).

Time and energy are also important resources, and their lack can pose serious issues for people with some disabilities. As Emily Brothers, a blind woman who has run for both national and local office in the UK, writes, this can lead to overwork for some people with disabilities in politics:

Despite our best endeavours, it often takes longer for a disabled person to accomplish a task. That is why so many successful disabled people work ridiculously long hours, which isn't possible if you experience fatigue because of your disability or health condition. Going the extra mile is equally true for many women competing in 'a man's world.' In truth, we all need to share the load in so many different ways. So why should politics be any different? (Brothers, in Brothers, *et al.* [2017]: p. 32)

To address this problem, the organisation Disability Politics UK has for several years campaigned to make job-sharing possible for Members of Parliament (Disability Politics UK, 2018). This would assist not only people with disabilities, but also those with parenting or caring duties, and those who wish to maintain a professional role alongside public service.

Although so far no bill permitting job-sharing in the UK parliament has passed, and a court case by two Green candidates who wished to job-share (one a woman with a disability, the other a parent with a child with a disability) was dismissed, the idea continues to be discussed. Recently, the influential Fawcett Society released a report (Brothers *et al.*, 2017) explaining how job-sharing could work in the British parliament, and advocating its use. The report called on research revealing that job-sharing is already successfully used in the UK by judges, governors of utility firms, executives in the NHS, and policymakers in the UK Ministry of Justice. It also quoted the judge's decision when dismissing the case brought by the two would-be MPs:

“There can be no doubt about the seriousness of the issue or the fact that job share is, in many fields, a means whereby diversity may be increased in the makeup of particular professions or roles... In my judgment the issue which the claimants raise is a fundamental one in relation to our parliamentary democracy.” (Cope and Philipps, in Brothers, *et al.*, 2017: p. 23)

Indeed, job-sharing and part-time working are already well-established within civil service employment in many European countries, including the Netherlands, and there is no reason that this practice cannot be extended to political appointees as well. Political parties could pioneer the practice, and several European Green and feminist parties have already experimented with job-sharing arrangements. For example, leadership of the UK Green Party is shared between MP Caroline Lucas and Jonathan Bartley (Bartley has caring responsibilities for a child with a disability.) However, at this time job-sharing is prohibited by law for elected politicians in the Netherlands.

In Belgium, there is a job-sharing-like process that gives an elected officials with a disability at local and provincial level the right to select a *vertrouwenspersoon* (confidential advisor) to assist them with their duties. This goes beyond providing a PA service, as it can include discussion of policies, but the *vertrouwenspersoon* cannot act as a proxy voter for the elected person. A letter from a doctor is needed to prove the need for assistance, and the *vertrouwenspersoon* cannot be a council employee. (For more information, see <https://lokaalbestuur.vlaanderen.be/faq/werking-bestaar/wie-heeft-recht-op-persoonlijke-bijstand-van-een-vertrouwenspersoon-welke-rechten-en-plichten-heeft>).

For example, a visually impaired politician from the CD&V party, Pol Verest, chose another CD&V member, Karl Tierens, as his *vertrouwenspersoon* when he gained a seat on the Gent (OCMW) city council in 2013. Tierens received payment for his work in the form of an attendance fee. Verest and Tierens discussed council agenda items together and prepared what would be said, submitted or requested of the local government by Verest, with input from their party (Van Rossem, 2013). However, in all council matters Verest himself had to take the lead and speak for himself. For Tierens, the role provided a way to learn by doing: he soon joined the council himself, and Verest chose a new *vertrouwenspersoon* (HLN, 2014).

No statistics were found about the number of Belgian politicians taking advantage of this scheme, or whether it has increased the number of disabled people running for office. The author was able to find three examples of currently serving *vertrouwenspersonen*, in Hulshout, Mannu Dox, and the aforementioned example of Gent, of whom two were working for visually impaired politicians and one for a politician with a hearing impairment. The *vertrouwenspersoon* receives the same attendance fee as the council member they work with, which depends on the size of the population that the council represents and can be as low as €400 per month, as council members are expected to do their work as a second job.

There is a potential downside to job-sharing arrangements, of course, which is the risk that people with disabilities in politics who job-share could earn less than their full-time compatriots.

The “disability hierarchy”

The term “disability hierarchy” has long been used to describe the fact that perceptions of people with disabilities are often dependent on the kind of impairment they have and how it occurred. This is true for people with disabilities as well (Deal, 2003), and may impact the chances of some would-be politicians. Canadian wheelchair user Kristen Williams, for example, notes that people with physical disabilities that are acquired may be viewed differently than those whose impairments were present at birth, and disabilities that impact verbal speech or intellect attract more negative views (Williams, 2014). Whether an individual’s disability is viewed positively, negatively or as a neutral factor depends largely on cultural factors, so this will vary between countries.

For example, impairment through military service can be a driver rather than a barrier – someone who has the same level of impairment from birth or due to an accident or illness is far less likely to achieve in politics than a war veteran, such as the late Sen. John McCain in the US, or someone who has otherwise acquired their impairment in the line of duty, such as Wolfgang Schäuble, former Minister of the Interior for Germany and current President of the Bundestag, who became paralysed below the waist after an assassination attempt in 1990. Symionidou (2009) also noted the higher status of DPO members who are war veterans in their interactions with politicians in Cyprus. However, impairments that occurred because of a car crash or diabetes might attract blame rather than respect amongst some persons. Self-stigma—having a negative view of oneself because of a disability—can form a powerful barrier to achievement as well.

Certain impairments, such as mental ill health or intellectual disability, may be more likely to trigger barriers than others; the extent of these will be influenced by culture and circumstances. But even in disability-focused roles, disability can be seen as a barrier to service (Baker, 2011). For example, when the Belgian Green Party ran a young local party volunteer who has Down syndrome as a candidate for his local council, they were often asked by reporters if it was some kind of attention-getting stunt (see *Results: Nation by Nation—Belgium*).

This tendency can also impact the careers of political appointees. For example, in 2009, Ari Ne’Emen, an adult with autism with BA in political science, was nominated to the National Council on Disability by President Obama. The NCD is a Federal agency that advises Congress and the executive branch on disability issues, contributing to policymaking. Previous to his service on the NCD, Ne’Emen had founded and run a high-profile NGO for autistic adults, the Autistic Self-Advocacy Network, as well as serving with other disability NGOs.

However, his nomination sparked controversy with parent-run organisations like Autism Speaks, with some parent-activists vitriolic in their opposition. His nomination was blocked for six months, although eventually Ne’Emen was able to join the NCD (Diamant, 2010). He served two terms, including a chair of the Council’s Entitlements and Policy and Program Evaluation committees. Since the end of the Democratic administration, Ne’Emen has returned to working with independent disability NGOs and as a consultant to the American Civil Liberties Union. Intelligent, a good public speaker and experienced at building coalitions, Ne’Emen is exactly the kind of person with a disability who is attracted to and well-qualified for this form of public service, but the personal attacks he suffered during both his nomination and his service were difficult to handle. “The level of prejudice was pretty shocking,” he told journalist Steve Silberman. “Some people relied on outrageous but all-too-familiar stereotypes to claim that it doesn’t make sense to have an autistic person on the National Council on Disability, such as the bizarre notion that autistic people are emotionless sociopaths” (Silberman, 2010).

Accessibility of political spaces and activities

Measures can be taken to make political spaces—from local meeting rooms to the debating chambers of national parliaments accessible for all. This issue was highlighted by several respondents, and is also found in the literature. For example, Dame Anne Begg, a wheelchair user and member of the UK parliament from 1997 to 2015, faced accessibility barriers in the 19th Century building that houses the House of Commons:

The House of Commons isn’t as accessible as it could be and she was unable to sit directly alongside other MPs in the chamber, but it didn’t bother her. “I remember after getting

elected, someone saying: 'It's terrible you stick out in the aisle, they haven't cut a bit out of the green benches for you to slot into'." Begg says she wrote back and said: "I've been invisible for far too long, I'm glad that you noticed I'm there." (Rose, 2015)

Obviously, everyday accessibility issues, such as access to public transport or adapted vehicles, will also have an impact on participation. The availability of sign-language services for deaf politicians, and screen-readers or Braille translations for blind persons, is also crucial—but these services add costs that political actors who do not have disabilities need not bear. It is not always clear who pays for reasonable adaptations when it comes to elected officials. Welsh councilor Anita Davis, who is blind, said she had at times found it hard to make decisions because the information she needed was not provided in accessible formats, and participants in meetings sometimes forgot to identify themselves.

She noted that canvassing door-to-door also posed challenges:

"I didn't know the layouts of the wards I was covering, so I wouldn't necessarily know if someone had steps or a ramp, or just how to find the front door. So I had a number of accidents where I fell down the steps or couldn't get in the gate." (Davis, in Flint, 2018)

Addressing accessibility issues also includes looking closely at how political work is carried out. If the system as it is assumes that all participants have the same, able-bodied set of capabilities, it will exclude people with disabilities. Changes may be needed in areas such as meeting and communicating. Universal Design principles can be helpful here to provide guidance and inspiration (Hamraie, 2017). Better and more reliably disability-friendly strategies can best be developed with input from people with disabilities themselves.

Results: Nation by nation

In the following sections, the situation for people with disabilities in political life will be explored with regards to five European countries: Belgium, France, Germany, Denmark and the UK. This will be followed by a short case study on improving inclusion within a political party, and a brief section on inclusion in the EU Parliament.

Several interviewees mentioned that the UN CRPD and the European Pillar of Social Rights provide the foundations for improving practice. For example:

The implementation of the UN CRPD is an excellent tool for governments to bring words into practice. Many governments, including the Dutch government and the Belgian and Flemish governments, have signed and ratified the UN CRPD, and they must now bring it into action by implementing it and making changes to their legislation, practices and culture to ensure that citizens with disabilities can actually and fully enjoy the same rights other citizens without disabilities take for granted.—Helga Stevens, MEP for Belgium

For a quick overview of some key descriptive data, see *Table 1* on p. 21.

Belgium (Flanders)

There are specific Acts in both the Flemish and Walloon areas of Belgium, and in the Brussels-Capital region, to improve representation of people with disabilities in public employment. In 2007, a 3% quota was set by decree, although this figure had been mentioned as a goal in official documents since the 1970s (Stevens, 2018). However, only six federal departments have reached this low target. In 2016, the average employment rate for people with disabilities in the Federal government of Belgium was 1.44% (De Bruyker, 2017). In the Flanders government, the figure was 1.3% (Stevens, 2018).¹

The quota is unenforced, and is not well known. It does not apply to political candidates. As Annelies van den Brande, 2018 candidate for Groen Sint-Niklaas and a person with a visual impairment, said when interviewed for this report: “In Belgium there are no quotas or rules concerned with making it easier for people with disabilities to be elected or to give them extra help in politics. That doesn’t exist in Belgium” (personal communication, Annelies van den Brande, 25 October 2018). There are no specific policies or laws in Belgium regarding holding a political office or government post when you have a disability, for either elected or appointed officials (personal communication, Helga Stevens, MEP, 24 October 2018.)

Belgium was, however, unique in that at least two persons with an intellectual or developmental disability have sought public office with backing from mainstream parties. Gent politician Didier Peleman’s background is with an NGO for people with developmental disabilities. He ran for the Christian Democrats Flanders (CD&V) Party in 2009, whereas young Green Party volunteer Tane Deuyt joined the Brugge council race on behalf of his party in 2018, gaining international attention

¹ While technically government and civil service employment is a separate world from holding appointed political posts, in this and the sections that follow it is used to examine participation in broadly similar government work. In no case were quotas found that applied to appointed roles, for which candidates are chosen by ruling political parties.

for his candidacy (VRT, 2012; van Bastelaere, 2018). Supporting a candidate, office-holder or policy advisor with an intellectual or developmental disability would pose challenges to most political parties and governments, but it is something that needs attention for the future. With more than 1% of the population on the autism spectrum and intellectual disability also common, it is not right to make the assumption that parents or others should always represent their interests. Moreover, we know from research that “proxies” don’t report the same things as the people they represent (Claes *et al.*, 2012), nor should we assume that people with intellectual or developmental disabilities do not have expertise in areas beyond their personal situation or disability issues. In particular, people with autism have already served at all levels of government, in both elected and appointed posts, as will be further discussed elsewhere in this report.

Overall, disability discrimination in Belgium is addressed through a general rather than disability-specific decree on equal participation in the workplace in Flanders (2002). The 2007 Anti-Discrimination Act, which is also not disability-specific and which was revised in 2016, is also important.

Provision of services such as job coaching, work adaptations, travel support and sign-language interpretation is handled by regional agencies, with work often carried out by external organisations. Employers can receive funds for adapting workspaces. MEP Helga Stevens, who is deaf and serves with the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie, noted that the way sign-language interpretation is provided could be a facilitator or a barrier. “The Flemish government has a policy since 1994 to pay for sign language interpreters in work situations (10% of the working time, be it as employee or as self-employed person—with a possibility to double this upon motivated request) and private situations (very limited: 18 hours a year which can be doubled),” she said. Coming to politics from a background as an attorney, Stevens said it took time for her party to understand how to work with a deaf person. “I contributed as volunteer to the internal working group ‘Policies for persons with disabilities’ of the predecessor to my party—this way the party had the opportunity to get to know me and to observe how I can function with sign language interpreters,” she noted. “As a self-employed person I was able to use my sign language interpreters more flexibly, compared to other deaf persons who are employees—they need the signature of their employer to be able to use work-related interpreting hours” (personal communication, Helga Stevens, MEP, 24 October 2018).

Stevens said she was unsure about quotas, although there is currently a law in Belgium requiring gender balance in the top three places on parties’ candidate lists. “I am not against quota per definition, it can help to turn around a disadvantage in the short term, and to speed up the process of achieving more diversity in governments and parliaments, as we have seen with female politicians,” she added (*ibid.*).

In Belgium, there have been disability awareness campaigns by government employers and through government workers unions.

Stevens provided very useful information about the situation and needs of deaf politicians at regional, national and European levels. Her account of how sign language services were provided during her trajectory from regional to national to EU service highlights how different rules about providing support for people with disabilities in politics can impact their ability to carry out their duties:

At the Flemish Parliament I was immediately provided with sign language interpreters. It took a short time to find the right working formula, but ever since then, the Flemish Parliament has been excellent in following up and paying the SL interpreters. They even paid

for SL when related to my parliamentary mandate, e.g. working visits, meetings with citizens, local party branch meetings, national party meetings, etc.

When I became member of the Belgian Senate, I pressed them to adopt the same system as used by the Flemish Parliament. A joint agreement was made to avoid overlaps and double finance, which is of course logical.

In this regard, the European Parliament is less flexible. They refuse to pay for non-official meetings... so for these meetings I fall back upon the Flemish system for reimbursement of expenses for work-related SL interpretation. However, I am pressing the issue within the European Parliament, as it is unfair that SL interpretation requested by external people to attend official meetings such as plenary sessions, committee meetings at the European parliament are hired on the same basis as the spoken language interpreters, while my sign language interpreters have to work under different conditions and are paid less and do not enjoy the same benefits as the interpreters hired by the Parliament itself.

My biggest problem is the general lack of access to the audio-visual media, such as radio and TV. Access, however, has improved over the years: more TV programmes are now subtitled and recently, during the local and provincial elections, some key TV debates were sign interpreted on the second public TV channel. Access to the radio is still problematic, not to say non-existent. A new phenomenon are the podcasts on internet: these are not accessible for me (and other deaf people in general) while they are beneficial for blind people.

A barrier which I continue to face—after 14 years in politics!—is the attitudes of reporters and presenters in media (radio and TV) who are still more hesitant to interview me or to invite me for a TV debate. They always worry about the sign language interpreters, which they tend to see as a form of visual pollution/interference. I have only appeared on the “Zevende Dag” (debate programme on VRT) twice, which is very low when compared to the number of other Flemish MEPs appearing on this show. And they will only allow one sign language interpreter at the table, while in fact two sign language interpreters should be working there to be able to deliver a good quality translation/interpreting service. After the last debate, the interpreter and I were outraged and made it very clear to the presenters that next time there should be two SL interpreters present at the debate.

It is also always a hassle to keep the sign language interpreter out of the picture when I am being interviewed. They like to have the interpreter in the picture with me, but s/he is just a relay/translator of messages! I always try to make that clear, that I am the person the camera should focus on, not on the interpreter. And the interpreter should get the microphone, not me!

*As a deaf person, it continues to be difficult to participate in the small talk and in conversations in the hallways: I always come in team with my two sign language interpreters, and somehow this is a barrier between my hearing colleagues and myself.”
(ibid.)*

France

Only one member of the French national parliament is known to have a disability, and he was unavailable for interview. Politicians at lower levels also did not respond to invitations, or did not

have time to take part. No data is available about the percentage of regional and local officials or political appointees with a disability in France.

A national law protects persons with disabilities against discrimination in employment. Redress is through the Le Défenseur des Droits (similar to College voor de Rechten van de Mens in the Netherlands), an ombudsman agency, which can refer complaints on to a court where warranted. A 2005 law requires all companies with 20 or more employees to employ 6% people with disabilities. If they don't, they can be fined. This law also applies to government employers. However, there are many ways for employers to be exempted from following this law (ANED, 2017). No political party was found that has a quota for candidates with disabilities.

Interestingly, this law also created the *Fonds pour l'insertion des personnes handicapées dans la fonction publique* (FIPHFP, Fund for the Inclusion of People with Disabilities in the Public Service), which uses the fines collected from government employers (none of which are currently meeting the 6% quota...) to fund supports and training. The FIPHFP also holds events for public employers to encourage them to hire more people with disabilities, and they have published guidance on reasonable adaptations for people with disabilities in public service, such as guidance on how to support workers with hearing impairments, and on how to improve recruitment practices to avoid disadvantaging employees with disabilities (FIPHFP, 2018).

Some supports and subsidies are available for persons with a disability in France who wish to pursue a profession, including public service, such as tuition reductions. A time-limited subsidy is available to employers that want to employ a person who has a disability. Some flexibility in hours and tasks is permitted. The agency Agefiph arranges for personal support in work, such as job coaching and workplace adaptations, including rehabilitation services for people who become disabled as adults. This agency can sometimes make direct job placements for qualified applicants.

However, despite anti-discrimination laws and increased availability of in-work support and adaptation, unemployment rates have *increased* for people with disabilities in France in recent years (Nicolas and Ebersold, 2017). Experts analysing the lack of success of these measures have pointed to the fact that in France, most persons with disabilities are over age 50 so age discrimination may combine with disability discrimination. In addition, France lags behind in inclusive education, and less than 50 percent of disabled adults have achieved a qualification at Baccalaureate level (pre-university) or above, in an era where higher qualifications are increasingly required by employers.

State-funded support services are not available to candidates for use during political campaigns.

Germany

No data is available regarding the number of politicians or political appointees in Germany who have a disability, but it is believed to be very low. Representation appears to be higher at local level than at provincial or national level. There are certainly several prominent political figures with a disability, including Wolfgang Schäuble, the current president of the Bundestag (national parliament). Although no German politicians or political appointees agreed to be interviewed for this project, it was notable that several currently serving at local or state level started their political careers as DPO activists. This indicates that DPOs could be a good recruiting ground for parties in search of qualified candidates.

In Germany there is a 5% quota regarding hiring persons with "severe" disabilities (*schwerebehinderte*). Just over 25 percent of employers currently meet the quota. Employers who do not meet it only pay a very small fine (currently 125-320 euros per month per company). These

funds go to the Federal Employment Agency (BMAS), and 30 percent then goes to an equalisation fund (*Ausgleichsfonds*) used to support people with disabilities who are transitioning into employment, including subsidies to employers (European Commission, 1999; Cuppage, 2013). In practice, this fund mostly benefits young school-leavers. Some of the remaining 80 percent goes to other projects that are also intended to improve hiring practices for disabled people, such as support for social workplaces. In 2016, BMAS said that it expected to receive 230 million euros from the fund over the next few years (BMAS, 2016.)

This quota also applies to government employers. No political party was located that has a quota for candidates with disabilities.

A new law to encourage participation of people with disabilities in work came into force in 2017. There are now a number of pilot projects running in 2018. Most of these are not applicable to political office holders, but there is some provision for training focused on professional careers (broadly defined). At this time, legal measures do not appear to be effective in improving access to high-level employment for people with disabilities, including in government ministries. In fact, between 2007 and 2017, there was a 40% *decline* in professional training contracts for people who have a disability.

Some subsidies are available to employers that need to adapt workspaces or provide workplace assistance, such as job coaching, but the system is said to be excessively bureaucratic, limiting access. Another issue is that 60% of women with a disability and 40% of men with a disability do not qualify for work-related support, as they are either “not disabled enough” or have not successfully gone through the system to get the required pass for access to these support schemes.

Personal assistance and transport support are available to some workers with disabilities, and is paid for by the state. This includes persons who are not in receipt of a disability pension. However, this support is means-tested, so a person who has been elected or appointed to a paid post with a reasonable salary might then lose their access to personal assistance, and need to pay privately. Such support can be quite costly. As disability activist Christian Bayer told the Independent Living Institute, this can form a barrier for people with disabilities: ““I don’t want to pay for my assistance, so I work part-time to avoid exceeding the income level. If the level were higher, or if there weren’t a limit, I would be able to work more” (Bayer, in Bernt, 2008).

Denmark

The number of people with disabilities in public office in Denmark, either elected or appointed, is unknown. According to the two politicians with disabilities interviewed for this report, both wheelchair users, it is likely to be very low—perhaps less than 1%. Sarah Glerup, who briefly served in the Danish parliament as cover for a Red-Green Party colleague who was on leave, was the first person with a disability to serve at national level (personal communication, Sarah Glerup, 17 October 2018).

Support for daily life requirements, such as PA service, are available in Denmark, and are neither attached to being in receipt of benefits nor means tested. Support in work can be provided for up to 20 hours per week. Historically, disability benefits in Denmark had been relatively generous, but a 2013 law changed this. Now, the benefits of persons with a disability who are unable to secure 225 hours or more of work on the open market are cut, as are the benefits of people with disabilities

who have a working partner. The provisions of this law have had an especially high impact on people with disabilities who are under age 40.

Glerup noted that the benefits system can create very direct barriers for people with disabilities who are interested in political life:

In recent years we have seen examples of people receiving disability pension who have been bullied by authorities into giving up running for local offices or even participating in public political debates. They have been told that they might lose their pension if they remain politically active, because it will be seen as a sign that they are able to work and do without a pension. (Personal communication, Sarah Glerup, 17 October 2018)

A national law prohibiting discrimination against people with disabilities in employment has been in force since 1996, and was updated in 2017. However, there are not anti-discrimination laws regarding other areas of daily life—so this law would not cover selection for political candidacy, participation in a political party etc. (European Network of Legal Experts in Gender Equality and Non-Discrimination, 2018). Adaptations to workplaces are covered, and this is paid by the municipality.

There is a law requiring employers to grant an interview to all qualified people who have a disability. A small wage subsidy is also available to employers, and there is a ‘flex job’ subsidy for part-time employees with a disability that includes a permanent subsidy paid to the employer.

Denmark does not operate a quota scheme for employment of people with a disability, nor does any political party have a quota scheme for candidates.

The availability of high-quality PA services is a facilitating factor for politicians who, like Glerup, have severe disabilities:

In general I would say the most important factor/policy when it comes to my participation not just in political life, but in society as a whole is the fact that I am entitled to a personal care assistant [PCA] 24 hours a day. This is the only reason I can live independently and work in spite of a very severe disability (I cannot walk or even breathe on my own). Without our PCA policies I would be stuck at an institution or dead. (Personal communication, Sarah Glerup, 17 October 2018)

Kristian Hegaard is currently a member of a municipal council in Denmark but also served briefly as a member of the national parliament, where he acted as Speaker for Foreign Affairs and Defence. He said that people with disabilities need to be quite exceptional to get past the barriers that exist, including cultural beliefs and expectations:

Expectations like—is it possible to get elected as such a young age? Can you handle so much work as an politician with disability? I was elected as an 18-year old for the municipal council and have got a seat since that.

I’m extremely hardworking and focused to achieve my goals. I think I wouldn’t have done it without my willpower, because there are so many fights in the party to get to elected positions. (Personal communication, Kristian Hegaard, 16 October 2018)

Hegaard noted that extra in-work support has not been available during either his municipal or national parliament service, despite the high demands made on persons holding these posts.

Glerup discussed factors in political life that will be familiar to party volunteers and would-be candidates or appointees across Europe:

[There is a] lack of flexibility—you have to be able to work full time or more to be a part of the system, really. There is not really room for people who can only work, say 18 hours a week or whose ability to work fluctuates.

Lack of access has been a huge issue especially earlier on in my life. Many of the places where you “learn” how to become political, network with other people, etc., are inaccessible if you are in a wheelchair.

Also, I have been met with some suspicion from people who think I was chosen/hired as a diversity poster child instead of based on my skills—or that I can only think about disability politics and am unable to be objective (of course no one is objective, able-bodied people think from a subjective able-bodied perspective, but no one ever criticises that). (Personal communication, Sarah Glerup, 17 October 2018)

United Kingdom

As of 2017, there are six members of the UK House of Commons who declare that they have a disability. One of these was interviewed for this report, but asked to remain anonymous. No data is available about representation at county or local level, or in the ranks of political appointees (Brothers et al., 2017). The situation has not changed in the last decade (House of Commons, 2010). Two additional people who hold or have held local political office in the UK, both of whom are activists within the Labour Party, were interviewed, as was a local Labour Party chair.

The UK provided one of the most surprising variances with prevailing practice elsewhere in Europe: the Equality Act 2010, which prevents discrimination in employment and requires employers to make reasonable accommodations for workers with disabilities, covers paid employees but not elected officials (HM Government, 2010). The MP who was interviewed for this research confirmed this fact, saying: “Laws that apply to other disabled people across the country do not apply to parliament or disabled people elected to The House of Commons or The House of Lords. There are no laws or official policies relating to disabled people in public life.”

The UK government does not set a quota for employers to encourage them to hire employees with disabilities, nor does any UK political party have such a quota for its candidate lists. Some flexibility in work hours is possible, but employees have to ask their employer directly, and they don't have to say yes. Employers are responsible for adapting work tasks and workplaces. Employees can seek redress via the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS).

In reality, help from ACAS is difficult to gain access to, and employers have many ways to avoid spending money. A popular trick is insisting that the person has to work as an independent contractor/freelancer rather than as an employee, which means the employer has no obligations. According to the Citizens Advice Bureau (2015), which is publicly funded to provide advice on issues such as benefits claims, employment and debt problems, 1 in 10 self-employed persons may have been placed in this situation by their (former) employer.

Disability is mentioned as a “push factor” for self-employment by researchers in other countries as well: for example, Moore and Mueller (2002) in Canada and a variety of EU countries, including the Netherlands (Beulen, 2009.) Bogus self-employment is, of course, a greater phenomenon, including but not only as exemplified by “gig economy” self-employment (Deliveroo, Uber, etc.). Employers increasingly use bogus self-employment as a way to avoid their social security obligations, including in the Netherlands (Floren, 2013). Although no disability-specific research was located about bogus

self-employment, a German study found that factors more frequently associated with disability—experience of having been unemployed and low educational attainment—were strongly associated with bogus self-employment (Dietrich and Patzina, 2018).

Bogus self-employment has also been pushed by private service providers for unemployed people with disabilities in the UK (for example, see Tracey, 2013), which receive payments for “job placement” when clients start businesses—even when those businesses turn out to not be viable.

The UK’s Access to Work scheme has provided support in work for many people with disabilities, including those with severe disabilities. Support can include job coaching, interview support, communication support, and PA support (e.g. to complete paperwork that would be difficult for a worker with a physical impairment or dyslexia). Funding for Access to Work has been cut and individual funding is now capped, however, so now fewer people are accessing the fund. This has had a particular impact on deaf employees who rely on sign language interpreters (Smith, 2018). As noted previously, this support is not available to elected officials.

The MP with a disability who provided evidence for this report has struggled considerably:

I have had a number of access issues unresolved, as parliament has refused to make adjustments for me to certain practices which I needed for my disabilities in order to do my job to the best of my ability. These include access to remote electronic voting/proxy voting as and when needed on the occasions my disabilities mean I am unable to attend parliament, for other MPs not to shout and heckle whilst in the chamber whilst somebody is speaking (an archaic and childish practice they are particularly keen to preserve), guarantee of a seat in the chamber at busy times as I cannot stand for very long and there are not enough seats for every MP, and disability awareness and equality training... for every elected official and their staff.

I also have asked parliament to do more to promote equality and raise awareness, and this too has been rejected. Ignorance towards my disabilities and how they affect me, and a lack of commitment to disability equality and awareness in both parliament and the UK at large, has affected my ability to do my job and has also harmed my mental health. (Personal communication, Anonymous, 18 September 2018)

This MP further noted that while some support is available for MPs through the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, it is not guaranteed, and MPs may have cover some support costs themselves.

One area where the UK has distinguished itself is the establishment of funds to cover the support needs of people with disabilities who are running for office. In England, there was a £2.6 million Access to Elected Office fund for a few years, but it was then closed. The loss of this support had a direct impact on candidates in autumn 2018. For example, one blind candidate had to ask family and friends to take time off work so that they could accompany her during door-to-door canvassing, because there was no funding for a PA (personal communication, Fran Springfield, 29 October 2018). A campaign by the cross-party political organisation More United (<https://www.moreunited.uk>) was instrumental in getting the fund reinstated at the end of 2018, and grants of up to £4000 will be available to local candidates in the 2019 election cycle. This can be used to cover costs for things like Braille translation, sign language interpretation and specialist transport (Booth, 2018).

In Scotland, a similar scheme has run successfully for several years, and is operated by Inclusion Scotland (see <http://inclusionScotland.org/what-we-do/employability-and-civic-participation/access->

to-politics/aeofs/). The fund was launched with a budget of £200,000 (approximately 220,000 euros). Candidates can receive funding to cover the cost of practical support needed during their campaign. Conservative Party councillor Eric Holford had help from the fund, and stated:

As a wheelchair user, the Access to Elected Office Fund really helped to level the playing field between me and other able-bodied candidates. Having a Personal Assistant, paid for by the Access to Elected Office Fund, really gave me confidence when canvassing a rural community from my wheelchair. As a tetraplegic, assistive devices provided by the Access to Elected Office Fund really helped me overcome my paralysis and manage my online campaign just as easily as able-bodied candidates. (Inclusion Scotland, 2018)

In its first year of operation, the Access Fund helped 44 potential candidates, of whom 39 ran for office and 15 were elected. Based on the pilot’s success at widening participation, the Scottish parliament then committed to continuing the fund through 2021, when it will be evaluated again (Young, 2018).

Larry Arnold is a local Labour Party chair in Coventry, England, and has autism. He has also been an NGO board member and involved in national policymaking initiatives. “Our active membership contains a number of disabled people, we meet in accessible venues,” he said regarding his work as party chair. “I have allowed a parent to bring her autistic child to the meeting when she could not arrange child care. Disability is always high on our agenda given the background of our ward, and our membership. The barriers to participation are more of an external nature, given the financial restrictions on disabled members and poor public transport in the evenings. In addition to formal meetings, we hold an open breakfast once a month in a public community space” (Personal communication, Larry Arnold, 30 October 2018).

Arnold’s comments make clear that reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities are also valuable to other groups who struggle to access “politics as usual”: single parents and people with a low socioeconomic status, for example. Overcoming cultural barriers, including the expectations of people with disabilities themselves, is also important, he said. “I think there is more of a fear of participation than actual barriers, an anticipation that there will be barriers and social difficulties” (*ibid.*). This suggests the need to encourage and support participation at the local entry level.

Table 1: Key facts about disability and politics in five European countries

Country	Employment quota? ¹	% politicians with disabilities? ²	Direct support for politicians w/ disabilities?	Conflict reported political work and benefits system?	Funded support available at work? ⁴	Equalities laws apply to elected officials?
Belgium	3%	1.3-1.44%	N	N	Y	Y
Germany	5%	1%	N	Y	Y	Y
France	6%	1%	N	N	Y	Y
Denmark	n/a	1%	N	Y	Y	Y
UK	n/a	1%	Y ³	Y	Y	N

¹ Quota regarding a specific percentage of workers with disabilities applies to (some) employers.

² Approximate, based on interviews and/or published sources, as no official data is available

³ At the time of writing, only in Scotland, but England announced that its previously closed Access Fund would be relaunched in 2019.

⁴ In all cases, personal care and disability-related support is limited and conditional. Denmark makes personal care support available at work or when volunteering more easily than others.

Inclusion at party level: A case study

On another positive note, the UK provided the only example found during this research of concerted action to improve access to a political party for people with disabilities that specifically included actions regarding candidacy for office. Disability Labour is an independent group within the Labour Party (there are similar groups focused on LGBT, female and ethnic minority members): see <https://www.disabilitylabour.org.uk>.

Fran Springfield is co-chair of Disability Labour and former local council member in Suffolk, with a background in nursing. She has also been a campaign organiser and researcher for other candidates. Springfield was interviewed along with Kathryn Bole, Labour Councillor for Whitton/Whitehouse and a party activist. Bole's background was in business and DPO governance. Both Springfield and Bole are wheelchair users due to conditions that limit their mobility.

We spoke not long after the autumn party conference, during which the governance of Disability Labour was completely changed and the organisation effectively relaunched. "In the last eight weeks we've been in post, we've probably done more than the previous leadership did in last two to three years," said Springfield. "From my perspective, the executive as it was had been completely taken over by the fact that they were getting access to the upper echelon of the party. That became more of the focus than doing the actual work of bringing other disabled people up along with them." This comment highlights one of the dangers of equality campaigns: as has sometimes been the case with campaigns for women or minorities within large organisations, serving on equalities committees can be a career-building exercise. Personal benefit and visibility can lead campaigners away from doing the hard work of representing a broader group.

The new team at the top of Disability Labour sees their role as "to raise awareness of the issues that disabled people have coming to the party and participating," said Bole. "It's still filled by grey-haired old men: they don't adopt the technology, they're not as open to change. And I think there is a 'political correctness' taboo to asking people about asking people how their disability affects them. So you end up with a Mexican standoff, with one side afraid to say anything and the other being not heard."

Bole, who had previously been active on disability issues in her trades union, was surprised at the lack of knowledge about access issues in the party. "How many of the things people think are simple are holding people back – like door-knocking," she noted. "I happen to use a power wheelchair, and that's not going to work very well. [To be selected as a candidate] in the Labour Party, you have to go before a team of people, your local campaign forum. The first thing they ask is how many doors you've knocked on, how many leaflets have you delivered."

Disability Labour are also working to improve support for candidates and appointees. For example, Springfield has supported the campaign of Marsha de Cordova, a recently elected Black MP who is blind. "She's been an MP since last year, and even now the House of Commons can't get her papers to her on time in order to be able to read everything before debates start," she said. "All she needs is large print, not Braille! They did it for David Blunkett, but he was a cabinet minister." Working as a political appointee can also trigger access problems, she added. "You have to be fit to work in the House! I was a researcher for an MP 30-odd years ago, I could walk

any distance you wanted at that point,” she said. “The building is incredibly hard to get around if you have any form of disability, and if you’re a wheelchair user, heaven help you. Last time I was there, it took me half an hour to get from the gate to where I wanted to be.”

Bole and Springfield said that improving inclusion for candidates, elected officials and political appointees within the party is not just about ensuring that people have support on the campaign trail or with day-to-day tasks. Party conferences are where alliances are solidified, internal leadership decisions are made, and policies are finalised. For this reason, improving access to conferences is one of Disability Labour’s main goals. At the September 2018 conference, Bole said, conference organisers arranged for her to be able to attend (many party activists are not invited), listened to her advice on accessibility and actioned her ideas. “The only possible sticking point I can see is disabilities along the learning difficulties line, and along the autism, Aspergers and neurodiversity line,” she said.

This issue was highlighted when a right-wing journalist and camera crew invaded a quiet room (“safe space”) that had been set up for such delegates and tweeted mocking comments. Disability Labour approached the party executive, and the journalist’s press credentials were pulled. Springfield said she was surprised that their appeal was successful, and quickly. “There’s this little group of eight people who make all the rules for conference, and they are known to be dinosaurs! I thought, ‘that’s not going to happen,’ but we had four wheelchair users, and Kathy’s [service] dog, and one of the autistic women who was most affected,” she said. Bolt added: “We found out the way to get to them was bring them chocolate – a chocolate lab! He went around greeting everyone. The dog has met [party leader] Jeremy Corbyn, but I haven’t!” This story illustrates a point that was made by other interviewees: when people with different kinds of impairments come together, they are more influential than single-issue groups. While the “disability hierarchy” tends to devalue people with developmental or intellectual disabilities, cross-disability coalition work can make sure everyone’s needs are met.

Springfield and Bolt both noted that the Access to Elected Office Fund is working on Scotland, and much missed in England, where they hope it will eventually be extended to cover local and regional races as well. They added that the benefits system currently presents barriers to participation that need to be addressed. Local councillors receive a small allowance to cover the costs of undertaking public service. This money is not considered a salary for tax purposes, so those receiving it cannot claim Working Tax Credits. However, the benefit system considers it “personal income” and uses it as a reason to cut means-tested benefits. This policy has a particularly pernicious effect on people with disabilities and single parents, Springfield said.

Springfield also pointed out that benefit payment errors can leave local councillors behind on their rent or council tax. It is against the law for debtors to stand for office, and they can be suspended due to arrears if already in office.

Disability Labour is looking closely at the possibility of disability quotas for candidates. “In the state it is now, if you had two people come in who put themselves forward to a panel, and one was disabled and couldn’t campaign as much as the other, they would find a way of selecting the other one,” said Bole. “My personal feeling is that there should be disabled-only seats or disabled-only shortlists,” as this has proved helpful to get more women into office.

The organisation is already instituting job-sharing across its management group, and encourage changes to the Labour Party constitution that will make this more common across the party. Job-sharing in office is an idea that both Bolt and Springfield agreed on.

Finally, Disability Labour is pushing the party to adopt “digital democracy,” to give more party activists access to participation on district and national level and to help office-holders who have conditions that may limit mobility or cause fatigue. “I know for me, when while I’ve been off sick [as a councillor] it’s due to pain, and I can’t be up for long periods of time,” Bole said. “if I could be a counsellor virtually, I wouldn’t have had to have a motion put forward that I hadn’t attended a meeting in six months.” (Personal communication, Katheryn Bole and Fran Springfield, 29 October 2018).

Inclusion in the EU parliament and EU governance

As noted by Belgian MEP Helga Stevens, the European Parliament and related EU institutions still have some way to go if candidates and policymakers who have disabilities are to have equal access to the reins of power. An interview was sought with *Ádám Kósa*, currently serving his second term as MEP for Hungary’s European People’s Party (Fidesz.) *Kósa*, who moved into politics after serving as head of a Hungarian NGO for deaf and hearing impaired people, is deaf and communicates via sign language. This is another indication that DPO leaders develop skills that can be valuable in political careers. He provided written information to inform this research.

Kósa and Stevens, both from right-wing parties, have been active in promoting bills that ensure sign language is treated like all other languages in the EU. *Kósa* has made the point that as long as disability access is seen as a “left-wing” social issue, people with disabilities can end up as pawns in political games. He favours and has been actively working towards a European Accessibility Act that will harmonise practice across the EU. He also advocates attaching accessibility regulations to any funding given out by the EU, for example grants from the EU Structural Fund (Martinsson, 2014).

Unlike Stevens, *Kósa* said he has been able to access sign language interpretation services he needs to support his EU work. This is mainly because a conflict between “EU Brussels” and “Belgian Brussels” introduces complications for Stevens (*ibid.*) Such conflicts may affect politicians and appointees with disabilities who receive recognition of their disability or services from a municipality or state when they begin working in a nation’s capital, as well as those who move to another country—for example, to take up a policymaking post. While some disability-related supports are portable across state or even national borders (for example, special parking permits for people with disabilities that are issued by EU states can be used throughout the EU), others could be lost or only retained with extra paperwork (Eichhorst *et al.* 2010).

Discussion

Many commonalities can be seen in the accounts of political life with a disability shared by the respondents for this research, and their experiences do not diverge greatly from the research, policy backgrounders and personal stories retrieved from the literature. In this section, the results are discussed in relation to the research questions, and also with relation to the Netherlands.

Level of participation

A representative level of participation in politics and governance was not found in any EU country, and there is no reason to believe that the Netherlands is different in this respect. The countries looked at most closely appeared to making small steps towards fostering participation, and links could be observed between inclusive education and later inclusion.

Several respondents said that greater visibility of people with disabilities in politics could help to bring about societal change. This includes serving as role models for other people with disabilities and providing an example to the general population of what people with disabilities can accomplish as well as direct political or policy interventions. However, for many candidates or appointees who have disabilities, success requires practical support. As the British MP interviewed said: “A number of my constituents whom I represent are glad to have a disabled MP representing them... [but] my disability made both my election campaign and my time in the role since my election harder than it would be for a non-disabled candidate and MP.”

Participation starts with voting, party volunteering and local races, so attention is needed to ensure that people with disabilities are welcomed and supported at this level. There is clear evidence that people with disabilities experience barriers to voting, with 30 percent saying they had difficulty voting in the 2012 Presidential election in the US (Gilbert, 2016). Actions taken to strengthen and support democratic processes within NGOs, such as visual voting systems, can be built upon to improve access to local and national elections. Considering Universal Design principles can help to make spaces and materials used in political activities accessible to most—although as needs related to impairments can sometimes conflict with each other, at times personal support may be required to ensure access. An example from the US is the involvement of DPOs in assisting people with disabilities to take part on the political process. The DPO Disability Rights Iowa, for example, receives funding under the Help America Vote Act of 2002, which it uses to help people with disabilities in their state register to vote, enter a polling place (many in the US are not fully accessible), cast their vote, train other people in how to support disabled voters, and test technologies that could help people vote (Disability Rights Iowa, 2018). The HAVA 2002 including funding of 3.9 billion US dollars, spread across the 50 US states, to improve their voting procedures generally. Although HAVA funding has since run out, efforts to use Universal Design principles to improve voting access have continued, including free, more accessible, open-source voting software that runs on multiple platforms (Gilbert, *op. cit.*) Experiencing this kind of basic participation encourages the formation of political ambition and activity.

Policies affecting politicians and appointed officials

In most countries, as in the Netherlands, there were no policies that specifically affected politicians or political office holders. France presented a partial exception, because the state used funding raised from fines on government employers to fund recruitment, development and other services for persons in public service who have a disability. However, so far this programme has had a limited impact.

The Access Funds in England and Scotland look to be a very positive approach to ensuring candidates have the support they need, but funding was not available to candidates at all levels. The English fund, which was closed and has not yet re-opened, supported only candidates at national level. The Scottish fund supports candidates at local and regional level, but not for national office.

Benefits policies were mentioned by respondents in four countries as having unintended consequences for politically active recipients, and these were said by four respondents to have blocked some people with disabilities from running for or continuing to serve in office.

Legal regulations, provisions for office-holders and quotas

In most countries, there were no laws or regulations that specifically affected politicians or political office holders, and this is also the case in the Netherlands. Generally, they were able to benefit from general anti-discrimination laws. Here the UK was an outlier, with political office holders not covered by the Equalities Act. This means that in the UK there is no duty on governments to make reasonable accommodations for elected officials.

Office-holders in some countries were able to benefit from publicly funded support (for example PA services of communications adaptations) while carrying out political work. However, this access was often described as limited or uncertain, and some respondents described conflicts between funders that impacted the form and amount of support they could have. The Access Fund in Scotland has had a good record of success so far, and England has recently decided to reopen its Access Fund.

The establishment of quotas for candidates with disabilities by political parties is a possibility, as many parties now operate official or unofficial quotas for female or ethnic minority candidates. For example, in one country, Belgium, a gender-based quota was legally mandated for the top three posts in party lists. There are no Dutch political parties known to have a disability quota for candidates. In 2016, the Liberal Democrats in the UK used a disabled-only shortlist for the first time, for a seat in a national parliamentary election. The party, which had already used women-only shortlists for some seats, had agreed to try the tactic at its national convention (Pring, 2016).

Quotas applicable to employers, including government departments, for hiring people with disabilities were found in some countries, but not all (the Netherlands does not have such a quota: although the *Participatiewet* included provisions for instituting a quota, it has not yet been triggered.) These quotas could affect political appointees, indirectly or directly, when they apply to government employers, political parties or NGOs/think tanks. However, no national governments in the EU had met their own quotas, nor have the majority of businesses in any EU state with a quota. Based on this information, such quotas do not appear to be effective—but it is also noted that there are many exceptions available for current national quotas, and fines for noncompliance (if any) are so low as to provide little incentive for employers, including governments and political parties.

Job-sharing is a practice that could benefit many elected officials or appointees, but is often blocked by policies or, in the case of elected office, by law. EU states, including the Netherlands, ministries and political parties can all find possibilities to innovate here. Job-sharing in appointed roles could be trialled first, as it does not require legislative change. Ministers could be encouraged to consider whether two part-time appointees could bring more to a role than one full-time appointee. This could broaden access not only for people with disabilities, but also for parents and people with caring responsibilities. A precursor for success would be to develop disability-inclusive lists of potential appointees, and potentially to provide support to develop promising individuals into strong candidates for appointed roles. Guidance to support more diverse recruitment for and job-sharing in such roles could be created and distributed.

The Belgian *vertrouwenspersoon* policy for elected officials with a disability at local and provincial level provides another possible way forward for elected office. In this system, only the official is elected, and the *vertrouwenspersoon* is selected by the official to provide assistance. See *Recommendations*, p. 29, for additional suggestions.

As noted earlier, there is a groundswell of approval for job-sharing in elected office in the UK; it is also being discussed by some Scandinavian parties. Other EU states would do well to examine the Fawcett Society (Brothers, *et al.*, 2017) report and to keep an eye on further developments.

Barriers

The barriers observed in neighbouring countries were similar to those seen in the Netherlands, although cultural differences will play a part. In contrast to the Scandinavian countries and the UK, which have had more inclusive education and an independent living movement for quite some time, the Netherlands is most similar in its disability policies and practices to Belgium, Germany and France. This means that education is comparatively less inclusive, fewer students with disabilities attend university, more people with disabilities are in residential care or otherwise isolated, and a medical/professional rather than social/human rights model has tended to prevail.

In Belgium, Germany, France and the Netherlands, however, this situation is being challenged by people with disabilities, including politicians. It was notable that this challenge comes from politicians with disabilities on the right as well as the left, with a call for barriers to success to be removed. Where politicians tend to differ along the left/right axis is with regards to the provision of publicly funded services—but here too, common ground can often be found.

It seems clear from the results that one particular barrier that should be avoided is permitting establishment of an overly narrow route into political life. The over-representation of Sciences Po graduates in French politics and the similar role played by Oxford and Cambridge in the UK present cautionary tales for the Netherlands.

Business leadership is also often a precursor to political leadership. This pathway is stymied by the poor representation of persons with disabilities in employment generally, and at higher levels of employment specifically. At EU level, fewer than half of people with disabilities are in employment (Grammenos, *et al.*, 2013), with employment levels in the Netherlands the very lowest overall rate recorded (7%). Over the past five years, a number of national initiatives have been initiated to address this employment gap in the Netherlands. As of 2016, the youngest group (persons aged 25 to 45) had the highest rate of paid employment, at 42%, but this will include persons working only a few hours per week and those classified as self-employed, who may or may not achieve a minimum

wage through their work. The majority are in low-paid occupations, such as hairdresser or cleaner, and they are less likely to have a permanent contract than workers without disabilities (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2016).

Despite these poor employment figures, there are individuals with disabilities who hold governance roles, or who are working in sectors where one might expect that there is a potential to move into such roles. For example, the CBS report indicates that 3% of the group who are in work hold managerial roles, and 4%-5% are employed in the public sector. A similar percentage work in the education, technical or business sectors. Although large companies such as Shell or Philips may have internal campaigns to recognise and develop the talent of employees with disabilities as part of their diversity policies, the CBS statistics indicate that these can only reach a small number.

Another pathway into political roles comes through appointment of persons with disabilities to public commissions, many of which are concerned with business issues. Data on the number of persons with disabilities in these types of appointed roles in the Netherlands could not be found, and may not be collected at this time. However, a 2018 UK investigation (Holmes, 2018) found that 3% of such appointees were persons with a disability, and located a number of barriers in the recruitment, application and hiring processes. Crucially, commissioners needed to be pushed towards proactivity. As one contributor to the research stated, otherwise “people tend to be tapped on the shoulder by people who look like them, act like them, are educated like them” (*ibid.*, p. 21). Suggestions were made on how to overcome these barriers, and these have informed the recommendations made in this report.

Roles in governance, and role models

As in the Netherlands, it is common for people with disabilities who enter politics to include disability issues in their portfolio. This was especially marked for politicians who came from a disability activism background. However, some seemed to be wary of over-focusing on disability issues, out of a desire to not be pigeonholed, to further their careers, or because they had strong political interests in other areas as well.

Not many politicians were interviewed who joined the field after experiencing governance roles in business or societal organisations, other than a few whose background was with DPO governance.

However, the fact that people with disabilities in such governance roles do exist in all countries represents an untapped resource for parties seeking experienced, knowledgeable potential recruits for candidacy or ministry work. Denmark’s Kristian Hegaard addressed this topic directly:

First of all, I think young people with disability need role models. Maybe there should be some kind of quota in the parties, or talent-developing in youth disability organisations with the focus on becoming a politician. (Personal communication, Kristian Hegaard, 16 October 2018)

The people with disabilities who current serve in public office or as appointed officials tend to be exceptional over-achievers, and are therefore excellent role models. Although their numbers are limited at national or EU level, there is a larger group of provincial and local politicians and policymakers who are also making very valuable contributions. These individuals are less visible than their occasional national counterparts. If a way could be found to bring them together, for example through participation in a “think tank,” they would also represent a fantastic “brain trust” for how to recruit, encourage and develop politicians of the future who have disabilities.

Conclusion and recommendations

To conclude, the level of inclusion in political life of people with disabilities does not match the percentage of the population who are disabled in any European country investigated. The reasons for this are multifactorial, and so will be any solutions. People with disabilities may face somewhat different cultural, economic, support or access barriers in the various EU countries, and within different regions of those countries as well.

This will also hold true for the Netherlands, which is still struggling with acceptance and enforcement of basic policies, such as inclusion in education and employment, that lead to acceptance and awareness in society and a wider window of opportunities for people with disabilities. As the previous section made clear, access to education and work impact access to political activity. The same can be said of physical and societal accessibility in general.

Having ratified the UN CRPD quite recently, however, the Netherlands is in a good position to learn from the successes and missteps of its neighbours, and to trial those strategies that seem most likely to improve inclusion. In some areas, it is already ahead: while certain European countries still deny voting rights to people with some disabilities, the Netherlands guarantees universal suffrage. Access to voting is considered the first level of political participation, with the ability to run for office following on from it (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2010). In the Netherlands, this too is a right protected for disabled citizens. However, for both voting and standing for office, access barriers may exist, and need to be removed. Evidence indicates that not only does voting increase political participation amongst people from disadvantaged groups, the political success of persons from these groups can positively impact the level of voting amongst its members (Logan, Darrah and Oh, 2012).

Recommendations

First, robust and trustworthy data needs to be collected at all levels of political life: local, provincial, national and European. Without firm numbers, it is impossible to gauge progress towards greater inclusion of people with disabilities. Improved data collection throughout the EU has also been called for by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, which stated: “At the national level, comprehensive, sex- and impairment-disaggregated data are necessary to direct immediate action, as well as to monitor, and correct where needed, interventions and progress achieved over time” (OSCE/ODIHR, 2017).

Second, only one political party was found to have a quota system in place to encourage selection of candidates or appointed officials who have disabilities, and it had only used a disabled-only shortlist on a limited basis. Whether such a quota system would work to encourage recruitment of suitably qualified candidates for office or other political posts would depend very much on the attitudes towards disability held by the members of that party. This is an issue that political parties in the Netherlands should be encouraged to grapple with. A quota that is decided on by the party members themselves would reflect a strong desire to improve diversity, and provide a mechanism with which to do so. It could be useful for party leaders to talk to their counterparts in the UK’s Liberal Democrats, for as far as the author can tell, it is so far the only party in Europe to experiment with disability-only shortlists.

Although some EU states do have disability employment quotas that might have an impact on the development and employment of political appointees who have disabilities, these appeared to be largely toothless and therefore ineffective. Should the Netherlands wish to institute such a system, either generally or in relation to government employment, care would need to be taken to eliminate loopholes and set fines at a level that incentivises compliance. In addition, government HRM departments might need extra support and guidance to improve their recruitment and support of employees with disabilities. These measures could help some appointed officials, either directly or by contributing to their development through earlier employment in government. Governments also need to remain alert to the danger of bogus self-employment, which can leave employees with disabilities without protection.

A number of other practices were described in the literature or by interviewees that could address some participation barriers. If the Netherlands wishes to implement any of these, it would be important to carefully research the impact of pilot schemes to ensure that they are effective in the Dutch political climate. At least some of these are areas where the Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties could itself launch programmes to address the issues identified in this report. Measures that might help include:

- **Leadership potential** needs to be recognised and built upon from an early age. Full inclusion in education and work are the foundations of full inclusion in political life: it is from this basis that leadership emerges. In addition, universities offering political science, governance or similar programmes should actively seek qualified applicants with disabilities, and ensure they have the right support. (Higher) education institutions should also attempt to identify and nurture emerging leaders who have disabilities in all subjects, as these individuals could be the policymakers or ministers of the future in their areas of specialism.
- **Welcoming and supporting people with disabilities as political actors at the entry level**—as voters, in debates, as members of political parties, as campaign workers and as local candidates—is the basis of full participation at higher levels. Several barriers to participation were identified that can be removed.
- Ensuring that **funding for support** is available for all who need it, is not means-tested, and can be used while individuals are carrying out political work, campaigning or volunteering with a party or political organisation. The Access Fund currently run by Scotland and soon to be restarted in England provides a positive example that could be replicated in other countries.
- Ensuring that **benefit system rules** do not create barriers to participation.
- **Mentoring schemes** aimed at recruiting and developing potential candidates and political appointees with disabilities could be launched, either by states, by political parties, by societal organisations, or by partnerships of these entities. A European scheme to develop political leadership by people with disabilities in all member states could expand the impact of this concept. Mentoring should not be restricted to young people—people with disabilities who have gained experience in governance of companies, NGOs or DPOs are obvious candidates for potential candidacy or public service in appointed roles.
- **Targeted recruitment and support** along the lines of the French FIPHFP looks like a very promising approach. Support could be personalised or delivered to specific groups. The French scheme is funded from fines levied on public employers that do not meet employment quotas, a creative idea that could be something of a win-win for people with disabilities and employers alike. This could help to build the careers of future and current

political appointees as they gain competence and grow their networks through public service. However, as the French example shows, it needs to have “teeth” to be effective.

- **Job-sharing** in public office and senior policy roles could solve problems for people with disabilities whose stamina is affected and for those with sensory impairments. It has benefits for many other workers as well, and fits the common Dutch preference for part-time work. It could even help to address complaints about the impossibly high workloads of some public officials. As the Fawcett Society (Brothers, *et al.*, 2017) report indicates, however, there are cultural, procedural and legal issues to work out. For appointees the issues would be the same as for other high-level employees who wish to job-share. For elected offices, the job-share partners would have to run for office as a team, and the team would have only one vote. Where there is a difference of opinion within the team, the team might have to abstain. It has also been suggested that an elected job-sharing team could divide the job temporally in a variety of ways (mornings/afternoons or seasonally) or could divide it by task (e.g. work in the chamber and work at constituency level) (Campbell and Childs, 2017). The Belgian *vertrouwenspersoon* provision for elected officials with a disability is a different, more limited form of job-sharing, and could provide a workaround for legal barriers. However, it would also require legal change, and funding.
- **Political parties** should develop a targeted strategy for recruiting and developing potential candidates, a task in which they could be helped by independent organisations, such as DPOs. The UK’s Disability Labour committee and the EMILY’s List approach offer two, potentially complementary, models for improving representation of people with disabilities within political parties.
- A **Disability in Politics think tank** might be a useful tool at European (or national) level to ensure that best practices are recognised and disseminated widely.

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