

Roland Lami & Blendi Lami

The Role of Persons with Disabilities in the political decision-making process in Western Balkans



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Berichte aus der Politik

**Roland Lami,
Blendi Lami**

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decision making process in Western Balkans**

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“There is no greater disability in society, than the inability to see a person as more.”

Robert M. Hensel

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Acronyms

PwD – Person with Disabilities

WB – Western Balkan

UN – United Nations

CoE – Council of Europe

EU – European Union

EC – European Commission

OSCE – Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe

UDHR – Universal Declaration of Human Rights

ICCPR – International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

CRPD – Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

ECHR – Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (European Convention on Human Rights)

ECtHR – European Court of Human Rights

APPRPwD – Action Plan to Promote the Rights and Full Participation of People with Disabilities in Society RPwD

– Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on the Participation of Persons with Disabilities in Political and Public Life CGP – Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters

RID – Revised Interpretative Declaration to the Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters on the Participation of People with Disabilities in Elections from 2011

SPwD – Council of Europe Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – Human Rights: A Reality for All – outlines the Organisation's priorities in the period 2017- 2023

DI – The Political Rights of Persons with Disabilities: A Democratic Issue

CHD – Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE MM – Document of the Moscow Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE

TFEU – Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union

CFREU – Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union

DS – European Disability Strategy 2010-2020: A Renewed Commitment to a BarrierFree Europe Analysis of the Rights, Social

SDGs – Sustainable Development Goals

DP – Democratic Party of Albania [Albanian: Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë]

PDP – Party of Democratic Progress [Serbian: Партија демократског прогреса]

SDA – Party of Democratic Action [Bosnian: Stranka demokratske akcije]

HDZ90 – Croatian Democratic Union 1990 [Croatian: Hrvatska demokratska zajednica 1990]

NB – Independent block [Bosnian: Nezavisni blok]

LDK – Democratic League of Kosovo [Albanian: Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës]

AAK – Alliance for the Future of Kosovo [Albanian: Aleanca për Ardhmërinë e Kosovës]

PDK – Democratic Party of Kosovo [Albanian: Partia Demokratike e Kosovës]

VMRO-DPMNE – Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity [Macedonian: Внатрешна македонска револуционерна организација – Демократска партија за македонско национално единство]

SNS – Serbian Progressive Party [Serbian: Српска напредна странка]

AA – Alliance for Albanians [Albanian: Aleanca për Shqiptarët, Macedonian: Алијанса за Албанците]

PPAK – Person with Disabilities Party

NGOs – Non-governmental organisations

PDO – Persons with disabilities's organisation

CSO – Civil society organisations

OPD – Organisation for persons with disabilities IIHR – Innovation, Inclusion, Human Rights

Executive Summary

Participation of persons with disabilities (PWDs) in political and public life is a human right as well as an important factor that promotes social inclusive development. When PWDs participate in political and public life their voice is heard and reflected in policy decisions. Despite the significant numbers of PWDs in the Balkan region, research suggests that PWDs continue to experience systemic exclusion from mainstream governance and developmental processes. This exclusion has been particularly acute in the areas of political representation in elective and appointed positions, with limited efforts by political parties to provide a conducive environment for PWDs to engage in politics. There is a need to address the persistent gap within Balkan region's political culture led and perpetuated by political parties while strengthening direct engagement between political parties and civil society, and the critical knowledge gaps within political parties to create and promote more inclusive political discourse, political commitments and public policymaking.

This study aimed at gathering data on the state of political inclusion of persons with disabilities within political parties in Western Balkans, including the determinants and behavioural drivers for political parties to include or exclude persons with disabilities within party structures, policies, and processes. The study was majorly qualitative, collecting data from the political parties, Disabled Persons Organizations (DPOs) and other

relevant stakeholders concerned with the inclusion of PWDs in the political processes.

The research was guided by ten research questions that sought to determine: (1) the key social, economic, and political drivers of Political Inclusion of Persons with Disability in right-wing Political Parties in Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Kosovo, Serbia and Bosnia – Herzegovina; (2) the supportive structures existent within Political Parties to promote the participation of special interest groups specifically PWDs; (3) the most effective/ineffective practices/structures in political party inclusion; (4) the barriers existent within Political Parties that hinder the participation of special interest groups specifically PWDs; (5) the legal, policy and programming options likely to promote/ or regulate the political inclusion of PWDs in Political Parties in Balkans region; (6) the existing policy and legal framework in West Balkan region that support inclusion of PWDs in social, political, and economic processes including the extent of political parties compliance and/or utilization of these policy provisions; (7) identification of good practices in PWDs inclusion on social, political, and economic processes from other jurisdictions than Western Balkans region, being good models from which right-wing political parties in Western Balkans region can learn.

The study shows that the level of participation of people with disabilities in the right-wing parties of Albania, Kosovo, Serbia, Northern Macedonia, Montenegro and

Bosnia and Herzegovina is very low. Also, the level of representation of issues or interests of people with disabilities is not a priority in the range of problems faced by this community. The study used a sample of 13 center-right and right-wing parties, and most of the answers given in the questionnaire filled in for this study by representatives of the respective parties as well as representatives of associations or organizations representing PWDs showed that problems and difficulties faced by people with disabilities in terms of the level of representation, participation and role in political decision-making are numerous. Political parties in this region, regardless of the different contexts in which they operate, are similar in many respects in terms of low attention to include or represent the concerns and problems of the PWDs.

Based on data from 13 interviews of center-right and right-wing political parties in Albania, Kosovo, Serbia-Montenegro, Northern Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, data from 7 interviews conducted with various organizations representing persons with disabilities in the respective countries as well as data from two focus groups with the participation of persons with disabilities, the study identified some of the determinants of the participation of PWDs in political parties being associated with internal party policies and programs, power relations within the parties, social and economic factors. There are specific barriers inhibiting PWDs to participate in the political parties include a culture of violence and intimidation within the party such

as lack of reasonable accommodation within party structures, lack of access to information and accessibility features; misconceived low esteem of PWDs by the political parties; and low investment by political parties in programs for PWDs. Within the legal and policy framework, the study observed that gaps exist with the current laws not carrying adequate strength to compel political parties to be inclusive.

Findings from this study conclude that the inclusion of PWDs in the political parties in Western Balkans region remains inadequate and presents a big gap in respect to the civil and political rights of PWDs as entrenched in the international legal instruments. Political parties are still, albeit slowly, trying to include PWDs in their agenda in terms of policy and practice. On the other hand, other political parties are grappling with the inclusion of PWDs partly because of unresponsive internal policies, limited capacity, and lack of awareness among the party leadership on inclusion among other barriers.

Opportunities, therefore, exist for structured engagement with political parties towards building inclusive culture and practice among its membership. On the other hand, mobilizing people with disabilities to have a voice in political parties is being made at a slow pace. Such situation requires a paradigm shift to achieve intra-party pro-disability agenda and national legal reforms that address the challenges limiting the participation of PWDs in the political processes and more specifically in the political parties.

Reading the study

Readers who are new to disability rights will find useful context in the Introduction and Persons with Disabilities sections, which explain how disability is defined, lists key international standards and agreements governing the political participation of persons with disabilities, and identifies barriers for access to political processes.

The second section, Political Parties, focuses on the role of right-wing political parties in Albania, Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Northern Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in involving persons with disabilities in party leadership structures and in general and local elections. It also identifies issues concerning persons with disabilities in political programs, level of involvement of candidates and campaign staff with disabilities, access to activities carried out by political parties, materials distributed during election campaigns, etc. It also explores good practices for engaging with public stakeholders and discusses administrative processes through the lens of disability inclusion.