

Voting without legal capacity

Croatia - Udruga za samozastupanje (Association for Self Advocacy)

SUMMARY OF PROJECT

Human Rights Advocacy through Learning by Doing is a successful advocacy project for legislature change that promotes the right to vote for persons deprived of their legal capacity. Project activities were carried out using a networking advocacy approach, which included wide cooperation with other self-advocate groups, members of the Croatian self-advocacy network, relevant state institutions, the academic community, the media, and Platform 112 – Croatia’s largest civil society network.

“By the end of 2012 the combined efforts of the Association for Self-Advocacy, the organization GONG, and Platform 112 resulted in a change in the Voters Register Act making it possible for more than 16,000 Croatian citizens who are fully deprived of their legal capacity to realize their active voting right.”

—Mr. Damjan JANJUŠEVIĆ, Association for Self Advocacy

FACTS & FIGURES

- Since the new Voters Register Act came into effect, persons with intellectual disabilities have successfully voted on local and regional elections and two state referendums.
- Self-advocacy groups from 14 local communities that are members of the Croatian self-advocacy network as well as people in two residential institutions were educated on their democratic rights, including their right to vote, and were provided with the necessary knowledge to participate in political and public life. More than 600 persons have received training on voting procedures and participation in public and political life.
- Public awareness on the right to vote for persons deprived of their legal capacity was raised via a broad public TV and radio campaign.

PROBLEMS TARGETED

According to data from the national Disability Ombudsman, there are more than 19,000 persons deprived of legal capacity in Croatia, of whom some 16,000 are completely deprived of their legal capacity. Other targeted problems that have impeded the active participation of persons with intellectual disabilities in political and public life are the lack of accessible, easy-to-read information

on election procedures and candidates' programs, and public prejudice that views people with intellectual disability as incapable of participation in democratic processes.

SOLUTION & METHODOLOGY

The main objectives realized by the project were making changes to the Voters Register Act, which now provides persons with intellectual disabilities with the right to vote, and raising public awareness. The project brought together self-advocates and a variety of civil society organizations to raise public awareness on the rights of persons with disabilities among the general population and to provide workshops on democratic and voting procedures for self-advocates in local communities.

OUTLOOK & TRANSFERABILITY

The project provides an innovative and successful example of inclusive practice in advocating for legislature changes and the public promotion of the right to vote for persons with intellectual disabilities. As such, the project methodologies, expertise, and experience gained – and the principle of inclusion of persons with intellectual disabilities in carrying out the advocacy activities – is fully transferable and applicable to any other social or societal contexts. The project of course incurred implementation costs, but it imposed no additional costs for the state or any other institution or organization.

Photo: Yes

CONTACT

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