



○ Grupi për Qasje në Zgjedhje  
○ Grupa za Pristup Izborima.  
○ Election Access Group

# MANUAL

FOR TERMINOLOGY AND  
CORRECT APPROACH  
FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

ELECTION ACCESS GROUP  
2016

## **Manual for Terminology and Correct Approach for Persons with Disabilities**



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## INTRODUCTION TO THE ELECTION ACCESS GROUP

The Election Access Group (EAG) is a multi-stakeholder working group that aims to ensure full participation of persons with disabilities in electoral processes and public life. It is composed of representatives from organizations representing four types of disability (Mr. Afrim Maliqi, HandiKOS, Ms. Rukije Gashi, Kosovo's Association of the Deaf, Mr. Daut Tishuki, Kosovo's Association of the Blind, and Ms. Sebahate Beqiri, Down Syndrome Kosova), two members of Kosovo's National Assembly (Ms. Ganimete Musliu and Mr. Salih Morina), three representatives from the Central Election Commission of

Kosovo (Mr. Florian Dushi, Mr. Adnan Rrustemi, and Mr. Nexhmedin Hyseni), one representative of the Election Complaint and Appeals Panel (Ms. Valbona Millaku), two representatives from state institutions (Ms. Luljeta Kabashi, Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, and Mr. Qazim Gashi, Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare). The EAG is chaired by Mr. Afrim Maliqi, and has two co-chairs, Ms. Ganimete Musliu and Mr. Florian Dushi. In addition to USAID and IFES, EAG is supported by the Kosova Democratic Institute (KDI).

This handbook aims to inform the general public, through media, about the right approaches and terminologies towards persons with disabilities. The group welcomes the contribution of all stakeholders to promote these approaches for persons with disabilities in the election process and public life.

# 1 DISABILITY AND CORRECT APPROACHES

## 1.1 Definition of disability in Kosovar legislation and international convention

Article 1 of U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) gives the following definition for persons with disabilities:

***“Persons with Disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others”<sup>1</sup> (2006).***

The term person with disabilities is used in the Constitution of Kosovo where it is

included in principles of equality and discrimination.

The applicable legislation in Kosovo gives the following definition: “Disability” is limited access and limit of usual activities of everyday life of a person as a result of physical, sensory or mental impairment, which inhibit him/her to participate in everyday life activities.<sup>2</sup>

The U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) is written in six languages (English, French, Russian, Arabic, Chinese and Spanish). Translations in other languages must use the terminology that is acceptable to the community of persons with disabilities. The translation to Albanian was done by the Albanian Foundation for Persons with Disabilities, and this translation of the

<sup>1</sup>KU.N Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, 2006, page 5.

<sup>2</sup>Law No. 03/L-019 of Republic of Kosovo on vocational ability, rehabilitation and employment of persons with disabilities, 2009, page 1.

Convention is published on the UN website.

Any other terminology for disabilities and persons with disabilities is not acceptable to either the persons with disabilities or the organizations that represent them.

## 1.2 Defining approaches that refer to and interact with disabilities

There are many types of disabilities that reflect society's attitude towards persons with disabilities and in many cases, more than one approach can be used at the same time. Short descriptions of different approaches that are found in our society are presented below, based on the publication "Equal Access: How to Include Persons with

Disabilities in Elections and Political Processes."<sup>3</sup>

✗ **Charity approach** – when it is assumed that persons with disabilities are unable to be full participants in society and need help. In the framework of this approach, persons with disabilities are pitied.

✗ **Medical approach** – when persons with disabilities are treated as though their disability is the cause of all barriers. In this model, persons with disabilities are encouraged to adjust to their environments, rather than the other way around.

✗ **Social approach** – when disability is defined as a result of a person's interaction with their environment. The preamble of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities says, "... disability results from the

<sup>3</sup> *Equal Access: How to Include Persons with Disabilities in Elections and Political Processes, International Foundation for Electoral System and National Democratic Institute, 2014, page 25.*

interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.”<sup>4</sup>

✓ **Rights-based approach** – here, the emphasis shifts from dependence to empowerment. Persons with disabilities have the same basic human rights as all other citizens, and governments should guarantee rights and be held accountable for their protection.

While all these approaches can be found in society, the rights-based approach is the only acceptable one for persons with disabilities, as this approach treats persons with disabilities as equal to other persons in society.

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<sup>4</sup>*U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Preamble(e).*



## 2 CORRECT TERMINOLOGY AND SENTENCE FORMATION WHEN REFERRING TO AND INTERACTING WITH PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

### 2.1 General information and correct sentence formation when referring to and interacting with persons with disabilities

Persons with disabilities represent 15% of the world population today.<sup>5</sup> However, this large portion of the world population is under-represented in media. Moreover, due to the lack of information and sometimes society's mentality, persons with disabilities are often referred with unacceptable terms, which can often be offensive. This trend is found in Kosovo as well.

Most countries with democratic traditions, apart from applicable

legislation that forbids discrimination against persons with disabilities, have special codes of ethics that are respected by the media. A code of ethics as such would strengthen national protection of persons with disabilities and also stimulate social understanding in Kosovo. However, due to the lack of a code of ethics, this manual will serve as a guide about rules for using correct terminology for persons with disabilities. Following are a set of rules and principles, based on the publication "Tips on Interacting with Persons with Disabilities"<sup>6</sup> and in consultation with different organizations for persons with disabilities, that need to be applied:

<sup>5</sup>"World Report on Disability", World Health Organization, 2011, page 29.

<sup>6</sup>"Disability Etiquette: Tips On Interacting With People With Disabilities", United Spinal Association, 2009

○ The main principle that should be respected when referring to and interacting with persons with disabilities is that they have the same rights as their fellow citizens. This means that they do not want to be treated or considered as “special”. A disability does not define a person, his/her personality and values do. If the emphasis is shifted towards the disability, the “special” is formed, which in turn creates inequality in society and puts persons with disabilities in “special” positions. Persons with disabilities should be referred as persons with full rights, not special rights. Phrases that create differences should never be used.

○ Another principle that should be respected is that the disability is something personal, and as such it can be mentioned or elaborated on only with the approval of the person with the disability. When a person with disability is being referred, the term used should be general and acceptable by him/her. A

generally accepted term is a Person with disability. Moreover, the following terms should be avoided: “handicap”, “paralytic”, “cripple”, “with special need”, or “retard”. For any reference, the only acceptable expression is “disability”.

○ If a disability must be referred to, use language that puts the individual before the disability. For example the following can be said: “Person with disability” or “Person with Down Syndrome”. Don’t put the emphasis on the disability when forming sentences. Furthermore, there should be great care when using words that link the person to his/her disability. For example the preposition “with” or adjectives that express disability are acceptable in cases like “Person with disability”. The following terms should not be used: “suffers from”, “victim of”, “with the disease”, or “limited by”. These words put a negative and offensive attribute to the disability and as such should be completely avoided.

In some cases the term “affected by” is acceptable, although this too has been replaced with the “person with” terms mentioned above.

- The term “Person with special needs” does not necessarily relate to a person with disability. A special need implies a condition, where a person requires help, tools or other means to achieve a specific goal. The following could have special needs in this context: children with difficulties in learning, elderly persons, persons who have experienced injuries, etc. A disability is something permanent or long-term, which can create special needs, however it is not necessary linked to special needs. Therefore, the term “Person with special needs” should not be confused with person with disability.

- Persons with disabilities should not be categorized as one special group. References should be individual or for specific groups (if that is acceptable for

them or him/her). Disabilities must not be categorized as one special group. Each disability is personal, and one person can have one or more disabilities. However, the assumption that one disability contains other disabilities is not correct.





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## **2.2 Types of disabilities and correct approach towards persons with those disabilities**

When persons with disabilities are referred, the terms used should be general. The terms “person with disability” and “disability” are acceptable for all types of disabilities. However, if a disability must be elaborated on, it should be done so by using general terminology for specific terms. The following list provides a brief overview of some disabilities, and how to (generally) refer to them appropriately in media:

### **Acceptable Terms**

**Person with disability**

### **Unacceptable Terms**

Person with special needs  
Flawed person  
Disabled person  
Handicap

### **Specific Acceptable Terms**

**Blind person**  
**Person with visual impairment**

**Deaf Person**  
**Person with hearing impairment**

**Little Person**

### **Specific Unacceptable Terms**

Blindy  
Purblind

Deaf-mute Person  
Stone-deaf

Midget  
Dwarf

Specific Acceptable Terms
<b>Person with physical disability</b>
<b>Person with Down Syndrome</b>
<b>Person with Autism</b>
<b>Person with intellectual disability</b>
<b>Person with psychosocial disabilities</b>

Specific Unacceptable Terms
Paralyzed / Paralytic Cripple Handicap Invalid Hunchback Deformed
Mongoloid Mentally challenged
Person sick with Autism Mentally deficient person
Crazy Stupid Idiot Retard Moron Nuts Mentally disabled
Schizophrenic Psycho Insane Lunatic



# 3 PREJUDICES ABOUT PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

## 3.1 Common prejudices about persons with disabilities

There are many incorrect assumptions that are often triggered by fear or lack of information or prejudice about persons with disabilities. Promoting such negative images of disability is a form of discrimination because it creates barriers to full citizenship for people who have a disability. The following paragraphs are based on the publication “Myths and Misconceptions about People with a Disability”<sup>7</sup>, and they outline some of the most common myths and stereotypes that emerge in society.

***It is important to avoid these prejudices while referring to and interacting with persons with disabilities.***

### Prejudice #1: A person’s disability defines him/her as an individual

People often label individuals with a disability according to their condition, and often they can be referenced to as “the disabled”. Grouping and naming, based on the conditions of individuals with disabilities promotes stigma, and also builds offensive prejudices. Persons with disabilities, just like everyone else, are defined by personal values and skills and not by one’s disability.

<sup>7</sup>Myths and Misconceptions About Persons With A Disability” International Organization for Persons with Disability – Together we rock!

**Prejudice #2: Persons with disabilities are in constant pain and sick.**

Persons with disabilities may get sick occasionally or may sometimes be in pain. However, in most cases, persons with disabilities do not have pain due to their disability.

**Prejudice #3: Persons with disability are special and should be treated differently.**

Labeling a person with disability as “special” does not convey equality. Expectations for success should not be underestimated to accommodate the “special” label that is associated with persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities have equal rights and are an equal part of society, not a special part with special rights.

**Prejudice #4: Persons with disabilities are always dependent on someone and need help all the time.**

Like everyone else, persons with disabilities may face difficulties or may need help. However, this does not mean that they always need help. Always ask if you think someone may need help, but do not assume they need help because they have a disability.

**Prejudice #5: Persons with disabilities are to be pitied.**

Disability is often seen as a tragedy and consequently persons with disabilities in most cases are treated with sympathy for their condition. In fact, disability is just one dimension of their life, as persons with disabilities have skills and values, with which they have many chances to succeed and live a full life as everyone.

**Prejudice #6: Persons with disabilities are all part of a one-dimensional group.**

In most cases, persons with disabilities are treated as a part of one group, where everyone has the same thoughts and interests only because they have a disability. Within the community of persons with disabilities there are various opinions about different issues, just like in all the society.

**Prejudice #7: Persons with disabilities only socialize with each other.**

Often in the society there's a perception that persons with disabilities only want to socialize with other persons with disabilities. In fact, just like everyone else, persons with disabilities choose their company based on values and common interests.

**Prejudice #8: Persons with disabilities cannot lead a productive life.**

Persons with disabilities are fully capable of participating in their communities and have a full life. They go to school, they work, have hobbies, travel and create families, like anyone else. The challenge is to focus on a person's ability and not the opposite.

## 3.2 Prejudices about persons with disabilities in Kosovar society

In Kosovar society there are negative approaches towards persons with disabilities. There are prejudices against persons with disabilities in Kosovo due to lack of information and incorrect perceptions. Failing to tackle such prejudices results in the creation of wrong beliefs, stimulation of inequality, and stigmatization of persons with disabilities.

Listed below are some common prejudices in Kosovar society that need to be avoided. These prejudices have been identified by organizations for persons with disabilities.

### **Prejudice #1: Persons with disabilities have poor economic status and seek charity**

Economic status of persons with disabilities is not necessarily linked with the disability. Persons with disabilities work when possible and make a positive contribution to society. It is highly offensive to offer charity to a person with disability who doesn't ask for financial help.

### **Prejudice #2: Persons with disabilities can transfer their disability onto others**

In Kosovo, there are still some unacceptable attitudes towards

persons with disabilities. In daily life in Kosovo, persons with disabilities are often avoided due to the unfounded fear that their disability is contagious and can be transferred. Disability cannot be transferred unlike prejudices, which can.

**Prejudice #3: Persons with disabilities are unable to communicate by themselves and therefore communication should be done with their assistant**

Persons with disabilities are an integral part of society and are able to communicate. Their disability does not affect their ability to communicate in most cases. Do not speak to the assistant of the person with disability, speak to the person with disability. If the person with disability has a problem with communication he/she or his/her assistant will let you know.

Communication can be a challenge when we talk about the deaf community, which uses the Kosovar sign language as its mother tongue. This is also known as KSL. Sign language has its own grammar and the rules of interpretation and can be learned by anyone who is interested. Sign language is recognized by CRPD, article 2, [“Language” includes spoken and signed languages and other forms of non-spoken languages.]<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>*United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 2*

## Some facts on sign language:

Myths	Facts
<p>Sign language is a picturesque sequence of words spoken in a short form.</p> <p>Abstract concepts cannot be expressed in sign language.</p>	<p><b>Sign language has complex grammar rules and a rich vocabulary that is appropriate for intellectual conversation, rhetoric, humor, and poetry.</b></p>
<p>Sign language is universal, and is the same in the whole world.</p>	<p><b>Sign languages are different just as are spoken languages and it has been scientifically proven that in every country, sign language has its own dialects, just as spoken languages do.</b></p>

**Prejudice #4: Persons with disabilities are dangerous for society**

A person's potential to be dangerous is not defined by his/her disability. Mistaken social attitudes that define persons with disabilities as not able to interact with society correctly stigmatize persons with disabilities, and promote wrong ideas – which further encourage an improper and offensive mentality in society.





## CONCLUSION

EAG has drafted this manual to raise awareness in media of the correct terminology and knowledge to refer to and interact with persons with disabilities. The correct terminology has been determined in cooperation with Kosovar organizations that represent persons with disabilities, and thus reflects a social approach. The manual will serve as a reference for basic definitions, social approach, correct sentence, construction, and the terminology that is to be used when referring to and interacting with persons with disabilities. Taking into consideration that media and other stakeholders are a source and carrier of important information, it is important that they implement this manual to correctly refer to and interact with persons with disabilities, and, by doing so, raise awareness and indirectly inform citizens on this important matter.

## REFERENCES

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