




# Observation Report

---

## Executive Summary

### **Political Participation of Voters with Disabilities in the 2022 Lebanese Parliamentary Elections**



This report is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents are the responsibility of the Lebanese Union for People with Physical Disabilities (LUPD) and does not necessarily reflect the views of FHI 360, the US Agency for International Development, or the US government.

---

# Contents

Acronyms	iv
About the Lebanese Union for People with Physical Disabilities (LUPD)	1
About B.O.T	1
Acknowledgments	2
Introduction and Background	3
About the “Haqqi” (My Right) Campaign	4
The LUPD Approach to Inclusive Elections in 2022	5
Methodology	7
Table 1: Distribution of public schools in the LUPD observation sample	8
Table 2: Summary of research tools and questions	9
Ethics	10
Limitations	10
Main Findings	11
Accessibility of Polling Centers	11
Compliance of polling centers to inclusive architectural standards	12
Accommodation measures undertaken by MOIM on E-Day	13
Inclusivity of the electoral process	15
Conclusions	18
Recommendations	20

# Acronyms

- CRPD Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- CoC Code of Conduct
- E-Day Election Day
- FHI 360 Family Health International
- LEB-CAAP Lebanon Civic Action Acceleration Program
- LUPD Lebanese Union for People with Physical Disabilities
- MEHE Ministry of Education and Higher Education
- MOIM Ministry of Interior and Municipalities
- MOSA Ministry of Social Affairs
- PC Polling Center
- PS Polling Station
- USAID United States Agency for International Development

# About the Lebanese Union for People with Physical Disabilities (LUPD)

The [LUPD](#) is a non-governmental, non-profit organization founded by people with disabilities in 1981 to advance their access to legitimate rights as stipulated in international covenants. The Union is a grassroots, non-sectarian, human-rights organization, active in Lebanon and the Arab world, promoting the participation of people with disabilities in public policy decision-making process and shifting the discourse from a framework of charity and exclusion to a framework of rights and inclusion. During the past two decades, LUPD has focused on urging stakeholders and influential people to implement Law No. 220/2000 through the issuance of implementing decrees by relevant ministries related to basic rights, especially the right to decent work, education and learning, an inclusive environment, and political and civil rights.

The LUPD (formerly the Lebanese Physically Handicapped Union) promotes the human rights-social model that disability does not lie in people themselves, but rather in the barriers at the level of places, services, and information. The Union therefore fights the exclusion of persons with disabilities from communities, and calls for economic, social, and educational inclusion, leading to a society that respects all its members, invests in their capabilities, and opens up equal opportunities for them. The LUPD also ensures that basic needs in terms of health, education, work, and socio-economic inclusion are recognized and safeguarded.

## About B.O.T

[B.O.T Bridge. Outsource. Transform](#) is an impact-sourcing platform that provides digital services performed by skilled freelancers from marginalized communities in Lebanon. Its objective is to guarantee that underprivileged youth and women have access to global and local digital jobs, providing them the opportunity to advance while earning an income.

---

# Acknowledgments

The LUPD thanks the associations and organizations cooperating with the “Haqqi” (My Right) Campaign in the context of observing the 2022 parliamentary elections. It also expresses gratitude to the volunteers for taking part in the national campaign and making exceptional efforts to make its work a success.

# Introduction and Background

In Lebanon during the past three decades, little attention has been paid to the rights of persons with disabilities, and relevant laws and regulations were not implemented, despite some improvements at the legislative level, especially after the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD) in April 2022. In general, the issue of disability remains marginalized and has not been institutionalized at the policy level. Due to the ongoing political and economic crisis, concerns are high that the situation will not improve. The percentage of people with disabilities ranges between 10% and 15 % of the population of Lebanon,<sup>1</sup> or more than four hundred thousand citizens. They face multi-layered difficulties in accessing their rights,<sup>2</sup> with several relevant pieces of legislation yet to be implemented, especially vis-à-vis political participation and accessible elections. Hence, people with disabilities still face legal and logistical challenges because successive authorities have not prioritized the issue of accessibility for persons with disabilities or institutionalized it as per the law.

Difficulties faced by persons with disabilities cover all aspects of their lives in Lebanon, including political participation and elections, where little has been done, so far, to ensure that elections are inclusive and accessible. The majority of polling centers are in public and private schools, in addition to public facilities such as town halls, which should be accessible in the first place, but that is not the case. LUPD undertook a research study in 2009 to map and assess public schools in Lebanon from a disability perspective and provided recommendations to upgrade these schools. However, the funds required for the upgrades were never allocated.

**A study on the cost of equipping schools in Lebanon to become accessible showed that 0.8 percent of the budget of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education over a six-year period would be sufficient to equip all public and private schools. This study, along with detailed architectural studies and maps of the schools were submitted to relevant ministries. However, successive governments from 2005 to date did not taken action on this.**

---

<sup>1</sup> Since 2015, the World Bank adopted the rate of 15 percent of people with disabilities in Lebanon based on the broader definition of disability, while civil organizations were adopting the 10 percent that was used by the United Nations at the end of the previous millennium.

<sup>2</sup> See: The Universal Periodic Review on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Lebanon, Reports for the Years: 2010, 2013, 2015, 2018, 2020.

## About the “Haqqi” (My Right) Campaign

To improve the situation of persons with disabilities in different aspects of their lives, mainly their right to political participation, LUPD launched in 2005 the “Haqqi” (My Right) Campaign – The National Campaign for Recognizing the Political Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Lebanon” calling for the right of citizens with physical, visual, hearing, and intellectual disabilities to participate in the electoral process with independence and dignity, in compliance with Article 98 of Law No. 220/2000. Since then, the campaign successfully introduced Article 96 into the electoral laws of 2008 and 2017 that specifically addressed the right of people with disabilities to accessible elections. Article 96 stipulates the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities’ (MOIM) obligation to account for the needs of people with disabilities when organizing elections, upon consultation with the relevant associations. Notwithstanding the importance of this article, organizations for the rights of persons with disabilities in Lebanon expressed several reservations about it, mainly pertaining to mistaken concepts, offensive language and disregard of decree No. 2214/2009 related to procedures and measures for facilitating the participation of persons with disabilities in the parliamentary and municipal elections. The campaign significantly contributed to the issuance of this decree in cooperation with the MOIM.

Considering articles 9 and 29 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD),<sup>3</sup> the objective of the “Haqqi” Campaign is to ensure inclusive and accessible elections for persons with disabilities and senior citizens. Ever since the launch of the campaign, LUPD has been systematically monitoring elections to document violations that occur on Elections Day against voters with disabilities and assess their overall voting experience. Through regular and methodic monitoring activities, LUPD was able to provide evidence-based, action-oriented recommendations that have contributed to putting the disability issue on the table and to improving accessibility and inclusiveness of elections. Since the launch of the campaign, LUPD's monitoring efforts have supported practitioners and policymakers on disability issues, and their recommendations have improved the accessibility and inclusivity of elections by providing evidence-based information to relevant authorities, including the MOIM, at an appropriate level of detail to enact change.

---

<sup>3</sup> Articles 9 and 29 of the CRPD respectively set out the accessibility requirements and the framework for persons with disabilities’ participation in political and public life. Article 9 stipulates the obligation to enable persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life, and requires that States Parties take appropriate measures to ensure them access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas. Article 29 stipulates that state parties shall “guarantee to persons with disabilities political rights and the opportunity to enjoy them on equal basis with others.” To achieve this, state parties should ensure that voting procedures, facilities and materials are appropriate and easy to use for persons with disabilities and protect the rights of persons with disabilities to vote by secret ballot, stand for elections and hold office as an elected representative.



## The LUPD Approach to Inclusive Elections in 2022

In the run-up to the 2022 parliamentary elections, LUPD devised an agile cooperation strategy with the organizations forming the election consortium, namely the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE), the Lebanese Transparency Association (LTA), and Maharat Foundation, to mobilize support and advocacy, implement legislation, and unify reform demands. LUPD tried to ensure that a strategy for participation of persons with disabilities in elections was put in place by the MOIM in conjunction with other ministries and institutions. However, it became obvious very early on that the MOIM would not undertake the significant reforms needed to ensure inclusive and accessible elections for voters with disabilities as required per the Decree 2214/2009. Therefore, LUPD advocated for minimum demands, including the use of ground floors in polling centers, the use of elevators where available, and the creation of polling stations in the courtyards of polling centers (through setting up temporary tents) where the first two requirements are not available. These demands were part of the “I want to vote from the ground floor” campaign, which were based on and driven from Decree No. 2214/2009.

During the period leading up to the elections, the campaign intensified its demands to relevant ministries requesting that the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA) provide a list of the names of registered persons with disabilities, but they refused to disclose this information for data-protection reasons. The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE), which was also asked to submit a list of schools with ground floors, eventually presented accessibility information on 814 schools out of 1,226 (details on these requests are provided in the methodology section below).

LUPD was able to provide MOIM with a list of polling centers where ground floors could be used, as well as those that have elevators, based on the MEHE list and the list of accessible schools developed by LUPD in 2009, in addition to a list of centers that can be replaced with others that are accessible or have ground floors to facilitate the voting process. In April 2022, MOIM issued a series of circulars recommending that election procedures be designed to accommodate and safeguard persons with disabilities.<sup>4</sup>

In parallel, LUPD undertook significant efforts to influence media in Lebanon to adopt inclusive measures such as the introduction of sign language to the main news bulletin on the national TV. On May 11, 2022, Minister of Information Ziad Makari signed a Code of Conduct (CoC) for Persons with Disabilities and Media<sup>5</sup> prepared by LUPD in conjunction with other representatives of organizations for persons with disabilities. The CoC also aims to transcend the stereotypical view of the capabilities and needs of persons with disabilities and includes instructions related to the language and use of disability terminologies.

---

<sup>4</sup> Circular No. 10/AM/2022 (available at <http://www.interior.gov.lb/AdsDetails.aspx?id=5420>), related to facilitating and securing the needs of persons with disabilities when organizing electoral processes; circular 60/SM/2022 dated April 26, related to facilitating and securing the needs of persons with disabilities in polling centers; and Decision No. 391 dated April 28, 2022 (available at <http://www.interior.gov.lb/AdsDetails.aspx?id=5423>) about the distribution of polling centers across Lebanon.

<sup>5</sup> Republic of Lebanon, Ministry of Information, Representatives of Associations of Persons with Disabilities Brief Al-Makary On ‘Code Of Conduct For Persons With Disabilities And Media’, Beirut, 11 May 2022; <https://www.ministryinfo.gov.lb/en/74591>.

## About This Document

The following is an executive summary of the 2022 parliamentary observation report produced by LUPD that documents violations of the electoral and voting rights of persons with disabilities, including their participation in the electoral process, and offers recommendations for the next elections. To that end, LUPD deployed 158 trained observers on Election Day (E-Day), including persons with disabilities from rights holders' groups, in 123 polling centers<sup>6</sup> which the MOIM had pledged to render accessible, to assess their compliance to inclusion and accessibility standards.

The objective behind the LUPD activity hereby reported was not to assess the accessibility and inclusiveness of the electoral process in general. It was rather to monitor the extent to which the MOIM complied with legal and administrative provisions, as pledged, to provide reasonable accommodations in a selected number of centers as explained below. The overall exercise aimed to assess the voting process of persons with disabilities on the one hand, and to gauge their experience on the other hand, to provide actionable recommendations towards inclusive and accessible elections in the upcoming elections, particularly the forthcoming 2023 municipal elections.

---

<sup>6</sup>Details about the sampling may be found in the methodology section below.

# Methodology

In Lebanon, there are a total of 1,226 public schools. Prior to E-Day, MEHE initiated a mapping effort at the request of the MOIM to ascertain whether public schools were accessible and equipped, as outlined in a questionnaire sent to the public schools. A total of 814 responded (66.4% response rate). This mapping showed that 233 schools had ground floors available for use, 105 had elevators and 28 had both elevators and equipped bathrooms. These are aggregated numbers, and one school may be counted in more than one category. Accounting for the availability of accessible bathrooms was useful mainly for the deployment of observers with disabilities.

In parallel, barely three weeks before the elections, the MOIM published the list of 1,734 polling centers approved for 2022 E-Day, 955 of which were public schools. LUPD conducted a comparison of the MEHE list of accessible schools with the MOIM list of assigned public schools and found the following:

- 141 of the public schools assigned as polling centers had polling stations solely on upper floors, although they had ground floors available for use.
- 33 public schools located outside of Beirut were accessible in accordance with MEHE inclusion criteria but were not assigned as polling centers by MOIM.

Hence, LUPD advocated that the MOIM enhance accessibility in 174 (141+33) centers, based on MEHE school assessment, as shown below:

- 1- Relocate polling stations in 141 schools to the ground floor.
- 2- Replace unequipped centers in rural areas with 33 equipped schools (from the MEHE list).

The remainder of LUPD's observations were focused on determining whether the MOIM had met the requirements of reasonable accommodation, as stipulated in decree 2214/2009, which it had pledged to implement. LUPD selected a representative sample of 123 schools across Lebanon's 15 electoral districts from the 174, representing 87.23% of the initial pool of 174 schools, and 12.8% from total public schools assigned.

The 123 schools are distributed as follows:

**Table 1: Distribution of public schools in the LUPD observation sample**

Governorate	# of public schools in the sample	% of the sample from assigned and accessible public schools	% of the sample from total public schools assigned as polling centers
South + Nabatieh	26	81%	10.4%
Mount Lebanon	29	90%	16.6%
Bekaa + Baalbek-Hermel	29	80%	13.5%
North + Akkar	33	77%	12%
Beirut	6	86%	16.5%
<b>Total 15 districts</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>87.23%</b>	<b>12.8%</b>

Following the selection of the sample, LUPD mobilized and trained 116 persons (59 female and 57 male, half of whom were persons with disabilities) to observe the E-Day, along with 42 enumerators from B.O.T (24 female and 18 male) who were assigned to accompany the LUPD observers. In coordination with the technical team of the USAID-funded Lebanon Civic Action Accelerator Program (LEB-CAAP), LUPD and B.O.T. designed digital assessment tools to 1) measure the accessibility of schools based on international accessibility and inclusiveness standards and 2) gauge the voting experiences of voters with disabilities. The teams were distributed in mobile and fixed teams across all 123 schools (10% fixed and 90% mobile teams).

On E-Day, three main research questions were asked utilizing three different tools and research methods, described in Table 2, below.

**Table 2: Summary of research tools and questions**

Research question	Tool utilized	Method
<b>Preparedness of polling centers for voters with disabilities</b>	Digitized questionnaire filled by observers based on international standards for accessibility and inclusion (primary data collection from 123 voting centers)	Quantitative
<b>Most common forms of violations exerted against voters with disabilities</b>	Digitized questionnaire (204 forms of direct observations from 123 voting centers)	Mixed
<b>Reported voting experiences of voters with disabilities</b>	Interviews with 104 voters with disabilities in 123 voting centers	Qualitative

The 104 respondents were distributed as follows:

Male	Female	Undisclosed
59	44	1

21 – 24 years old	25 – 29 years old	35 – 45 years old	46+	First-time voters
2	6	18	78	6

Physical disabilities	Hearing impairment	Intellectual disability	Visual impairment
89	2	9	4

Furthermore, LUPD provided the MOIM with a list of 174 voters with disabilities who contacted them and expressed their willingness to participate in the electoral process if inclusivity and accessibility standards were adhered to. Following the elections, the “My Right” Campaign volunteers contacted 104 of the registered persons who consented to participate in the interviews and found out that 64 (61.5%) voted, while 40 abstained (38.5%). The outcomes of these interviews are also incorporated below under the inclusivity of the electoral process section.

## Ethics

LUPD adhered to ethical standards in all research activities it undertook as part of the 2022 parliamentary election's observation study. Ethical considerations included the "do no harm" approach, non-discrimination, justice, equity, transparency, and honesty. Observers who were deployed on E-Day were trained to respect respondents' decisions not to answer, their adherence to their respective values and preferences, and the level of comfort in discussing disability issues. The confidentiality of the answers is also preserved, as well the full identity of respondents, who were asked to give their verbal consent to participate in the interviews and were informed that they have the right to withdraw at any time during the interviews. All respondents were informed of the purpose of the questionnaire and were informed of foreseeable risks and benefits of participating in this research. The observers were trained to be on the lookout for trends emerging from and linked to elections and disabilities, particularly among young males and females with disabilities, so that LUPD could address them in the report's recommendations.

## Limitations

The main limitation that this endeavor faced was the lack of time, mainly due to preparations delays on the MOIM side, as well as the last-minute planning and funding for the observation of accessible elections due to the lack of funds and commitment to disability in general. Rumors about the possibility of postponing elections that continued to spread until only days before E-Day also hindered the commitment of organizations, funds, and individuals. The political, economic, and security situation also affected the campaign and the proper training and deployment of observers due to limited mobility of observers, especially persons with disabilities. The limited funding initially allocated to LUPD was also a significant barrier, prompting an immediate technical and financial intervention by USAID's LEB-CAAP, who devoted their specialists to providing technical support to accelerate LUPD's civic engagement on E-Day.

# Main Findings

The main findings of the research are summarized and presented under two themes as follows:

1. Accessibility of polling centers, with the aim of measuring polling center's compliance with inclusive architectural standards and accommodation measures to ensure accessibility.
2. Inclusiveness of the electoral process, aiming to understand the voting experiences of voters with disabilities.

## Testimonies from voters with disabilities

*"I was carried to the polling station, which was on the ground floor, as there were several steps to reach the polling station and there were no ramps. And the person who carried me and accompanied me dropped the envelope into the ballot box".* **Young man with physical disability**

*"My son does not know how to read or write, so I chose the list and preferential vote and dropped the envelope in the box"* - **Father of a young man with intellectual disability**

## Accessibility of Polling Centers

*This section is divided into two sub-sections aiming to present findings about 1) the compliance of polling centers to inclusive architectural standards and 2) the assessment of reasonable accommodation on E-Day. Information provided under this section is based on the questionnaire on the preparedness of polling centers for voters with disabilities (aiming to assess the architectural standards) and the most common forms of violations vis-à-vis voters with disabilities as reported by the teams of observers, who reported 204 disability violations in 123 centers throughout the E-Day (rf. table 2 above). The total number of voters with disabilities in these centers was not available.*

---

## Compliance of polling centers to inclusive architectural standards

### Use of ground floors

According to the findings of the monitoring activity, 81.30% (100 out of 123) of the schools designated as polling centers, as communicated to the MOIM, utilized the ground floor, while 9% set up tents on their playgrounds, both indoor and outdoor, which were used as polling stations on E-Day. The monitoring activity, however, showed that 22.5% of the polling stations where persons with disabilities were supposed to vote were not moved to the ground floor, and in 7.3% of the cases (out of the 204 monitoring forms), the polling station transferred to the ground floor was not the one designated for the person with disabilities.

### Availability of ramps

The findings showed that 56% of schools did not have ramps to facilitate the movement of people with disabilities. While 25% of schools have ramps, only 22.6% of them are fully compliant with technical specifications. Ramps are not required in 19% of the observed schools.

Among the existing ramps, 45% were found to be safe and easy to use, 7% were newly installed, and 48% were partially compliant. 90% of existing ramps are built of concrete, while the 7% that were newly installed included two ramps made of wood and one made of iron, which is not ideal because they are not permanent structures and if vandalized could be hazardous to the user.

### Availability of parking space in polling centers (PCs)

43% of PCs have parking spaces available, while only 30% of them have their parking spaces close to the entrances, which affects the movement of voters with disabilities to access the center in an easy and comfortable way.

### Elevators, accessibility and availability of electricity

Elevators were available in 11% of the surveyed centers (14 schools), although electricity was secured in only 27% of these centers (3 out of 11) .



---

## **Availability of equipped toilets**

Equipped toilets were available on the ground floors of 25% of the schools in eight electoral districts. The observation groups noted that the percentage of usable toilets was 18.7%, while the percentage of fully compliant toilets in terms of cleanliness, level of accessibility, and ease of entry was only 5.7%, with a total of seven out of 123 schools.

Equipped bathrooms were also available on the upper floors of 14% of schools (17) spread across eight different electoral districts. The findings revealed that out of these 17 school bathrooms, there were 10 usable and accessible bathrooms, four clean and accessible bathrooms, and three completely equipped bathrooms.

## **Adequacy of ballot boxes and voting booths**

Across all polling stations, the position of the ballot box was inaccessible to voters with disabilities as it was placed on a high table. Furthermore, polling stations were not suitable for persons using wheelchairs, due to the height and narrowness of the stand since polling stations did not allow the wheelchair to reach the nearest point at the armrest.

## **Accommodation measures undertaken by MOIM on E-Day**

In addition to the inclusive architectural standards that schools comply with in accordance with international standards of accessibility and inclusivity, there are reasonable accommodations measures that should be taken by the election administration authority to ensure better voting conditions for voters with disabilities, such as clearing up passages, placing directional signs, ensuring operability of elevators, and others as shown below.

## **Availability of directional signs**

The monitoring report shows that of the 123 schools in the sample, only 1.6% of schools had directional signs for elevators, 6.5% had signs for equipped toilets on ground floor and 2.5% had signs for toilets on upper floors. These signs are necessary instructions to inform voters of different destinations. The observation team also noted that there were no signs or directions to explain the voting process for voters with disabilities, especially for voters with intellectual disabilities.

---

## Availability of alternative entrances

34% of polling centers had more than one entrance that could be used for voters with disabilities, while 66% of centers had only one entrance. However, 57% of those entrances were not accessible for voters with disabilities and the elderly, which required them to use the unequipped entrances and hence to rely on the help of others.

## Obstacles blocking the entrance of the centers, toilets and corridors

The observation showed that there were obstacles to the movement of persons with disabilities at the main entrances in approximately 54% of the centers, while 46% of the schools had accessible entrances. The highest percentage of obstacles was visible at the centers' entrance, with approximately 49% for bumps or steep ramps, 34% for high sidewalks, 23.5% for strongly sloping roads, and 7% for the presence of obstacles such as trees, lampposts, and water channels. These obstacles complicated the movement of persons with disabilities and elderly people, exposed them to risks, and led them to rely on the assistance of others in their movements.

In the schools where elevators were available (11.4%), 36% had their access obstructed.

The survey also showed that 52% of toilet entrances available on the upper floors were also obstructed.

Finally, observers noted the presence of obstacles in corridors leading to polling stations in 53% of the schools. While school corridors are usually characterized by their wideness, the chaos and poor organization on E-Day turned these spaces into narrow lanes that hindered the smooth passage of voters with disabilities and voters in general.

## Elevators

Regarding the elevators in the centers where these were available (11.4%, 14 schools), 28.5% were broken (four) and 50% were closed (seven), in addition emergency power outages in 29% of the centers prevented the use of these elevators by voters with disabilities to reach their polling stations on the upper floors. As for the centers where the elevators did not operate and there were no

---

polling stations available on the ground floor, persons with disabilities were carried or used crutches or walkers on the stairs, which is hazardous. Campaign teams noted this as a recurrent practice in these centers.

### **Availability of assistive tools and alternative means**

The MOIM did not provide any assistive tools and alternative means such as pre-printed ballots in braille or other electronic alternatives for persons with visual, hearing, intellectual and physical disabilities.

## **Inclusivity of the electoral process**

This section documents the violations that persons with disabilities have been subject to while participating in the elections, mainly the human interactions with different stakeholders, including security forces, election officers, and candidates' and lists' delegates. These are based on violations observed by the LUPD and B.O.T. monitors, as well as anecdotal evidence from the interviews conducted with voters with disabilities on E-Day (104) and after (64 from the pool of voters with disabilities who registered with the "Haqqi" Campaign).

### **Security forces**

Anecdotal evidence from observation forms and interviews with voters showed that the security forces often did their best to ensure the access of voters with disabilities to the polling centers by removing obstacles that prevented voters with disabilities from reaching the center by themselves. Campaign observers also observed that about 90% of voters with disabilities were able, with the help of security forces, to park their cars in the place closest to the doors of the polling centers, all of which are schools. This was confirmed by voters with disabilities (through interviews) in about 92% of the cases. Compared to previous elections, this is a remarkable improvement in the attitudes of security forces, which resulted in improved accessibility for voters with disabilities.

In addition, security forces were more aware than in 2018 that voters with disabilities have the right to be accompanied by an assistant who would support them in casting their ballot.

In only 8% of the cases, it was reported that security forces did not facilitate the passage of vehicles of persons with disabilities to the entrances of polling centers, and in 11% of cases they did not allow people to park near the entrance to the polling center or to enter its precincts.

## Elections officers

The campaign observers noted that around 5% of the violations observed were related to forcing voters with disabilities to complete the ballot paper outside the booth because it was difficult for them to move around the polling station. In 90% of cases, elections officers dropped the ballot papers in the ballot box instead of voters themselves because the box was placed on a high table and hence not accessible for persons with disabilities. Observers also reported violations to the human dignity of voters with disabilities in 22% of the violations observed whereby these voters were discriminated against. For example, election officers often pressured voters with disabilities to speed up the voting process. Observers also monitored cases where election officers delayed the voting of persons with disabilities, let other voters pass in front of them, and allowed an unknown person to complete the ballot paper instead of voters with disabilities. In many cases as well, voters with disabilities had to explain their right to have someone assist them during the voting process.

"I carried her on my own to get her to the center, and that was very difficult, as there were no safe ramps at the doors of the center, but there were several steps (approximately 20 steps) to reach the polling station. The security forces were cooperative, but I could not find anyone to help me to carry her..." – **Brother of a woman with disabilities**

In one polling station, the election officer did not allow the observer to enter the room, while another observer with a disability was ridiculed by a party representative.

## Candidates' and lists' delegates

In cases where ground floors were not operational in polling centers, voters with disabilities were often carried to upper floors by security forces and / or candidates' delegates. In addition to this practice being generally degrading for persons with disabilities, there were frequent cases where voters were left alone on the upper floors after casting their ballots and were never carried back down. Observers also noted cases of interference by partisan authorities in the voting choices of persons with disabilities, which constitutes a breach of the secrecy of vote and right to independent voting.

Observers documented 12% of violations related to inappropriate treatment by party representatives against persons with disabilities. For example, in one of the districts, politically affiliated delegates drove voters with disabilities to the polling center in a bus very early in the morning, where they cast their ballots and left in

---

the same bus. One party delegate was also seen imitating a person with physical disability walking.

While voters with disabilities in need of assistance were able, in most cases, to be accompanied by their relatives, others were accompanied by party members or list agents and often seemed worried and cautious during the interviews.

Finally, 59% of voters with disabilities who were interviewed believed that persons with disabilities did not participate extensively in the general elections due to the absence of architectural installations that respect their needs. About 8% were able to use language related to inclusivity, saying "the elections are not inclusive", and about the same percentage said there was an "absence of a policy of inclusion". 17% believed that the failure to implement the laws and respect the rights prevented the participation of persons with disabilities. About 30% detailed the obstacles, mainly pertaining to accessibility (use of areas inaccessible to wheelchairs, use of stairs, absence of accessible parking spots, etc.) (20.8%), need for accompaniment (3.4%), and crowdedness (3.4%).

# Conclusions

The pledge made by the Minister of Interior and Municipalities to ensure that persons with disabilities participate independently in the 2022 parliamentary elections and his efforts to use the ground floors of polling centers as polling stations represented an opening from previous administrations and a step on the path to recognizing the rights of marginalized groups in the country. In 100 out of 123 schools, seven polling stations were relocated to the ground floor, in addition to the installation of tents in 11 centers and temporary ramps in three centers. The use of tents in playgrounds is very important as an alternative to polling stations on the upper floors. This sets a precedent in this context, as tents were barely utilized before, and the efforts undertaken by the MOIM in this regard are to be recognized and acknowledged, especially within the current context of deteriorating conditions and depleting public expenses

However, the overall commitment to the rights of people with disabilities at the political and administrative levels in Lebanon has not yet fully materialized and requires a greater engagement and steadfastness from all concerned stakeholders, including but not restricted to the MOIM, MEHE, and MOSA.

Furthermore, it is clear, throughout the regular observation missions that LUPD has undertaken since 2005 that the MOIM efforts have never been sustainable and consistent. In other words, ensuring accessible elections has never been strategized as part of an overall commitment to inclusion, but rather seems to be dealt with as a last-minute arrangement that is never built on what was previously achieved.

As a matter of fact, the coordination between MOIM, MEHE, and MOSA has not yielded serious results in stimulating the participation of persons with disabilities in the voting process, as explained above. The absence of the administrative committee made up of representatives of different ministries and administrations, along with representatives of organizations of persons with disabilities (as per Article 3 of decree 2214/2009,<sup>7</sup> made the coordination even harder and prevented the establishment of a guiding plan to facilitate the participation of persons with disabilities in the elections.

In addition, the MOIM could not ensure reasonable accommodation to facilitate the access of persons with disabilities to polling centers, as per article 2 of decree 2214. For example, power outage in centers equipped with elevators deprived many voters with disabilities and elderly from voting independently and with

---

<sup>7</sup> The task of this committee is to develop a guiding plan aiming to facilitate the participation of people with disabilities in the electoral processes, and to follow up the implementation of this plan.

---

dignity, whereby they were often carried by campaign members, delegates and security forces in a way that harms their dignity and affects the independence of their votes. Out of the nine centers that have solar energy, only one of them has an elevator, but it was not used. Sources from the MOIM stated that it has installed about 240 ramps at polling centers. A report by MEHE on the works and installations of MOIM in this regard is yet to be issued. Observation showed that many hastily placed wooden ramps did not consider the architectural and technical standards required in terms of the incline and location of the ramp and the safety of pedestrians. The various obstacles at the entrances to the polling centers should have been removed to facilitate the movement of persons with disabilities on E-Day.

Furthermore, the observation exercise as well as interviews with voters with disabilities showed that there was a clear lack of awareness and knowledge in how election stakeholders, including election officers, security forces and candidates' delegates, interacted with voters with disabilities. While societal attitudes are generally demeaning for persons with disabilities due to the absence of the state's commitment to the rights of people with disabilities, most of the violations related to the performance and behavior of election officers could have been avoided had the MOIM exerted the needed efforts to properly raise their awareness of these issues, through direct and targeted training.

In conclusion, the numerous and diverse violations that the observation campaign has documented significantly affect the integrity of the electoral process for voters with disabilities. First, accessibility issues prevented many persons with disabilities from genuinely participating in elections; and second, malpractices that were visible during elections severely compromised the ability of these voters to cast their ballots free from any intimidation or pressure while preserving the secrecy and independence of their votes. The failure by the elections administration to ensure accessible and inclusive elections therefore undeniably affected the overall electoral process and jeopardized the democracy, fairness, and integrity of elections.

# Recommendations

The obstacles that prevent the full electoral participation of voters with disabilities in Lebanon are diverse and multidimensional. Legal challenges include developing and implementing inclusive national legal frameworks; providing accurate and up-to-date data on the number and distribution of voters with disabilities in Lebanon; targeting voter education, choosing location and design of polling stations; and providing Braille forms, in addition to societal attitudes towards people with disabilities in general. Such challenges not only affect the rights of persons with disabilities as voters, but also as citizens, especially if they want to work within state administrations or run for administrative or political positions because of the limited accessibility of government premises in general. In that sense, democratic elections are not only about correct representation and fairness of the electoral process; they are also about inclusion, which should ensure the full participation of all people throughout the electoral cycle and beyond, including people with disabilities, in line with article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol, which were ratified by the Lebanese Parliament on April 14, 2022, in Law No. 291.

Based on the findings, we provide two sets of recommendations, addressing short- and long-term goals and objectives. The first would ensure the commitment of the government and the concerned administrations to achieve the minimum requirements before the upcoming municipal elections. The second reflects what is required strategically so that all obstacles that hinder the access of persons with disabilities to their rights are removed.

## **Short-term recommendations**

We call for the implementation of relevant law 233/2021 on the right to access information and Decree 2214/2009 on the procedures and measures related to facilitating the participation of persons with disabilities in parliamentary and municipal elections, specifically articles 2 and 3 thereof, in preparation for the municipal elections scheduled for 2023. This would be done mainly through the establishment of the “Administrative Committee for the Development of the Guiding Plan” as stipulated in Article 3 of Decree No. 2214/2009, which is an important step towards more effective coordination between ministries and administrations towards accessible and inclusive elections.

In addition, the following measures need to be implemented simultaneously, mainly by the MOIM:



- 
- Setting up mechanisms for coordination, follow-up, and cooperation between all stakeholders at different levels, including the administrative committee, schools, and municipalities in each governorate, passing through governors, presidents of districts (Qaimaqams), to the heads of educational regions and school directors at the Ministry of Education.
  - Pre-inspection of schools that will be assigned as polling centers, adoption of inclusive architectural standards in constructing, repairing, and installing ramps, and proposing inclusive designs for tents and booths.
  - Instructing municipalities to remove obstacles in front of the entrances and carrying out works to facilitate access and entry, and to school administrations securing electricity for elevators, if available, and securing halls on the ground floors, as well as distributing directional signs in all centers.
  - Providing targeted training on human rights and inclusion to all potential elections officers and security forces deployed on E-Day.
  - Requesting from MOSA updated information on the number of persons with disabilities, the percentage of voters among them, and their geographical distribution (considering the privacy of such information and data), for the MIOM to attend to their needs in their assignment of polling centers and election officers.<sup>8</sup>
  - Designing and disseminating customized voter education materials to motivate persons with disabilities to participate in elections.
  - Activating and disseminating the media code of conduct pertaining to improving access to information and abolishing discriminatory language and discourse towards people with disabilities in Lebanese media.

On a broader level, civil society organizations and associations involved in electoral reform and related activities should deepen their knowledge about inclusion issues and systematize these issues within their reform programs in an inclusive and continuous manner, by organizing interactive learning activities in cooperation with organizations of persons with disabilities, allowing them to build their capacities and gain knowledge and experience in the subject matter.

Efforts should be also made to mainstream disability and include inclusion indicators across all domestic and international observation missions. Furthermore, rights holders' groups and organizations of persons with disabilities need to align and coalesce on their rights and demands so their voices are better heard.

---

<sup>8</sup> In this context, information about the geographic distribution of voters with disabilities is not available and relevant data are not generated in elections-related research.

---

## Long-term recommendations

- Reviewing the laws in consideration of the binding international Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recently ratified by Lebanon, especially the electoral law and law no. 220/2000 on the rights of people with disabilities.
- Adopting special temporary measures for persons with disabilities, including but not limited to a pre-defined seat and/or candidacy quota, to encourage more active participation in parliamentary and municipal elections.
- Adapting the voting process to suit all needs with the use of various available methods and alternatives, including electronic alternatives for persons with different disabilities, such as digitized ballots for voters with visual or hearing impairments
- Issuing inclusive external environment standards in specifications by the Lebanese Standards Institution (LIBNOR) to facilitate the safe movement for persons with disabilities and others and to complete the urban and inclusive built landscape to cover newly licensed public buildings, especially public and private schools, in accordance with the CRPD, as well as the entire urban transport network, including roads, sidewalks, external corridors, public transport means and stations, and open spaces designated for the public's use such as gardens, parks, beaches, and public spaces.
- Repealing all words and expressions in legal texts, including the electoral law, that refer to persons with disabilities in contradiction with the CRPD's language and literature.