



# Using Video and Audio as Accessible Voter Education Tools

Video and audio are important tools to connect voters with the information they need to participate and fully engage in the electoral process. They help instill a firm understanding of key processes such as the electoral cycle, regional and national policies, candidate profiles, and how to exercise the right to vote. Importantly, video and audio offer opportunities to ensure content is accessible to a wide audience, including persons with disabilities. At the same time, however, materials that rely on audio and video present challenges for accessibility; if managed without due attention to audience needs, they can even exclude and disenfranchise persons with disabilities. To avoid doing so, and to take advantages of the opportunities that audio and video provide, it is essential to consider the experiences of persons with disabilities from the start of the design process and to have a clear understanding of how to use these media appropriately.

To ensure all voters have the information they need for Election Day, election management bodies (EMBs), civil society organizations, organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), and other stakeholders should ensure all voter resources are accessible. Connecting with a local OPD helps confirm that voter education messages are accessible to voters with disabilities and that those messages use rights-based language. Partnering with an OPD can also help the EMB craft voter education messages targeted to voters with disabilities and provide important information on accessibility. OPDs can also help create voter education that features

persons with disabilities in active leadership roles, such as voters, poll workers, or candidates. Mainstreaming persons with disabilities in audio and video voter education messages demonstrates inclusion in political and public life and can reduce the stigma that may limit the participation of persons with disabilities in society.



This informational video on the rights of internally displaced persons to vote in Ukraine mainstreams disability by including images of persons with disabilities alongside other citizens.

## Accessible Audio and Visual Formats

### Television and video

EMBs and electoral actors regularly use video and television to share information with the public. Whether using video or televising an event or press conference live, this media should be accessible and inclusive, including by representing people from diverse backgrounds. Including those with disabilities who identify as young people, ethnic minorities, and women diversifies representation. Voter education videos should use respectful, rights-based language and portray persons with disabilities as independent.

If an EMB produces a video or televises an event, such as a press conference or candidate debate, sign language interpretation should be shown in a corner of the screen. Subtitles or captions also be provided. Sign language interpretation enables access for people who use sign language, such as Deaf people. It is recommended that



This screenshot shows a televised candidate debate in the Republic of Georgia. A sign language interpreter is visible in the bottom right corner of the screen.

the sign language interpreter wear clothing that contrasts with the background to maximize visibility. On television, an inset of the sign language interpreter should appear in the lower right-hand corner of the screen and be large enough for viewers to easily see the interpreter. The W3C Working Group<sup>1</sup> offers useful guidelines and good practices for including a sign language interpreter in a streamed video.

Subtitles (transcriptions of spoken words in a video) or captions (transcripts that include other sound information, such as music cues or noises in the video) support persons with intellectual disabilities and those who are hard of hearing and may not know sign language. In November 2015, Paraguay's Fundación

Sarakai and Justicia Electoral (the country's EMB) created a video that explained the steps for voting on Election Day in Spanish and Paraguayan Sign Language. Poll workers could download the video onto mobile phones and show them to voters with hearing disabilities. Videos can also be shared online through platforms such as YouTube and Vimeo. In this way, videos can be shared many times, reaching new viewers.

## Radio and Podcasts

In many countries, radio is one of the most effective ways to reach communities in rural areas or members of ethnic minorities or Indigenous Peoples who speak a minority language. Radio broadcasts can also connect people who are blind or have low vision to information that is available to others in a visual format. Radio can also support persons with intellectual disabilities or low literacy if the content is offered in a format that is easy for them to understand.

Podcasts are an increasingly popular way for people to obtain news and information. They can be important tools for EMBs to interact with the public. Unlike live radio programs, podcasts are recorded in advance and listeners can access them via cellular data or Wi-Fi, or download them and listen offline. An EMB could offer its own podcast on electoral topics or an EMB representative could appear as a guest on other podcasts that reach a range of audiences. For example, a director of the Australian Election Commission appeared as a guest on GovComms, a podcast about government communications, to discuss the EMB's online messaging during Australia's 2022 national election.

It is important to complement radio or audio messages with visual information because people who are deaf or hard-of-hearing cannot access those broadcasts. Provide transcripts of podcasts or radio spots to give voters with hearing disabilities access.



A journalist who is blind discusses the 2017 elections in Liberia.

<sup>1</sup> Web Accessibility Initiative. [Sign Languages](#) in [Making Audio and Video Media Accessible](#)

## Best Practices for Accessible Video and Audio

- Collaborate and consult with persons with disabilities and their representative organizations when designing voter education materials.
- Feature persons with disabilities in voter education messages to showcase their active participation in political and public life.
- Recruit diverse actors with disabilities, including women, young people, or members of ethnic or religious minority groups.
- Provide voter education messages in multiple formats so voters with different types of disabilities can obtain the same information as people without disabilities.
- Ensure all video materials use rights-based language and captioning, including televised campaign events, debates, and news briefings.
- Provide captions or transcripts for all videos uploaded on EMB websites or video sharing sites such as YouTube.
- Provide transcripts for audio materials, including podcast episodes.
- Engage with public and private sector communication companies and media organizations to ensure accessibility.

### Resources

[International Language Guidelines on Disability | IFES – The International Foundation for Electoral Systems. \(2023, November 2\).](#)

[Podcast Accessibility.](#)

W3C. G54: [Including a sign language interpreter in the video stream | Techniques for WCAG 2.0.](#)

YouTube Help. [Watch how to add subtitles & captions.](#)

**Read and download** Using Video and Audio as Accessible Voter Education Tools on [www.ifes.org](http://www.ifes.org).

IFES's **Learning Series on Disability-Inclusive Election Technology** provides EMBs and civil society with guidelines and recommendations to ensure the technology they use, procure and develop is fully accessible for persons with disabilities.

Learn more at [Learning Series on Disability-Inclusive Electoral Technology](#).

Follow [@IFESDisability](#) to stay up to date on IFES's work on inclusion of persons with disabilities.

Contact [media@ifes.org](mailto:media@ifes.org) for more information.

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This learning series is made possible by the generous support of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). We would also like to thank the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) for their support of previous work on which this project has built.



International Foundation  
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