

Election Access Observation Report: Guyana

Local Government Elections 2023



PREPARED BY:
THE GUYANA COUNCIL OF
ORGANISATIONS FOR
PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

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Acronyms

GCOPD: Guyana Council of Organisations for Persons with Disabilities

IFES: International Foundation for Electoral Systems

GECOM: Guyana Elections Commission

LGE: Local Government Elections

USAID: United States Agency for International Development

CRPD: United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

ICCPR: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

CARICOM: Caribbean Community

OAS: Organization of American States

CEDAW: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

Definitions

Accessibility audit: A review process aimed at assessing how accessible public buildings are, particularly for persons with disabilities.

Accessible: Accessible refers to the design of products, devices, services, systems or environments which are usable, user-friendly and accessible for all, including for persons with disabilities.

Accessible Format: Accessible format means print, audio or visual information that is accessible to persons with disabilities.

Assistive Tools: Devices or methods that assist persons with disabilities in performing tasks, such as voting, which they may otherwise find difficult or impossible to do unaided.

Braille: A writing system comprised of raised dots used by people who have total blindness or low vision.

Catchment Areas: Specific geographic areas within administrative regions, often used to organize the audit or observational activities.

Disability Access: People who experience disability have equal access to the physical environment, information, communication and services, employment and right to a meaningful and adequate participation as citizens.

Discrimination: Treating people differently based on certain identity-based characteristics, such as race, disability, gender, age, or other factors.

Diversity: People who experience disabilities have a freedom and a right to define themselves. The diversity of people who experience disability, including their cultural backgrounds, needs to be recognized, and there should be flexibility to meet their differing aspirations and goals.

Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM): The body responsible for the administration and oversight of elections and voter registration in Guyana.

Local Authority Areas: The various geographic regions represented in the Local Government Elections, comprising 10 Municipalities and 70 Neighborhood Democratic Councils.

Local Government Elections (LGE): Elections held at the local level within Guyana to elect representatives within the country's 10 Municipalities and 70 Neighborhood Democratic Councils.

Nomination Day: The day designated for the submission and approval of Lists of Candidates for the Local Authority Areas in the upcoming elections.

Observers: Individuals trained to monitor and report on the election process.

Persons with Disabilities: Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory disabilities, which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others (CRPD).

Polling Stations: Designated places where voting takes place during elections.

Proxy Voting: A form of voting where one person is authorized to vote on behalf of another, typically used when the original voter is unable to be at the polling station in person.

Public Assistance: Financial help given by the government to individuals who require it to support themselves due to various reasons, such as disability.

Reasonable Accommodation: The degree to which the physical, environment, transportation, information and communications and other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas, are accessible to persons with disabilities.

Returning Officers: Election officials responsible for overseeing the election process in each electoral district.

Universal Suffrage: The principle that all adult citizens have the right to vote, irrespective of their disabilities or other identity-based factors.

Executive summary

Despite state-commitments to international instruments such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), people with disabilities around the world continue to face obstacles to fully accessing their electoral and political rights. These obstacles can be the result of discriminatory legal frameworks, social stigma, inaccessible infrastructure, or insufficient reasonable accommodations. To fully examine what, if any, barriers are in place for voters with disabilities during elections in Guyana, the Guyana Council of Organisations for Persons with Disabilities (GCOPD), with the support of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) under the USAID Youth Advocacy, Linkages, Leadership in Elections and Society (Youth ALLIES) Program, engaged in a rigorous election access observation mission for Guyana's 2023 local government elections.

The report methodology integrates an analysis of the legal landscape, real-time observations conducted on election day (June 12, 2023), access audits of registration sites conducted in September 2023, and interviews with voters with disabilities. Using a methodology that GCOPD tailored from IFES' [Election Access Observation Toolkit](#) for the Guyana context, GCOPD deployed 42 youth observers to collect data as part of a disability access observation mission that covered 563 polling stations (36% of total polling stations). The observers were strategically deployed across eight out of the ten voting regions in Guyana, encompassing urban, suburban, and remote areas.

The results of the observation reveal a range of barriers that people with disabilities in Guyana face when participating in the electoral process. These barriers included legal obstacles, inaccessible infrastructure, a lack of assistive tools, and inaccessible polling station layouts. Positively, the majority of observers encountered polling staff who were willing to provide assistance who spoke deliberately and slowly. These same polling staff, however, could benefit from further training that would foster more accessible experiences for voters with disabilities, including spacing between furniture for wheelchair users, positioning voting booths so that they are far enough away so that blind voters can speak to their assistants without being heard, and other simple logistical changes that would improve accessibility and secrecy. Gaps in accessible infrastructure remain a persistent challenge: temporary or permanent ramps must be put into place in polling stations with stairs. Another immediate imperative is to initiate legislative revisions that remove obstacles from running for office for persons with disabilities receiving public assistance and explicitly state that assistive tools, such as tactile ballot guides, must be in place to facilitate independent voting. This report serves as a constructive instrument for providing recommendations that will make the electoral landscape and voting experience more accessible for all.

Introduction

The inclusion of all citizens, regardless of gender, age, race, disability status or other identity markers, is a cornerstone of democracy. Recognizing the importance of inclusion and accessibility, particularly for persons with disabilities, the Guyana Council of Organisations for Persons with Disabilities (GCOPD) took the initiative to conduct a comprehensive accessibility observation mission of polling stations during Guyana’s 2023 Local Government Elections (LGE), as well as an accessibility audit of centers used for continuous voter registration in Guyana.

On June 12, 2023, eligible voters across Guyana exercised their constitutional right to cast their ballots for local government representatives in municipalities and neighborhood democratic councils. Voting took place in 67 of the country’s 80 Local Authority Areas. Due to unopposed approved candidate and party lists in several areas on Nomination Day, voting did not take place in 13 Local Authority Areas and 193 Constituencies. A total of 188,856 of the 540,056 registered voters participated across the country’s 1,574 polling stations, yielding a turnout of approximately 34.97 percent. All election results in the prescribed Form 31 were made publicly available on the official website on June 28, 2023.

This report encapsulates the findings, experiences, and data gathered from this accessibility observation effort, aimed at highlighting both good practices as well as areas for improvement in relation to access for persons with disabilities in Guyana’s election process. Using a robust methodology, non-partisan observers were carefully chosen and trained, and their observation mission spanned the length and breadth of Guyana – from private homes to public buildings– to gather data that reflects the diverse landscape and varied experiences of voters.

This report aims to provide readers with an understanding of the accessibility of this election process, as well as make key recommendations for strengthening access for all. The report draws from the insights of more than 500 checklists completed by observers, feedback from voters with disabilities, international best practices, and guidance from the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM).

The following sections will cover the process adopted for this audit – from observer selection and training to their on-ground experiences during the LGE, the challenges of data collection, especially concerning voters with disabilities, data entry, analysis and recommendations. Ultimately, this report hopes to spotlight the current status of election accessibility in Guyana and catalyze informed decisions and actions for a more inclusive future.

Assessment methodology

This non-partisan assessment of accessibility of the 2023 local government elections in Guyana consisted of the following:

- 1) Review and analysis of the legal framework;
- 2) Observation of the voting process on election day on June 12;
- 3) An accessibility audit of registration sites; and,
- 4) Interviews with voters with disabilities to gather their experiences.

The review of the electoral legal framework was done by IFES with input from GCOPD and based on international standards. GCOPD and IFES collaborated to train observers, tailor observation and audit checklists, and modify voter questionnaires. GCOPD worked with young people with disabilities to recruit observers, create a deployment strategy, and observe the voting process in eight of the nine regions where voting was taking place in Guyana.¹

Selection and training of observers

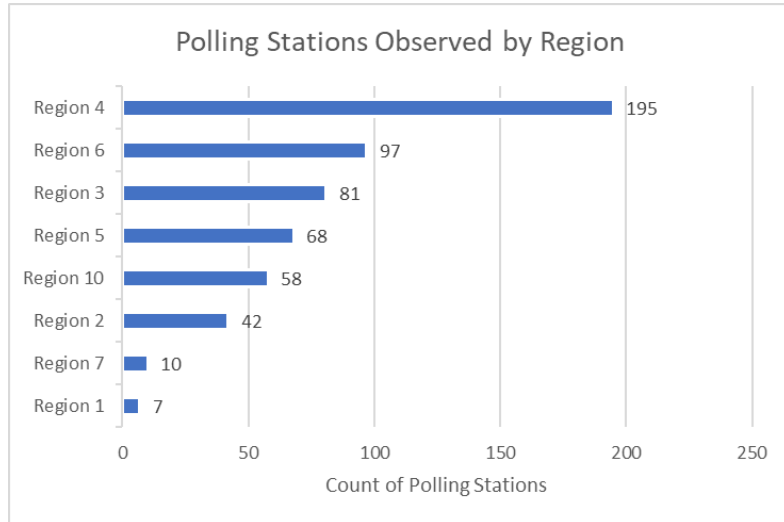
Under the Youth ALLIES program, young volunteers designed community projects that included observation of polling stations on election day, for the purpose of assessing disability access. Information on the initiative was shared with GCOPD's members and volunteers and persons associated with the organization in order to recruit a diverse group of non-partisan volunteers with broad geographic reach. After this information was shared, various persons expressed interest to participate as an observer. The observers were then selected from various sources, including: from GCOPD's pool of young volunteers and members; other partners and disability rights organizations; and GCOPD member agencies. Additionally, geographic location was considered in the selection of observers. In some instances, there were a large number of persons expressing interest from one geographic area. In cases where this occurred, observers were selected based on their history of non-partisan work with GCOPD and other disability organizations. In cases where GCOPD had fewer observers expressing interest in particular regions, GCOPD utilized its network to recruit observers in some of regions where GCOPD has no or less of a presence.

¹ As the candidates and political party in Lethem, Region 9 were running unopposed, voting did not take place in in this region.

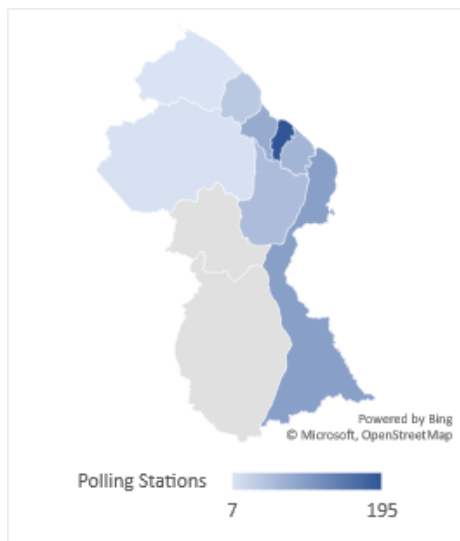
Selection of polling stations

GCOPD aimed to provide the broadest coverage possible and include a diversity of polling stations and voter experiences in its observation efforts. First, GCOPD took into account the location of the observers they were able to recruit, which covered eight of the ten regions of Guyana – and eight of the nine regions where voting took place. These being: Regions 1,

2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 10. This geographic coverage included urban centers, towns, small villages, rural communities, and remote areas.



The individual polling stations were identified from GECOM’s published list of official polling stations for the LGE. The list was divided into administrative regions. Each administrative region’s list was further divided into catchment areas. This was dependent on the volume of polling stations in the respective region. Each pair of observers was provided with a list of suggested polling stations to visit within their catchment area. The observers were advised to



select polling stations to be audited based on a variety of factors in order to capture diverse data. These factors included: visits to polling stations both at private residences and public buildings, religious places of worship, polling stations on both the upper and ground floors, and polling stations on the roadside and within the communities. The observation covered polling stations both in urban, semi urban, rural areas and hinterland regions. Each of the twenty-one pairs of observers were requested to conduct audits at approximately twenty polling stations within their catchment areas using the diverse criteria outlined. GCOPD aimed to cover between 25 to 30 percent of all polling stations in Guyana, eventually covering 563 of the country’s

1,574 polling stations (36 percent).

Assessment tools

Assessment tools for this mission included an observation checklist, a questionnaire for voters with disabilities, an accessibility audit checklist for registration sites, and an analysis of the electoral legal framework based on international best practice. IFES and GCOPD developed the preliminary templates for observation forms and voter questionnaires drawing from IFES' [Election Access Observation Toolkit](#). This toolkit contains methodologies for conducting stand-alone election access observations, audits of election infrastructure, as well as content on how to include disability access in mainstream observations, and has been utilized in more than 12 countries around the world, including Guatemala, Haiti, Indonesia, Kosovo, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, and Timor-Leste. In January 2023, GCOPD and IFES convened a training-of-trainers workshop for 14 disability rights advocates who would go on to conduct trainings for all observers. During this workshop, GCOPD, IFES, and workshop participants developed a checklist for the Guyanese context that examined physical access, access to information, proxy voting, voting with an assistant, and the behavior of polling staff in relation to access for persons with disabilities. The workshop participants also developed a questionnaire for voters with disabilities that contained questions that probed into their experience with physical accessibility, reasonable accommodations, and their perceptions of the voting experience.

Training of observers

GCOPD selected a pool of forty-two persons and this group was accredited by GECOM as observers. GECOM held a training open to all registered observer organizations on May 31, 2023. The leadership of the GCOPD election access observation mission was in attendance to receive important information about observer conduct on election day, the legal framework for elections, and to ask questions of GECOM staff.

Subsequently, GCOPD held a training for all its accredited observers on June 4, 2023. Given the geographic diversity of the observers, the training was held online. The training was led by GCOPD, trainers trained at the workshop in January, and IFES staff. During the training, the participants were guided on the completion of the checklist and voter questionnaire, going through each question individually to ensure comprehension and applicability. Observers were also trained on the role of election observers and code of conduct, GECOM regulations for observers, inclusive elections, international standards, how to engage with the media responsibly, the objectives of the observation mission, among other areas. During the training, observers also completed a practice observation during visits to public buildings. This was done to test the checklist's applicability, determine the time needed to complete the checklist, and provide the observer with experience in completing the checklist. GCOPD provided feedback after the test checklists were submitted to ensure observers understood how to fill in the

forms. A WhatsApp group was formed with all observers to share information and to facilitate any further guidance.

Deployment of observers

The observers were deployed in pairs on the day of the local government elections. The pairs were formed based on geographic location. The observers had contact with their respective regional coordinator and with GCOPD's Program Manager, Ganesh Singh, who was the overall coordinator for the activity. Observers were deployed from 5:30am to approximately 8:00pm on the day of LGE. The observers travelled across their geographic catchment areas in their respective regions visiting a diverse set of polling stations. Transportation was provided for all observers who were attired in a GCOPD observer jersey and GECOM accredited badge.

Survey of voters with disabilities

The observation checklist was accompanied by a questionnaire for voters with disabilities. This section was completed by the observers on election day based on interviews with voters with disabilities. Observers remained at polling stations for a period of time to provide an opportunity to interact with voters with disabilities, however contact with voters with disabilities on the day of the local government elections was limited. Due to the limited number of surveys completed with voters with disabilities on the day of the local government elections, GCOPD and observers proceeded to interview voters with disabilities via the telephone to complete the survey. The individuals for the survey were selected randomly. GCOPD personnel made telephone calls to various persons with disabilities across Guyana using the organisation's database of persons with disabilities. If the individuals contacted voted at the LGE, the survey was completed with their consent. A total of 56 voters with disabilities were interviewed.

Audit of Registration Sites

GCOPD representatives observed 21 voter registration sites to determine the level of accessibility for persons with disabilities. The registration centers observed are in 8 of the 10 regions of Guyana, with regions 1 and 8 excluded from the observation exercise. Most (19 of the 21) registration centers were located in urban areas, within the aforementioned regions. Observers used an audit checklist based off of IFES' Election Access Observation Toolkit that GCOPD tailored for the Guyana-context. GCOPD included specifications in the audit checklist that meet best practice for disability access, drawing from both international commitments (such as the CRPD) and national legislation, such as the American with Disabilities Act.

Data entry and analysis

The data entry process commenced one week after the observation was completed and after the completed checklists were received from all observers. An electronic checklist was developed using Microsoft Forms. Three separate forms were developed due to the limitation on the number of checklists that can be input into each form. Following the development of the electronic form, the data from the completed hardcopy checklists was input. This process took approximately three weeks. A total of 563 completed checklists were entered into the forms for analysis; data was then further verified by GCOPD to confirm its accuracy and consistent use of forms.

After data entry was completed, the information was shared with IFES's democracy data team for analysis and data visualization.

Limitations

The assessment mission was implemented despite challenges such as changes in election timeline and complex logistics, particularly in rural areas. While initially GCOPD hoped to cover all nine of the regions in which voting was taking place, the lack of expression of interest from potential observers in Region 8 made it too difficult to cover this region. Polling stations could not be assigned through stratified sampling techniques, and were instead selected based on proximity to observers with disabilities to make travel easier. Travel between and sometimes within regions in Guyana can be difficult, particularly since transport such as speed boats and minibuses are rarely accessible for people with disabilities. In addition, local observers are only allowed to vote at their assigned polling station on election day – making it necessary to ensure that observers were assigned to observe polling stations near enough to the vicinity of their polling stations, so they would be able to vote as well.

As observers met with very few voters with disabilities on election day itself, the follow-up survey was supplemented by interviews over the telephone. This was completed within two weeks of election day to allow for the greatest possible accuracy. While efforts were made to ensure that the survey respondents were random, these respondents were all drawn from a database of persons with disabilities maintained by GCOPD and did not necessarily include all people with disabilities in Guyana.

Therefore, findings of the observation and survey are more indicative rather than representative.

Review of the legal framework

The government of Guyana has recognized the rights of persons with disabilities through the signing and ratification of international conventions, adoption of regional treaties, and the passing of legislation. However, some legislation within the national framework does not necessarily align with the international and regional obligations of Guyana which are aimed at ensuring that persons with disabilities live equal and independent lives.

International framework

As a member of the United Nations, Guyana is a signatory to the primary international convention on human rights – the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which declares at Article 21 that state parties should guarantee the right to participate in government and elections, and the right to public services. The protection of civil and political rights of all citizens, including persons with disabilities, was reemphasized in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which Guyana signed on August 22, 1968 and ratified on February 15, 1977. Article 25 of the ICCPR states that, “Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity... to vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections.” This Convention also upholds the right of assembly, the right to take part in public affairs, and the right to equality. Most importantly, Guyana is a State party to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which specifically highlights and protects the fundamental rights of persons with disabilities. As a State party, Guyana is obligated to ensure that persons with disabilities can “fully participate in political and public life on an equal basis to others,” which includes “the right and opportunity for persons with disabilities to vote and be elected.” To give effect to these rights, Guyana must:

- Protect the right to vote and the right to run for office for persons with disabilities;
- Ensure that voting information is accessible and easy to understand;
- Support accessible facilities (such as polling stations and registration offices);
- Establish inclusive policies and procedures;
- Create accessible election materials (such as ballots and voting instructions);
- Provide additional assistance for persons with disabilities on Election Day if needed.²

Regional framework

As a member of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), Guyana adopted its Charter of Civil Society in 1997, which explicitly addresses discrimination against persons with disabilities.

² Article 29 of the CRPD.

Article XIV of the Charter guarantees the rights of persons with disabilities by promoting “respect for their human dignity, equal opportunities to develop their full potential and freedom from discrimination on the basis of their disability.”³ CARICOM’s Kingston Accord of 2004 reaffirmed “that every Caribbean citizen has the same human, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights” and expressed support for a binding internal human rights treaty that was subsequently realized in the form of the CRPD. More recently, in the Declaration of Pétion Ville of December, 2013, CARICOM member States, including Guyana, affirmed their commitment to develop national legal frameworks to give effect to the rights of persons with disabilities, and more particularly the commitments set out in the CRPD.⁴

Guyana is also a member state of the Organization of American States (OAS), which has adopted the Inter-American Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities.⁵ As such, Guyana is obligated to adopt legislative, social, educational, and employment-related measures to protect the rights of persons with disabilities; to prioritize the prevention of disability; and to promote independence, a high quality of life for persons with disabilities and public awareness of disability.

National framework

The fundamental rights of Guyanese citizens, including the freedom of assembly, expression, choice, speech, and association are intrinsically protected by the Constitution of Guyana. These rights are afforded to all Guyanese irrespective of race, place of origin, political opinion, ethnicity, age, disability, marital status, sex, gender, language, birth, social class, pregnancy, religion, conscience, belief, or culture. While there is legislation specific to the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities (the Persons with Disabilities Act), there are no provisions that explicitly ensure the full and equal participation of persons with disabilities in political life. In fact, legislation such as the Local Authority (Elections) Act, Chapter 28:03, expressly disqualifies persons with disabilities who are receiving public assistance from being elected to local government bodies.

Notwithstanding, universal suffrage is generally well-respected throughout the legislative framework as there are no legal barriers to the participation of persons with disabilities to

³ CARICOM, Charter of Civil Society for the Caribbean Community Article XIV p. 16: https://caricom.org/documents/12060-charter_of_civil_society.pdf

⁴ CARICOM, Declaration of Pétion Ville: <https://caricom.org/declaration-of-petion-ville/#:~:text=We%20are%20determined%20to%20continue,the%20diversity%20of%20our%20societies>.

⁵ OAS, Inter-American Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities [https://www.oas.org/juridico/english/treaties/a-65.html#:~:text=The%20objectives%20of%20this%20Convention,their%20full%20integration%20into%20society.&text=d\)%20Measures%20to%20ensure%20that,are%20trained%20to%20do%20so](https://www.oas.org/juridico/english/treaties/a-65.html#:~:text=The%20objectives%20of%20this%20Convention,their%20full%20integration%20into%20society.&text=d)%20Measures%20to%20ensure%20that,are%20trained%20to%20do%20so).

register as a voter or vote on election day. However, there is also no legal provision explicitly instructing that election management should deploy and use assistive tools, such as tactile ballot guides, that would allow for people with disabilities to vote independently and in secret on election day. During elections, persons with visual disabilities may vote using the assistance of a companion or a presiding officer. The companion must be a voter registered at the same polling station as the person with a disability, creating a legal obstacle to persons with disabilities having an assistant of their own choice. Proxy voting is also available for persons with visual and physical disabilities who cannot vote in person.⁶ Both methods raise concerns about the secrecy of the vote that the Local Authorities (Elections) Act emphasizes must be maintained.⁷

Findings from election access observation

The findings are organized thematically in six sub-sections. These sections are: 1) polling locations and facilities; 2) reasonable accommodation and accessible materials; 3) training of election staff; 4) provision of assistance; 5) polling staff with disabilities; and 6) voters with disabilities and their experiences.

Polling locations and facilities

Accessible location

Polling stations located on the ground floor are generally more accessible for persons with disabilities, in particular those with physical disabilities. The observation found that a majority (87.1%) of the observed polling stations were located on the ground floor.⁸ Polling stations that are not on the ground floor can mitigate accessibility concerns with the presence of an elevator or lift mechanism. However, among the polling stations which were not on the ground floor, only 1.4% had an elevator or lift, making these polling stations overwhelmingly inaccessible for wheelchair users and less accessible for persons with physical disabilities in general.

Accessible facilities

As part of the observation, the observers examined the accessibility of external facilities, namely the washrooms and seating areas. The observers evaluated the facilities and concluded that only 22.2% of polling stations had washroom facilities that were accessible for persons with disabilities, with one observer noting that a specific polling station had no washrooms available at all; and only 30% of polling stations had enough seating for those who may have

⁶ See Section 62 (1) (f) of the Local Elections (Authority) Act, Chapter 28:03

⁷ See Section 84 of the Act.

⁸ It is important to note, however, that over half of the ground-floor polling stations had stairs in the entry (see entryway layout below).

required it. The lack of seating is particularly important for people with physical disabilities who may not be comfortable standing for extended periods of time and for people with psychosocial disabilities, such as autism, who may require quiet or personal space.

Accessible entry

Observers assessed the entrances to the polling stations at all 563 polling stations visited on election day. This involved observations of the layout of the polling station from the parking lot into the voting booth. When analyzing election accessibility for persons with disabilities, the architecture and layout of the polling stations' entryway is also examined. This ensures persons with disabilities can access the station to cast their vote, regardless of their disability.

- **Parking Facilities:** There were mixed responses from observers on the availability of parking areas and accessibility of parking structures. Among the polling stations observed, 52.4% were found to have a parking space close to an accessible entrance and similarly, just over 53.8% were found to have an accessible route from the parking area to the entrance of the buildings where the polling station was set up.
- **Entryway Layout:** The observation found that more than half (55.9%) of the polling stations had steps which hindered access to the voting booth for persons with disabilities. At polling stations with steps, ramps can help maintain accessibility for wheelchair users where there are stairs on the way to, or within, the polling station. However, only a limited number (12.3%) of polling stations with steps had a ramp for persons with disabilities, and of that figure, only 9.4% of ramps were appropriately designed and maintained (e.g. had a holding rail and/or were built to fit the following specifications: not too steep, not too narrow, and/or did not include holes). In total, approximately half (51.7%) of the observed polling stations were found to have flat or ramp access into the polling station. Election observers concluded that more than half (56.8%) of observed polling stations had doorways which were wide enough to allow access for persons using wheelchairs.

Obstacle-free movement for persons with disabilities

Polling stations that are free of obstacles are important to facilitate easy movement for voters with all types of disabilities as they move through the polling station and into the voting booth. For wheelchair users, it is especially important that there is enough space to maneuver a wheelchair in and out of the voting booth without assistance, ensuring the voter can access the booth while maintaining voting privacy. More than half of the polling stations observed (63.8%) had hallways free of obstacles, allowing for easy maneuvering for persons with disabilities, in particular wheelchair users and individuals who are blind or have low vision. To a slightly lesser

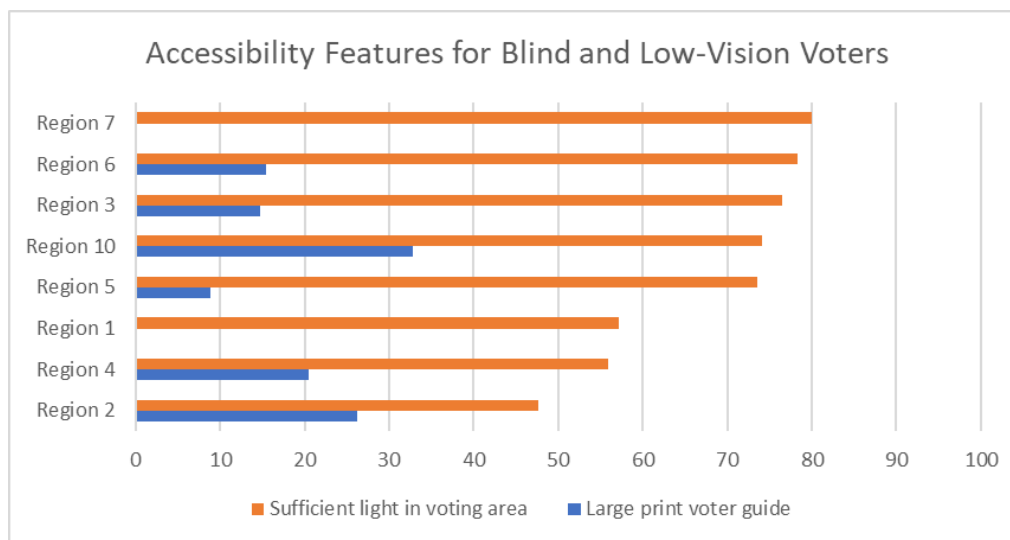
extent, only 51.7% of polling places were observed with obstacle-free access to the voting booth (e.g. no objects placed in the path between the entry and the voting booth, the voting booth large enough to maneuver a wheelchair in and out, and other items). The presence of obstacles in the path of the voting booth presents a challenge for persons with disabilities who wish to vote independently.

Reasonable accommodations and accessible materials for persons with different types of disabilities

During the election observation process, observers noted the availability of reasonable accommodations and accessible materials for persons with disabilities. As defined by the CRPD, reasonable accommodations are “necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.”⁹

Reasonable accommodations for persons with visual disabilities

There are a number of ways election management bodies can increase accessibility for persons who are blind and low vision by providing reasonable accommodations, including: a braille or audio voting guide, a voting guide presented in large font, a magnifying glass, sufficient lighting, and tactile ballot marking guides. The observers noted sufficient lighting in the voting areas across more than half (66.3%) of the observed polling stations. However, the observation also showed that few polling stations made any other accommodations for persons with visual disabilities that would allow them to vote independently and in secret (see figure X below). No



observers reported encountering a braille or audio voting guide or a tactile ballot marking guide, making it impossible for voters who are blind or low-

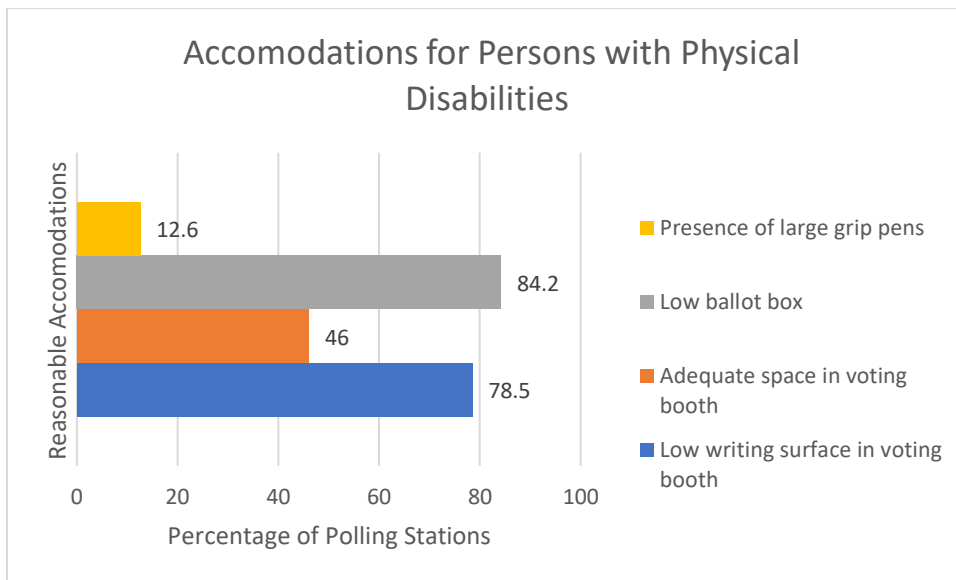
⁹ Article 2 of the UN CRPD.

vision to vote independently or in secret.

Note: Neither tactile ballots/marketing guides nor braille/audio voter guides were observed.

Reasonable accommodations for persons with physical disabilities

In addition to accessible entryways, parking, and polling station facilities, voters with physical disabilities also require voting booths which provide adequate space for wheelchairs or walkers, writing surfaces at a conducive height for wheelchair users and persons of short stature, and secure ballot boxes at an accessible height for wheelchair users or persons of short stature to be able to place their ballot in the box independently. Other reasonable accommodations, such as wide grip pens, can also be used to facilitate independent voting. Across most (78.5%) polling stations, the observers noted that the surface height of ballot marking tables were positioned low enough for all voters to access. Similarly, most polling stations also positioned the ballot box at a height accessible to wheelchair users. However, only 46% of polling stations provided adequate space at the voting booth for persons with assistive devices such as wheelchairs or walkers. To an even lesser degree, very few polling stations provided large grip pens for persons with dexterity issues. The absence of reasonable accommodations such as a wide grip pens and unobstructed access to the voting booth limits a person with disabilities' opportunity to vote independently.



Reasonable accommodations for persons with psychosocial or intellectual disabilities

Ensuring voting accessibility for persons with an intellectual and psychosocial disabilities typically requires that information be transmitted in an easy-to-understand format, for example

through the use of pictorial or visual formats, and that polling stations provide a quiet area for individuals waiting to vote. During the observation, observers noted overall that persons with these disabilities had difficulty understanding the information on the ballot paper in 19.2% of the polling stations visited. In a few instances where the observer spoke with a voter with an intellectual disability, the difficulty of understanding the ballot sheet was a result of too many symbols on the ballot sheet or the symbols weren't clear or easily identifiable. Furthermore, only 24.5% of polling stations provided a quiet waiting area for persons with psychosocial disabilities. Overall, the observation found that few provisions were made for persons with psychosocial or intellectual disabilities.

Though a few polling stations made accommodations for these voters, observers also noted that 3.4% of the polling stations visited denied access to persons with an intellectual or psychosocial disability, and that this denial was apparently based on their disability.

Reasonable accommodations for persons with auditory disabilities

For persons with auditory disabilities, voting accessibility can be improved through targeted communication, be it through sign language interpretation, written information, or deliberate slow speech. According to observers, over half (approximately 57.2%) of polling stations were reported to have used deliberate slow speech to communicate. Other means of communication support for voters with auditory disabilities were observed to a lesser extent. Observers noted that less than half of polling stations (43.5%) provided written information for voters with auditory disabilities. According to the election observer's reports, very few (4.6%) polling stations had polling staff who used sign language. However, no polling stations had a professional sign language interpreter present.

Training of election staff

Adequate training of election staff on accessibility is important in ensuring staff are equipped to protect the rights persons with disabilities while facilitating the voting process. Staff members who have sufficient knowledge of rights-based language, reasonable accommodations, how to set up an obstacle free polling station, and the use of an assistant can greatly improve the voting experience for voters with disabilities. Election observers noted that a majority (75.1%) of polling stations had an information clerk equipped to provide assistance to persons with disabilities when voting. 71.2% of polling stations had poll workers who reported receiving training on how to support persons with disabilities. One aspect of this assistance included providing forms 27 and 28 to voters with disabilities and their assistants (form 27 for the voter requesting assistance and form 28 for the assistant). The election observers noted that more than half (57.7%) of polling stations offered these forms to voters with disabilities.

Provision of assistance

Voting with an assistant is an important accommodation for voters with disabilities. Article 29 of the CRPD calls on State parties to allow voters with disabilities to vote with an assistant of their choosing. In Guyana, national legislation states that voters with disabilities may select an assistant from people who are registered at the same polling station in which they will vote, or they can request assistance from the Presiding Officer. Election observers noted that a majority (76.2%) of polling stations confirmed that the Presiding Officer allowed voters with disabilities to have an assistant when requested. However, persons with disabilities were permitted to be accompanied by an assistant of their choice while voting at only 54.4% of polling stations observed.

Polling staff with disabilities

Under the CRPD, people with disabilities have the right to participate in all aspects of political and public life on an equal basis with others. This includes serving in various electoral roles, including as polling staff. Observers noted that only six of the 563 observed polling stations had poll workers with disabilities based on interviews with polling staff.

Voters with disabilities and their experiences

As part of the observation mission, survey interviews were conducted both with voters with disabilities encountered at polling stations as well as immediately following the election via telephone interviews. While the 56 voters with disabilities surveyed cannot provide representative data given the sample size, the experiences do illustrate both good practices as well as areas for improvement. Importantly, only two of the surveyed polling stations (0.4%) had instances of voter intimidation against persons with disabilities. The vast majority of respondents indicated that they had received adequate information about the voting process (94.5%), that they had enough time to vote (89.1%), and that they found the ballot paper easy to understand (94.5%). However, voters who took part in the questionnaire reported that there is a significant gap in accessible information provided by the media (54.5% reported that there was sufficient accessible media coverage) and by political parties (49.1% reported sufficient accessible information provided by political parties). Importantly, only 70.9 percent of voters with disabilities reported receiving adequate information about the candidates. Please see the table below for the voter experiences, based on the voters with disabilities surveyed.

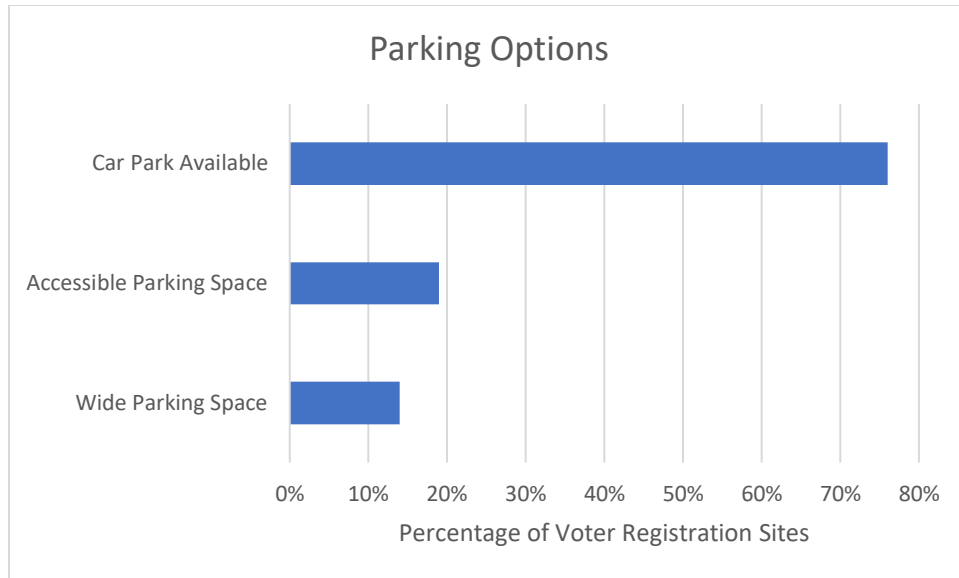
Question	No %	Yes %	No Response %
Did you find the ballot paper easy to understand?	5.5	94.5	0
Did you have enough time to vote?	5.5	89.1	5.5
Did you receive adequate information about the voting process?	5.5	94.5	0
Did you receive adequate information about the candidates?	27.3	70.9	1.8
Was it easy for you to mark the ballot paper, independently?	7.3	89.1	3.6
Was it easy for you to correctly fold the ballot paper?	18.2	81.8	0
Were you able to vote without any difficulties at the voting booth?	18.2	81.8	0
Did you understand how to insert the ballot paper into the box	5.5	92.7	1.8
Did you feel intimidated at the polling station?	85.5	9.1	5.5
Do you think that traditional media (e.g. tv, radio, newspapers) has provided enough electoral information that is accessible for persons with disabilities?	38.2	54.5	7.3
Do you think that the political parties have provided enough electoral information that is accessible for persons with disabilities?	43.6	49.1	7.3

Findings from audit of registration locations

The findings are organized thematically in five sub-sections. These sections are: 1) parking for people with disabilities; 2) external path accessibility; 3) building entrance; 4) registration area; and, 5) accessible washroom facilities.

Parking options

The GCOPD representatives observed limited parking accessibility for persons with disabilities. Though 76% of the observed registration centers had a car park close to the center, most of the car parks were not accessible for persons with disabilities. In trying to determine parking facilities for persons with disabilities, observers also noted that 19% of the registration sites had an accessible parking space identified. The observers also sought to answer the question of whether the accessible parking space appeared to have enough space for persons with disabilities to enter and exit a vehicle with their assistive devices, however, only 14% (3 of 21) registration centers were found to have met this requirement.



External path accessibility

Approximately 80% of the observed registration sites had pathways leading to the entrance of the registration site and 71% were observed to have pathways which were at least 90cm wide. Using international best practice outlined in legislation such as the American Disabilities Act, ramps should be at least 90cm wide with a grade of no more than 2.5cm for every 30cm. Observers noted that approximately 61% of the registration sites had ramps which met these requirements.

Building entrance

To evaluate if registration areas were housed in accessible buildings, the observers noted a few factors about the main building entrance. In examining the main entryway, the observers found that a majority (90%) of the buildings had a door which was at least 90cm wide, and therefore suitably wide enough for wheelchair users to access. The floor level of the entryway is another important, but often overlooked accommodation for persons with disabilities, but the observers noted that a majority (71%) of the main entryways observed, had a flat entryway, meaning, they were less than 3cm from the ground. However, a little less than half (42%) of registration centers had doors which could remain open, an accommodation which would be particularly helpful for persons with assistive devices. To further evaluate access to voter registration, 80% of registration centers were found to have stairs leading up to the entryway, yet only 28% (6 of 21) of the registration centers had ramps to offset the difficulties which persons with disabilities may have when using stairs to navigate to the registration center. To note, of the 28% of registration buildings with ramps, all ramps were made of concrete, met the expected standard of 90cm wide, and were sufficiently sloped at 30cm by 2.5cm. To note,

though few registration centers had the required structural accommodations to facilitate accessible entrance to the building, an even smaller percentage (14%) of registration sites had adequate signage guiding persons with disabilities on where to enter.

Registration area

The registration center observations included an evaluation of the entrance of the registration area, and the facilities within the room which would have offered increased accessibility for persons with disabilities. The observers reported that 23% of registration areas (5 of 21) had both stairs and a ramp to facilitate access for persons with disabilities. When evaluating these ramps, 80% of these ramps (4 of the 5) met the required measurement, indicating they were 90cm wide, with a 2.5cm rise by 30cm length. In terms of location, most registration areas (80%) were located on the ground floor, which provided easier access for persons with disabilities. However, it is important to note that of the registration centers that were not on the ground floor (20% or 4 of 21), only one was confirmed by observers to have a lift or elevator leading to the registration area.

For persons with disabilities with assistive devices or wheelchair users, an entrance door which can remain open during use, is an added accessibility accommodation. Observers noted the entryway at each registration area and found that a little less than half (42%) of registration areas made this accommodation. In evaluating other aspects of the entryway, the observers found that approximately 33% of registration areas were confirmed to have a doorway 90cm wide, and similarly only approximately 38% of registration areas had a flat entryway which was less than 3cm from the ground.

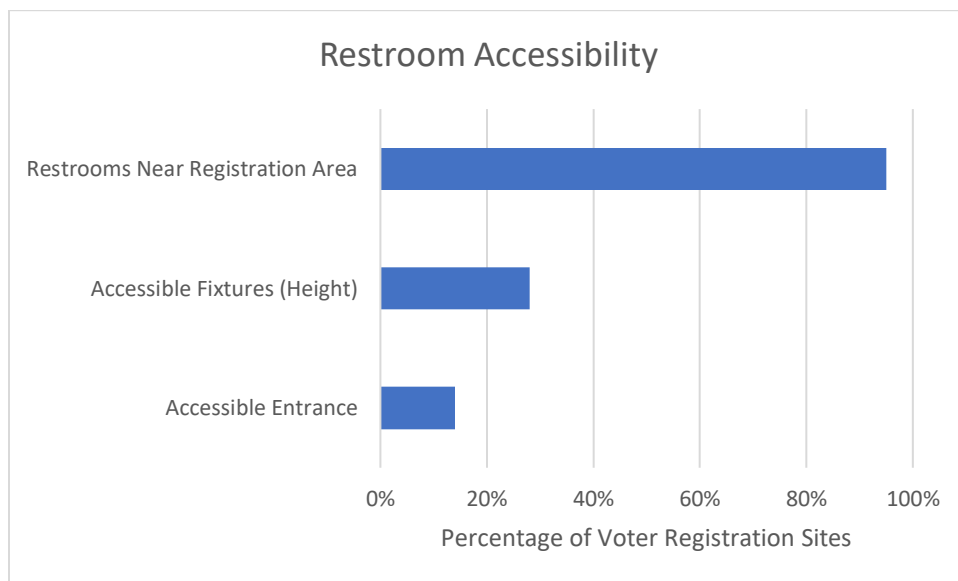
Within the registration area, observers reported that approximately 95% of registration centers had adequate lighting for persons to view documents clearly. This accommodation is particularly important for persons with visual disabilities. Observers also noted flooring within the registration site, particularly to determine if the surface had uneven surfaces or a thick rug which would limit movement. The observers found that 95% of registration centers had flat and even flooring. However, a majority (80%) of centers did not have a clear path within the registration area, for persons with disabilities to maneuver freely. Therefore, though the surfacing used on the floor was suitable at most registration areas, the layout of the room provided limited space for actual movement and maneuvering.

Access to voter registration also involves the dissemination of information, and the observers sought to determine if there was adequate space within the registration area to allow information sharing via posters or signs. The observers noted that all registration centers had

adequate spaces on the walls to facilitate posters and signs which would explain the registration process.

Accessible washroom facilities

The observers reported that 95% of the observed registration sites had restroom facilities within close proximity. However, though restrooms were available, most were found to be inaccessible for persons with disabilities. The observers evaluated the doorway access for persons with disabilities and the observers noted that a limited number of registration sites (14%) had a restroom entrance which was wide enough for wheelchair users to access, as well as a flat entryway which was less than 3cm from the ground. The observers also reported findings on the facilities within the restroom and their positioning for persons with disabilities. In all the registration centers observed, none of the toilets included handrails which would benefit persons with disabilities or the elderly. The absence of handrails means though restrooms were available, they were not adequately retrofitted to be of use to persons with disabilities. The observers also noted the positioning of the standard fixtures within the restroom, notably the toilet and the sink which are expected to be at a height of 48cm and 74cm respectively. These height requirements are particularly accommodating for wheelchair users. However, the observers noted in their data that for very few registration sites (28%), the toilet and sink were at the required height for persons with disabilities. To note, the registration sites which had a toilet at the required height also had the sink positioned at the required height.



Conclusion and recommendations

The findings from GCOPD's accessibility audit of the 2023 Local Government Election, can be summarized as follows:

1. **Polling Locations and Facilities:** The majority of observed polling stations were located on the ground floor, making them more accessible for individuals with physical disabilities. However, non-ground floor stations lacked adequate accessibility features, such as elevators or lifts, rendering them mostly inaccessible for persons using wheelchair. Washroom facilities and seating areas were often not sufficiently accessible.
2. **Accessible Entry:** The availability of parking spaces and accessible routes varied among the observed polling stations. Steps at polling stations hindered access for persons with disabilities, though some had ramps. While most polling stations were free of obstacles that would make free movement difficult for persons with disabilities, only 51.7% of voting booths were set up to facilitate independent access, especially for voters using wheelchairs and voters with visual disabilities.
3. **Reasonable Accommodations and Accessible Materials:** Accessibility for individuals with disabilities depended on reasonable accommodations. Few polling stations provided accommodations for visual disabilities, physical disabilities, intellectual and psychosocial disabilities, or auditory disabilities, limiting the opportunity for these voters to cast their ballots independently and in secret.
4. **Training of Election Staff:** Most polling stations had trained staff to provide assistance to persons with disabilities during voting, but only some offered necessary forms for requesting assistance.
5. **Provision of Assistance:** While polling stations generally allowed assistance for voters with disabilities, allowing voters to be accompanied by an assistant of their choice was less common due to legislative limitations.
6. **Polling Staff with Disabilities:** The participation of persons with disabilities in electoral roles, including as polling staff, was limited.
7. **Voters with Disabilities and Their Experiences:** Survey interviews revealed positive experiences for voters with disabilities, with adequate information and time for voting. However, accessible information from media and political parties was lacking, and not all voters were able to receive information about candidates in accessible formats.

Conclusion

The election access observation revealed a range of challenges and successes related to accessibility for voters with disabilities. While Guyana is making some progress in meeting their commitments under the CRPD, significant gaps remain in ensuring equal voting rights for

people with disabilities. The observation revealed that there are some good practices in place but accessibility for voters with disabilities is still insufficient: it is positive that polling stations are generally on the ground floor, for example, but most of these still have stairs in the entryway that lacked ramps. GECOM should be commended for their commitment to using sign language interpretation in their voter education videos; however, voters with disabilities reported that there was little similarly accessible information provided by the media or political parties. Polling locations and facilities often lacked the necessary accommodations to ensure full accessibility. Accessible voting materials and assistive devices, crucial for enabling independent voting, were not provided across different disability types. While observers reported that polling officials were generally helpful and willing to give assistance, polling officials would benefit from a rights-based training approach, particularly when it comes to the set-up of polling stations. The low representation of polling staff with disabilities is also a concern. Overall, the findings emphasize the need for continued efforts to enhance accessibility and inclusivity in the electoral process, ensuring that all Guyanese citizens, regardless of their disabilities, can exercise their right to vote in an independent and equal manner. GCOPD hopes that the recommendations laid out in this report are taken forward by all electoral decision makers to make elections more accessible for all voters.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from the observation mission, the following recommendations are made:

Election law reform

Currently, the national legislative framework for elections does not fully guarantee the rights of persons with disabilities to participate in political life. Amendments to election laws are crucial to ensure that they are consistent with international best practice, standards, and obligations, especially those outlined in the CRPD. For instance, the Local Authority (Elections) Act should be amended to remove the disqualification criteria which bars persons with disabilities who receive public assistance from running for local government elections. The laws and processes are also silent on including persons with disabilities as poll workers or election officials. While there is legislation that protects persons with disabilities from discrimination in employment, there should be specific provisions that afford persons with disabilities the opportunities to secure employment as poll workers or election officials, and to work in an accessible workspace.

While the legal framework does not create any barriers to political participation for persons with disabilities upon registration or on election day, it does not necessarily provide for accessibility measures that would allow all persons to vote in secret and in person. Guyana

must take all the necessary steps to ensure compliance with international obligations and to give effect to the rights of persons with disabilities. Therefore, specific laws should permit accessible procedures and materials to be adopted, and the use of assistive devices and tools by persons with disabilities.

Further, current measures like proxy voting should also be strictly regulated to ensure that the secrecy of the ballot is protected. Reforms should also ensure that voters are able to choose their own assistant. The limitation to an assistant being registered in the same polling station as the voter should be removed.

Accessible voter education information

The Constitution and various Acts of Parliament that protect the rights of persons with disabilities are not available in accessible formats or in easy-to-understand language. The Government of Guyana should endeavor to produce accessible and easy-to-understand versions of these documents for public consumption so that all Guyanese citizens can understand their rights.

All election stakeholders, particularly GECOM, the media, political parties, and the police, should ensure that all voter information is distributed in a format that is accessible for persons with disabilities at every stage of the election cycle. GECOM should be commended for consistently having sign language interpretation in their videos. However, flyers and other voter information could be made more accessible for people with visual disabilities by ensuring their compatibility with screen-readers or by including QR codes that link to audio or videos. Greater efforts should be made to partner with OPDs to ensure information is provided in appropriate formats. Information should also be positive and educational with the aim of teaching and encouraging persons with disabilities to exercise their fundamental right to participate in political life, including the right to vote and the right to be elected.

Accessible materials could include those developed in audio, braille and large fonts (for persons with visual disabilities), sign language and pictures (for persons with auditory disabilities), pictorials and easy-to-read materials (for persons with intellectual disabilities), and materials that depict persons with disabilities in positions of authority, not just as recipients of assistance (such as elected leaders or officials). Examples of such materials include large size samples of ballot papers, sign language posters and videos, and voting guides in braille, large fonts and audio formats, among others.

Capacity building of election officials

Observers overwhelmingly noted that polling staff provided assistance and generally made efforts to provide clear information, and GECOM staff should be commended for this. However, the layout and selection of polling stations remains a crucial issue that impacts the ability of voters to access their rights. Election officials should be trained to provide an inclusive and accessible voting environment; for example, by ensuring that no objects are placed in the path of the voting booth, making sure there is sufficient room between the wall and the voting booth for a wheelchair user to enter and exit, ensuring that there is sufficient lighting in the polling station, and other measures that would allow for a more accessible layout, including the entryway. Capacity building of election officials could also include training on rights-based language, how to give assistance to voters who are deaf, and how to ask if someone needs assistance (without automatically offering it by, for example, taking the initiative to push a wheelchair without permission). Training could be supplemented by a simple handout or flyer with basic accessibility reminders (see Annex A for an example).

It is further recommended that there be a helpdesk at GECOM that is available to its registration offices and each polling station so that staff working at these locations can call over video to access trained staff who can provide information to persons with disabilities using accessible mediums like sign language.

Use of assistive tools and devices

While there is currently no legal provision that mandates the use of assistive devices, there is also no legal restriction on putting them into practice to improve access for persons with disabilities. GECOM, in consultation with disability rights organizations, should endeavor to provide some basic assistive devices to facilitate the independent voting of persons with disabilities. This should include the provision of tactile ballot guides for voters who are blind or who have low vision so that they can vote without an assistant.

The introduction of assistive devices should be coupled with training and education. GECOM should train all election and polling staff in the use of these tools in order to effectively assist voters with disabilities, while making voters with disabilities aware through education campaigns of their availability.

Accessible registration offices

The accessibility of registration offices varied significantly. Positively, most registration sites had adequate lighting and flat flooring, with 80 percent of sites also on the ground floor. Most registration sites that were not on the ground floor, however, had no accessible lift – making it

impossible for wheelchair users to enter. While the flooring inside most polling stations was flat and suitable, the layout of the site had obstacles that would make it difficult for persons with disabilities to maneuver easily. Staff at registration sites should be trained on how to lay out centers in an accessible manner so that they can remove obstacles that might be in the path of wheelchair users or other people with disabilities. Washrooms should be upgraded so that entryways and toilets allow for adequate space for persons with disabilities. Registration sites that are not located on the ground floor need to have lifts so that people with disabilities can enter and register in person. Parking should be allocated and reserved for people with disabilities, with adequate room to allow for wheelchair users to enter and exit a vehicle. GECOM should be commended for the high number of ramps that were installed in registration sites; staff should further confirm that these are wide enough to meet standards.

Selection and set-up of polling stations

The process of selecting and setting up polling stations involves several key considerations to ensure accessibility for voters with disabilities. Prior to finalizing the selection of public buildings to serve as polling places, it is important to conduct accessibility audits and to consult with people with disabilities. These audits are essential to verify that the chosen buildings are already accessible or to identify necessary temporary measures that can be implemented to ensure accessibility.

When establishing polling stations, the chosen locations should be free from obstacles, have accessible entrances and exits, and offer easy maneuverability. If there are stairs leading to or within the polling stations, permanent or temporary ramps should be made available. Entrances and exits must be wide enough to accommodate individuals with physical disabilities, including those who use wheelchairs, allowing them to navigate through the station independently and access the polling booth and ballot boxes without assistance.

In the polling booths, tables should be set at a height that is accessible to individuals using wheelchairs or those of smaller statures. Similarly, ballot boxes and indelible ink jars should be positioned on tables of an appropriate height so that persons using wheelchairs or of smaller stature can access them without aid. To assist voters with low vision or auditory disabilities, clear signs presented in large fonts and pictorial formats should be strategically placed to guide them through the voting process.

Adequate lighting is crucial within the polling station and particularly over the polling booths. Large grip pencils should be provided to accommodate individuals with dexterity challenges, ensuring that they can mark their ballots accurately. There should be ample distance between voting booths to allow for easy movement of voters using wheelchairs and maintain voter

secrecy, especially when verbal instructions are needed by voters with disabilities who have assistants.

Additionally, provisions must be made for the comfort and needs of various voter groups. This includes ensuring that there are enough chairs available for older persons, pregnant women, and persons with disabilities who may need to wait for their turn, thereby complementing the concept of priority voting. Furthermore, accessible toilet and sanitation facilities should be present within the polling station to cater to the needs of all voters. In sum, the selection and setup of polling stations should prioritize accessibility and inclusivity to ensure that every eligible voter can exercise their democratic rights with ease.

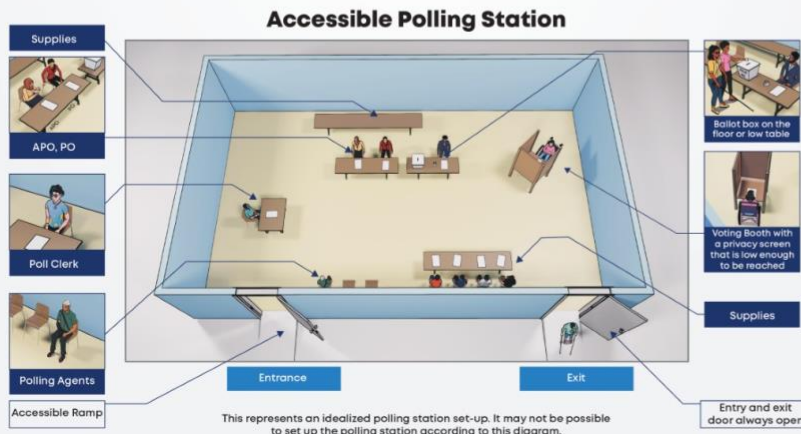
ANNEX A: Accessible Election Flyer for Polling Staff (Sample)

ACCESSIBLE ELECTIONS: TIPS AND BEST PRACTICES

On Election Day, it is your responsibility as poll workers to support voters during the voting process. You will meet voters with disabilities who may require your assistance. This guide will provide some good practices for making the voting experience accessible to persons with disabilities but it is not exhaustive. For more information about the right of persons with disabilities to participate in political life feel free to contact the Guyana Council of Organisations for Persons with Disabilities (GCOOPD) or the International Foundation for Electoral Systems Guyana (IFES Guyana).

HOW TO SET UP AN ACCESSIBLE POLLING PLACE

- If possible, set up a polling station on the first floor and ensure that any entrances with ramps are open.
- The polling station layout must be set up in a way that allows enough room for persons using a wheelchair to freely move around from entrance to exit.
- Ensure that there is sufficient lighting for voters to see poll workers' faces when they are speaking and near the polling booth so they can read the ballot without difficulty.
- Keep entrance and exit doors open so that voters using wheelchairs, crutches or canes can easily enter and exit the room.
- The table in the voting booth must be low enough for persons of a short stature or using a wheelchair can use.
- Remove any low-handing objects on walls or from ceilings so that people with visual disabilities do not accidentally walk into them.
- Chairs for voters who are waiting.
- Paper and pens available that poll workers can use to write or draw instructions.
- Enough space for people using wheelchairs to move
- Ballot box is low enough for persons of a short stature or who use a wheelchair



GENERAL ETIQUETTE TIPS

1. **Practice the Golden Rule** - Treat everyone as you would like to be treated. If you see a voter with a disability, please be courteous and polite. Think of the person first, not their disability. Avoid showing pity or being patronizing.
2. **Always Ask Before Giving Assistance** - Just because a person has a disability, they do not necessarily need or want your assistance. Never help someone without first asking them.
3. **Speak Directly to Voters with Disabilities** even if they are in the company of an assistant or interpreter.
4. **Think Before You Speak** - Avoid using labels when you speak - they are offensive to everyone, including people with disabilities. Always use people first language when referring to persons with disabilities.

✗ Avoid	✓ Use
Disabled, special needs, PWDs, handicapped, differently-abled	Persons with disabilities
Visually impaired	A voter who is blind or has low vision
Deaf and dumb, deaf and mute, hearing impaired	A woman who is deaf or hard-of-hearing
Wheelchair bound, confined to a wheelchair	A candidate using a wheelchair
Crippled	A monitor with a physical disability
Mentally retarded, dumb	A voter with an intellectual disability
Down's person, Down Syndrome	A man with Down syndrome
Dwarf, midget	A little person
Mentally ill, insane	A voter with a psychosocial disability
Victim of HIV/AIDS, suffers from AIDS	A journalist who is HIV positive, a poll worker living with AIDS
Normal	Non-disabled, able-bodied

FOR VOTERS WITH SPECIFIC TYPES OF DISABILITIES, HERE ARE SOME SUGGESTIONS:

<p>Visual disabilities</p> <p>A person with a visual disability may have difficulty seeing, even when wearing glasses, and may be blind or have low vision.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Say hello and state your name when they enter the room ➢ If a voter asks to be led to the polling station or ballot box, allow them to take your arm ➢ When assisting voters to sit, guide their hand to the back of the chair to help them find their seat themselves ➢ Be precise when describing directions – avoid terms like “this, that, over there, over here”
<p>Hearing disabilities</p> <p>A person with a hearing disability may have difficulty hearing, even if using a hearing aid.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Look at their face when you are speaking ➢ Speak slowly and clearly ➢ Be patient and willing to repeat instructions ➢ If needed, gently wave to get the voter's attention 
<p>Physical disabilities</p> <p>A person with a physical disability may have difficulty walking or climbing steps and may use a wheelchair or other assistive device.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ If needed, assist in opening the door ➢ Sit in a chair when you are speaking to a person using a wheelchair so that you are at eye-level ➢ Avoid touching a wheelchair, unless you have permission
<p>Psychosocial disabilities</p> <p>A person with a psychosocial disability may have a condition that affects cognition, emotion and/or behavior.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Be patient and willing to repeat instructions ➢ Respect their personal space ➢ If possible, offer them a quieter area to wait
<p>Intellectual disabilities</p> <p>A person with an intellectual disability may have a limited ability to learn at an expected level and function in daily life.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Look at their face when you are speaking ➢ Speak slowly and clearly ➢ Use simple phrases to explain how to vote ➢ If needed, write or draw instructions

REMEMBER: Not all disabilities are visible to others! Be aware that some voters have disabilities you cannot see but may still need support.



For more information Watch This!



Here's The Voting Process