

Equal voting rights sought for disabled

JAK-POST - 27 Jan 2018.

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THE JAKARTA POST/JAKARTA/
BANDUNG/SURAKARTA

Measures taken by the General Elections Commissions (KPU) across Indonesia to better facilitate voting rights for people with disabilities are important steps toward ensuring their full participation in society, a rights watchdog has said.

Although some disabled persons are still excluded from the voter registry for both local and central elections, there has been a significant improvement in the fulfillment of voting rights for people with disabilities, it says.

Institute for Advocacy and Protection of People with Disabilities (LAPPCI) chairman Heppy Sebayang said at least 1.5 million voters in Indonesia were people with disabilities.

“Such a huge proportion cannot be ignored. Providing better access to voting for people with disabilities means we are protecting their rights as citizens,” Heppy told *The Jakarta Post* on Friday.

In 2016, the KPU headquarters issued a voting guide for voters with disabilities, as mandated by the 2011 law on election organizers. Local election commissions are working hard to make sure that no disabled persons are turned away from polling stations.

KPU Surakarta is striving to boost the participation of people with disabilities in the upcoming elections by providing easier access. In one such measure, the commission has distributed audio visual books to help blind and deaf voters better understand voting procedures.

KPU Surakarta chairman Agus Sulistiyo said the commission had begun to hold election simulations to introduce voting procedures to disabled people who would participate in the upcoming Central Java gubernatorial election.

“For blind voters, we have prepared 1,000 braille templates to help blind and visually impaired people vote in the election,” said Agus.

Dealing with around 65,000 voters with disabilities, KPU West Java has worked with Telkom University to hold a competition to create a smartphone application

for people with hearing and vision impairment so they can learn about candidates and voting procedures for the upcoming gubernatorial election in the province.

In East Kalimantan, KPU Balikpapan is preparing braille ballots along with several trained witnesses for visually impaired voters.

KPU West Nusa Tenggara (NTB) also promised to erect disability-friendly polling stations throughout the province. Chairman Lalu Aksar Ansori said polling stations should be at least 800 square meters and equipped with ramps to accommodate voters in wheelchairs.

“We’re spending Rp 168 billion [US\$12.6 million] on the gubernatorial election. We’re sure we will be able to provide adequate facilities for voters with disabilities,” he said, adding that NTB had around 2,000 voters with disabilities.

KPU East Manggarai spokesman Adrianus Harimin said anyone who had mental problems but had been declared healthy, had the right to take part in an election either as a voter or a candidate.

Suhendar, an activist from a forum for deaf people in Bandung, West Java, deplored one of the latest KPU decrees stating that election candidate should be physically and mentally healthy. “The decree sees us, people with disabilities, as physically impaired and unhealthy. This violates our right to run for election as local leaders.”

In Makassar, South Sulawesi, disabled advocacy group PerDIK lamented KPU regulations that stated all candidate must be free from medical disabilities.

“This means the KPU has violated the political rights of disabled people to vote and be voted for as mandated by the 2011 law on the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the 2016 law on people with disabilities,” said PerDIK executive director Abdul Rahman. In South Sulawesi, 216,000 disabled voters are registered for the upcoming gubernatorial election. (v1a)

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