THE EUROPEAN YEAR OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES 2003

Fieldwork: September 2003
Publication: February 2004

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This survey was requested by DG Employment and Social Affairs, Unit E/4 and coordinated by Directorate General Press and Communication.

This document does not represent the point of view of the European Commission. The interpretations and opinions contained in it are solely those of the authors.
The European Union declared 2003 the European Year of People with Disabilities in order to raise awareness about the situation of its millions of disabled citizens. It is currently estimated that at least 10 per cent of the EU population will be affected at some point in their life by a disability. The EYPD campaign launched at EU level and in the Member States aimed to increase the awareness amongst the wider population of the rights of disabled people to participate fully in society and to make people more aware of what disability means.

One of the key challenges of the EYPD campaign was to promote a wider understanding and acceptance of main issues. In order to measure in part the success of this campaign, the European Commission commissioned a series of questions about the EYPD campaign and disability issues in the Eurobarometer survey. The main data making up this report were gathered between 1 and 30 September 2003 and are part of wave 60.0 of the Standard Eurobarometer, although comparisons are made in some questions to an earlier survey carried out in 2000.

This Executive Summary is based on the final results of the views of EU citizens about disability issues gathered in this survey. Views are assessed across the European Union and results are presented according to results at EU level, country level and with a socio-demographic analysis which attempts to highlight both the similarities and differences by such varied factors as gender, age, education, occupation, etc.

In the detailed analysis of the data in this survey, it became apparent that fundamental variations in attitude were most apparent between different countries, rather than as a result of a particular socio-demographic characteristic such as gender, age, education or occupation, although sub-divisions based upon potentially linked aspects such as education, occupation and income do emerge.

Accordingly, this Executive Summary focuses on country variations and a detailed socio-demographic analysis is contained in the Main Report.

**Awareness of the European Year of People with Disabilities (EYPD)**

In general, the results of the survey demonstrate a good awareness across the EU of the EYPD campaign. Accordingly more than a third (36%) of EU citizens indicated that they had heard about the EYPD campaign. Given the social nature of the EYPD campaign and the number of international events which seized public attention in 2003, this can be seen as a positive result though nearly two thirds (64%) were not aware of the EYPD. Furthermore, as indicated later below, more than half of EU citizens (including those who claimed not to have heard specifically about the campaign) were able to identify that one of the key aims of the European Year was to raise awareness about disability issues. Some 42% of those polled identified that the rights of disabled people also played an important part in the EYPD campaign. These figures confirm that a majority of people across the EU did not perceive the EYPD campaign as one to raise money or to see disabled people as deserving of pity. A key positive outcome of the EYPD campaign would be a recognition more widely spread that approaches to disability should be based on the rights of disabled people and their full participation, focussing on their abilities and capabilities, and not on the disabilities created by society.

---

1 Eurobarometer 54.2 Attitudes of Europeans to Disability available at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/disability/index_en.html
Examined on a country-by-country basis, it is clear that awareness is some Member States of the EYPD campaign has been particularly high, and for example amongst the group of those who were aware that 2003 was EYPD, 73% of Irish, 70% of Luxembourg and 55% of Austrian citizens indicated that they were aware of the campaign.

Throughout the report, the Irish figures show a very high level of awareness which is probably due in part to the fact that the Special Olympics International Summer Games were held in that country during 2003 and this event and the whole issue of disabilities received considerable exposure and a media coverage far above the average, too.

The country that appeared to be least aware of this initiative was the UK where only 21% of the population were aware of this fact.

**Sources of Information**

By far the most important source of information on the EYPD was the media - cited by an average of 81% of those polled across the EU15. In fact, in Greece, the figure reached 90%.

The Irish figure for this source, at 85%, is four percentage points greater than the EU15 average, perhaps due in part to the country’s hosting of the Special Olympics International Summer Games. However, very high ratings covering the other information sources meant that the Irish also received information from a friend and event publicity. In these two major sources, the Irish percentages were higher than any other country, and at least twice as high as the EU15 average.

From the survey, it appears that a low percentage of UK citizens obtained this information through the media. The figure of 57% is some nineteen percentage points beneath the next lowest figure, well below the 81% EU average and figures of 88% in Portugal and 90% in Greece.

Two alternative scenarios for this divergence could be that either the subject received relatively little UK media exposure or it may reflect UK citizens’ media habits.

**Purpose of the EYPD**

More than half (53%) of EU citizens believed that the purpose of the EYPD was to increase understanding of disability issues. This average figure, however, conceals a wide variation on a country-by-country basis. While only 35% of the Portuguese believe this to be the main reason, this belief is held by 80% of Swedes and 72% of citizens of Luxembourg.

The next most popular imagined purpose (and, in fact, a complementary aim of the EYPD) was seen by 42% of Union citizens as being to promote the rights of people with disabilities. This had a particularly strong following in Greece, Finland and Sweden with 53% or more of those polled believing this to be the case.

On the other hand, this was an attitude held by less than a quarter (24%) of Dutch people.

On an EU-wide basis, the belief that the purpose of the EYPD was fund-raising for disabled people was held by 25% of those polled.

This view was somewhat prevalent in France where 36% of those polled viewed it as the prime purpose, while only 12% of Swedes saw this as being the EYPD’s main objective.

The belief that the year was designed to give a more positive view of people with disabilities was held by one in five (21%) of people polled and received strong support in the Netherlands (33%) and in Finland (29%).
Against an EU15 average of 8% who said they did not know the reason for the EYPD, percentages were slightly higher amongst Portuguese (14%) and UK citizens (13%).

The level of education had a noticeable bearing on perceived purposes of the EYPD. 29% of those with the least level of education believed the purpose was to raise money for disabled people, compared with an EU15 average of 25% and a figure of 20% for those with the highest level of education.

**Has the EYPD informed people about living with disabilities?**

61% of EU15 citizens polled on this question believed that the EYPD had contributed to informing society about the difficulties faced by people with disabilities in their daily life.

This sentiment was particularly felt by Irish and Luxembourgish citizens, where 81% of each country’s poll tended to agree with the statement. A relatively high figure of 75% was also noted in Austria.

At the other end of the spectrum, only 45% of the UK sample tended to agree with this statement. In addition, in the UK, while the number of people tending to disagree with the statement was in line with the EU15 average at 17%, 38% of those polled were in the ‘don’t know’ camp, compared with a 22% EU15 average and a figure of only 6% in Luxembourg.

**Has the EYPD improved rights for disabled people?**

Just over half the EU citizens polled (51%) tended to agree that the EYPD had paved the way towards obtaining the same rights for people with disabilities. While this benefit was identified by 72% of the Irish poll, this was a sentiment held by only 42% of Dutch and 45% of Germans.

This issue produced an EU average of 27% of ‘don’t knows’ with a higher figure of 42% in the UK.

**Has the EYPD improved access for physically disabled people to public places (buildings and transport)?**

With 26% of those polled not knowing whether this improvement in access had taken place and a similar percentage tending to disagree, less than half (48%) of the poll tended to agree that this benefit to physically disabled people had been caused by the EYPD.

Yet again, Ireland was in the vanguard of positive reaction and 68% of that country’s poll tended to agree with this point.

**Has the EYPD improved access to public places (buildings and transport) for intellectually disabled people?**

There was a noticeable variation in the question of access when dealing with intellectually disabled people rather than those who disability was physical.

Whereas, as detailed in the previous question, 48% of those polled believed that access had improved for physically disabled people, when the question related to those whose disability was intellectual, the figure reduces noticeably to just 38%.
While, in those countries where the whole concept of the EYPD appears to have been embraced with a high degree of enthusiasm, and figures of 62% and 54% are recorded in Ireland and Austria, only 26% of Swedes and 30% of Danes tended to agree that improved access had been achieved for this group.

Of the 30% of the poll who tended to disagree, high figures of 39% were observed in Italy and Luxembourg and 38% in Portugal.

**Has the EYPD improved access to services for people with physical disabilities?**

Once again, Ireland and Austria were the two nations that had the most positive view on physically disabled people’s rights of access to services. While these figures were more than half of those countries’ poll at 67% and 60% respectively, they were considerably above the EU15 average of 47% which was, itself, above the 39% recorded in Sweden and an even lower figure of 37% in Portugal.

Amongst the figures from countries making up the 31% of those polled who said they did not know, were lower figures in Luxembourg (18%) and the UK (47%). Perhaps because it is less easy to recognise intellectually disabled people than those with a physical disability, noticeably fewer European Union citizens tended to agree that intellectually disabled rather than physically disabled people had been helped to exercise the same rights of access to services.

The Irish figure (61%), again, was at the top of the ranking which compares markedly with the Swedish figure of only 28%.

**Has the EYPD improved access to services for intellectually disabled people?**

Reflecting a similar pattern to previous questions, there was less support for the proposition that the EYPD had helped the intellectually disabled in this area.

Accordingly, while, as shown above, 47% of EU citizens believed the EYPD had helped physically disabled people to exercise the same rights of access to services as other people, this figure falls to 39% when intellectually disabled people are the focus of the question.

**Has the EYPD improved access to employment for people with physical disabilities?**

The notion that the EYPD has improved access to employment for people with physical disabilities was accepted by 42% across the EU15 of those polled with the usual high Irish support level of 62% and a considerably smaller figure of 30% from Portugal.

Portugal also had the highest level of those polled (41%) tending to disagree with this proposition.

The UK figures were not only noticeable for the regular high levels of ‘don’t knows’ (in this case, 46% compared with and EU 15 average of 31%) but also for a very low percentage (13%) of those tending to disagree.
Has the EYPD improved access to employment for people with intellectual disabilities?

Once again, there is noticeable divergence of opinion which tends to show that EU citizens think that the EYPD has had a stronger influence on improving aspects of the lives of people with physical disabilities rather than of those whose disabilities were of an intellectual nature.

Accordingly, while 42% of those polled across the European Union tend to agree that the EYPD has improved this form of access for those with physical disabilities, the figure again falls by 9% to 33% when the group under consideration are those with intellectual disabilities.

As always, the most positive view on the issue in this question was held in Ireland (56%) while figures of 26% and 25% were noted in Portugal and Sweden.

The ‘don’t know’ factor on this issue became the largest response category with 35% of those polled across the fifteen Member States not expressing an opinion. The UK contribution to this average was a substantial 52% which, on a net basis, made the British ‘tend to agree’ figure the third largest score from a Member State at 75% with net figures of 84% in Ireland and 76% in Austria.

Has the EYPD improved access to standard education systems for people with physical disabilities?

45% of EU15 citizens tended to agree that the EYPD had improved access to standard educational systems for people with physical disabilities. This was a sentiment held by more than half the population of Ireland (65%), Austria (59%) and Greece, Spain and Luxembourg (52%).

Less convinced were the citizens of Portugal and Denmark where this view was held by only 36% of those polled.

The level of ‘don’t knows’ was 33% on this issue and, a very high proportion (49%) of the UK poll had no opinion on this.

Has the EYPD increased understanding of issues of physical disability?

On average, more than half of the EU15 sample taking part in this survey felt that the EYPD had increased people’s understanding of physical disability issues.

In Ireland, host of the Special Olympics International Summer Games, this sentiment was felt by more than three-quarters (78%) of those polled and figures in excess of 60% were noted in Austria (67%), Luxembourg (66%) and Finland (63%).

The UK was the country with the highest level of ‘don’t knows’ (45%) compared with an EU15 average of 29% and also was the Member State where the smallest percentage (41%) tended to agree on this point.
Has the EYPD increased understanding of intellectual disability issues?

There were fewer people who tended to agree that the EYPD had increased the understanding of intellectual disabilities compared with a similar proposition relating to physical disabilities with figures of 45% and 51% respectively.

The highest figures were noted in Ireland (71%), Luxembourg (60%) and Austria (59%).

The lowest number of people tending to agree with the proposition was to be found in the UK (34%). The UK also had by far the highest percentage of ‘don’t knows’ with half those polled (50%) not expressing an opinion compared with an EU15 average of 32% and figures as low as 15% in Luxembourg and 18% in Ireland.

Has the EYPD increased media coverage of physical disability issues?

It was no surprise that Irish opinion was strongly in support of this statement (78%) with only 8% tending to disagree, compared with an EU15 average of 22% and figures as high as 27% in both the Netherlands and Sweden.

Amongst those countries showing a higher than average level of agreement with this statement were citizens in Luxembourg and Austrians, together with 59% of Spaniards.

Has the EYPD increased media coverage of intellectual disability issues?

As has been seen on all issues where comparisons are made between the figures relating to intellectual and physical disabilities, there is a difference (usually in the region of five percentage points) in people’s reactions to these issues.

Accordingly, only 45% of EU15 citizens believed that the EYPD had increased media coverage of intellectual disability issues compared with 51% when the issue related to physical disability.

Against this 45% average, in addition to the group of three (Ireland, Austria and Luxembourg) who consistently have a positive/convinced attitude on these issues, there were noticeably higher than average figures from Spain (57%).

This proposition also produced a regional variation in the German statistics with this belief being supported by 51% of East Germans but only 44% of West Germans.

The UK figures showed the lowest percentage of those tending to agree (32%) and the highest levels of ‘don’t knows’ with 46% of those polled taking this view.

The Swedes (31%) and the Dutch (32%) were the countries where the level of disagreement was noticeably higher than the EU15 average of 25%.

Belief in disabled people’s rights to a job

94% of the Finnish poll believed that people with disabilities had the same legal right as anyone else to a job and across the European Union this was a view also held by 85% of those polled.

The sole country where the figure was less than 80% was Austria where only 75% of those polled held this belief.
The low level of awareness which distinguished the UK responses in the previous question and produced ‘don’t know’ factors as high as 51% from that country’s poll has disappeared in this question.

This is perhaps because the response is based upon personal feeling or actual differences in levels of national legislation in this area.

**Belief in disabled people’s rights to training**

The belief that people with disabilities had the same legal right as anyone else to take part in training gained the support of 87% of the poll across the European Union.

In Finland, this figure was 97%, while at the other end of the scale the Iberian figures were slightly lower with 81% in Spain and 82% in Portugal. The lowest figure in the EU was the 78% recorded in Austria.

These last three mentioned countries were also the only countries with double-digit figures amongst those who did not believe that people with disabilities have the same legal right as anybody else to take part in training.

**Are there European laws against discrimination in the workplace on the grounds of disability?**

Despite the fact that nearly one out three (30%) of EU15 citizens did not know whether this European legislation existed, amongst those actually expressing an opinion, 91% of those polled believed these laws existed. This net figure reaches 97% in Ireland where the ‘don’t know’ figure, although still attaining 21%, is one of the lowest in the Union.

A relatively high percentage of the Portuguese poll (13%) thought that there was no European legislation against discrimination in this area.

**Do employers make the necessary changes in the workplace to employ disabled people?**

There was a wide variety of responses amongst those making up the 43% average of EU15 citizens who believe that, in general, employers made the necessary changes in the workplace to employ disabled people, ranging from 22% in Portugal and 27% in Belgium to 59% in Luxembourg and 57% in Ireland.

Similar large variations in numbers were noted amongst those taking the contrary view who did not believe that employers made these changes. While this was a view held, on average, by 35% of EU citizens, it was a view only subscribed to by 26% of the Irish and 30% of Germans and Luxembourgers.

However, the Portuguese, the Danes, the Greeks and Finns all had more than half of their sample believing that this was not the situation and figures of 63%, 58% and 54% respectively were recorded in these countries.

High ‘don’t know’ figures were recorded in Spain and Italy.
Working in sheltered workshops

Hidden within the EU15 average of 53%, was a marked polarity of views on this issue as to whether people with severe physical or intellectual disabilities should only work in sheltered workshops. While only 32% of the UK poll subscribed to this view, this figure was some forty percentage points less than the Greek figure of 72%.

Figures of 65% or more were noted in France, Austria, Portugal and Luxembourg.

Variation in attitude was also a strong feature on a country-by-country basis when analysing the numbers of EU citizens who believed that people with severe intellectual or physical disabilities should not be limited to working only in sheltered workshops.

While this average figure across the EU15 was 29%, its constituent parts ranged from 16% in Greece to more than half (53%) of the Danes polled.

This wide spread of EU opinion was further reflected in the ‘don’t know’ figures which ranged from the 8% found in Luxembourg to the 25% in Spain.

Knowledge of people with a long-lasting illness, disability or infirmity that limits their activities in any way

In the 2003 survey, there were fewer people who did not know anyone who had a long-lasting illness, disability or infirmity limiting their activities in any way, than there were in the previous 2000 survey.

While in 2000, 40% of those polled did not know anyone who fitted this description, the figure had fallen to 35% in the 2003 poll so 12% more people now knew people in this category.

There was a marked increase in the number of respondents’ acquaintances with any of these conditions and this group increased from 20% to 26% across the European Union with particularly large increases seen in Germany (24% to 30%), Spain (22% to 35%), Luxembourg (19% to 29%) and Portugal (13% to 25%). This is now the largest area of contact.

While a slight increase from 16% to 17% was seen across the EU15 for the incidence of these conditions amongst friends, there was an interesting decrease in the figures relating to family members which fell from 25% to 22% across the Union.

Awareness of the various types of disabilities

This question looks in detail at 21 medical conditions which can cause disabilities and assesses people’s awareness/knowledge of them. These range from visual impairments through skeletal impairments to head injury and loss of limbs and a full list and analysis is given in the Main Report. Nuances in the translation of the question into different languages in different Member States create a relatively wide spectrum of opinion on a country-by-country basis.

As this subject relates to a level of knowledge and awareness of a multitude of medical conditions, a factor which produces a highly consistent level of results on a socio-demographic basis is the respondents’ level of education which itself has a seemingly strong correlation with income and occupation.

Accordingly, the general awareness level of a well-paid, well-educated manager will be considerably higher than that of a lowly paid manual worker with a low level of education.
How many disabled people there are in your country?

The final question assesses people’s estimates as to how many disabled people there are in their country.

This question was posed to respondents after they had been asked specific questions relating to their levels of awareness of twenty-one specifically defined disabilities.

It is therefore perhaps unsurprising with a prompt list of this dimension and a seven-choice option that respondents’ ability to make an accurate estimate of the percentage of people in their country affected by any one of these conditions was compromised and a wide variety of answers were given.

Respondents’ choices included ‘don’t know’ as well as percentage bands as to what proportion of their country’s population they believed had a disability of any kind. Looking for broad patterns within these figures, four large groups emerge – the ‘don’t knows’, 5%-9%, 10%-14% and 20% or more. These, in 2003, accounted for 76% of the total poll.

20% of EU15 citizens chose the option of saying that they did not know and this ‘don’t know’ factor was particularly high in Spain (44%), Portugal (38%) and Greece (34%).

The Dutch, Swedes, Danes, Finns and Germans, however, were all relatively confident about estimating the percentage in their respective countries and in none of these five states did the ‘don’t know’ factor exceed 10%.

The largest choice of EU15 citizens was made by the 22% who believed that the proportion of citizens in their country with a disability was 20% or more. Once again, this average statistic conceals a wide variety of figures ranging from 8% in Spain to 35% in the Netherlands and Sweden and 42% in the UK.

Across the European Union, 17% of those polled believed that the percentage of their citizens with a disability of any kind was a figure between 5% and 9%. Higher than average figures were seen in this group from Luxembourg (26%) and Germany, France and Finland which all recorded figures of 21%.

A further 17% of EU citizens estimated the percentage of their citizens with a disability of any kind to be in the range of 10% to 14%. Once again, this average figure’s constituent data ranged from 11% in Portugal and 12% in Spain to 22% in Finland.