THE EUROPEAN YEAR OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES 2003

Fieldwork: September 2003
Publication: February 2004

HIGHLIGHTS

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.
European Year of People with Disabilities

Highlights

This survey, undertaken within the framework of Eurobarometer 60.0 between 1 and 30 September 2003, looks at EU citizens’ views about disabilities in the context of 2003, the European Year of People with Disabilities (EYPD). Among other things, people were asked about their awareness of the EYPD and its purpose, whether it had improved the access of disabled people to education, employment, and services, as well as whether it had contributed to increased understanding and media coverage of disability issues. All the people who participated in this study are European Union nationals, aged 15 years or over, and reside in a European Union member country.

Summary: By September 2003 (after just nine months since the launch of this initiative), one in three of EU citizens was already aware that 2003 was the European Year of People with Disabilities. The vast majority of people had learnt of the EYPD by means of the media and many believed that the Year had contributed to informing people about difficulties faced by people with disabilities in their daily life. Just over half those polled felt that the EYPD had paved the way towards obtaining the same rights for people with disabilities, although fewer people agreed that it had increased understanding of intellectual disabilities compared with physical disabilities.

Throughout this survey, it will become increasingly apparent that fundamental variations in attitude are usually based upon a country-by-country view, rather than on 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.

Awareness of European Year of People with Disabilities (EYPD)

- By September 2003 (i.e. just after nine months of this initiative), one in three (33%) of European Union citizens was aware of the EYPD.

- Amongst this group who were aware that 2003 was EYPD, awareness reached 73% of Irish, 70% of Luxembourg and 55% of Austrians citizens. At the other end of the scale was just 21% of the UK poll.

- Throughout this report, the Irish figures will show a very high level of awareness which is 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.

Sources of information about the EYPD

- By far the most important source of information about the EYPD was the media - cited by an average of 81% of those polled across the EU15.
Purpose of the EYPD

- More than half (53%) of EU citizens correctly believed that the purpose of the EYPD was to increase understanding on disability issues. This belief was held by 80% of Swedes and 72% of citizens in 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 an EU-wide basis, only 25% believed that the purpose of the EYPD was fund-raising for disabled people. This view was more prevalent in France (36%).

- 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%).

Informing people about living with disabilities

- 61% of EU15 citizens believed that the EYPD had contributed to informing people about difficulties faced by people with disabilities in their daily life. 81% of Irish and Luxembourgish citizens agreed with the statement compared with just 45% in the UK.

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.

Improved access for physically disabled people to public places (buildings and transport)

- Less than half (48%) of the EU poll tended to agree that this benefit to physically disabled people had been caused by 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, 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.
Access to services for **physically** disabled people

- 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%.

Access to services for **intellectually** disabled people

- While 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 concerned.

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. Irish support level for this reached 62%.

Access to employment for people with **intellectual** disabilities

- There is noticeable divergence of opinion which tends to show that the EYPD has had a stronger influence on improving aspects of the lives of people with physical disabilities rather than with intellectual disabilities.

- 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.

- 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.

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%).

**Increased understanding of physical disability issues**

- 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%).
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.

Increased media coverage of physical disability issues

- Irish opinion was strongly in support of this statement (78%) compared with an EU average of 57%.

Increased media coverage of intellectual disability issues

- 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.

Rights to jobs

- 85% of the EU15 poll and 94% of the Finnish poll believed that people with disabilities had the same legal right as anyone else to a job.

Rights to training

- 87% of EU citizens believed that people with disabilities had the same legal right as anyone else to take part in training.

European laws against discrimination in the workplace on the grounds of disability

- Despite the fact that nearly one in 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.

Employers make the necessary changes in the workplace to employ disabled people

- Contributing to the 43% average of EU15 citizens believing that, in general, employers made the necessary changes in the workplace to employ disabled people was a wide variety of responses ranging from 22% in Portugal and 27% in Belgium to 59% in Luxembourg and 57% in Ireland.

Working in sheltered workshops

- Hidden within the EU15 average of 53% was a marked polarity of views on the 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 less than half of the Greek figure of 72%.
Knowledge of people with a long-lasting illness, disability or infirmity that limits their activities in any way

- 64% of EU15 citizens personally knew people who had a long-lasting illness, disability or infirmity that limits their activities in some way.

Awareness of the various types of disabilities

- This question looks in detail at 21 medical conditions which can cause disabilities or impairments and assesses people’s awareness/knowledge of them. These range from visual impairments through skeletal impairments to head injury and loss of limbs. 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.