



European Day of People with Disabilities 2008

Acting locally for a society for all

Report

Brussels, 1 and 2 December 2008



Note: some words are underlined in this document.
These are words which could be hard to understand.



We explain these words
in the attached document called “Dictionary”.

The conference has been organised
by the Unit “Inclusion of People with disabilities”
of the European Commission.



This Unit is part of the Directorate General for Employment,
Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities.

The European Commission does not necessarily agree
with what is written in this brochure.

This brochure has been written by Helen Kerrison.
She is the director of a company called “Insight in Business”.



This text has been written in January 2009.

It has been translated into easy-to-read by Inclusion Europe.



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This brochure and more information
are available on the website of the European Union: <http://europa.eu>



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Summary

Background

In 1992, the United Nations decided that the 3 December of each year would be the International Day of Disabled People.



The European Union decided to do this as well. So the 3 December is also the European Day of Disabled People.



Every year, the European Commission organises a conference to celebrate this important day. They do this with European disability organisations like the European Disability Forum.



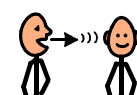
These conferences mostly talk about disability policies. They are meant for



- policy makers,
- people with disabilities,
- decision makers
- and experts in the field of disability.

The aims of these conferences are:

- to give an opportunity to exchange information and good practice,
- to allow networking among people from the disability policy field.



Every 2 years, the European Commission writes an important report. This is a report on the situation of all people with disabilities in every country of the European Union. The conclusions of the conferences on 1 and 2 December 2008 will be added to this report.



Time for local action

The United Nations wrote a new Convention on the Rights of Disabled People. This is a very important document.



It says that disabled people have the same rights as anybody else.

Disabled people must be included in the society. They have the right

- to have a job,
- to do their own shopping,
- to take public transport,
- to get support from the government.



If we want inclusion to become a reality, we have to work on it also at local level.



Disabled people should not face discrimination anymore.

They should be listened to when new laws are written.



It is up to the local and national decision-makers to make sure that this happens.



But the European Union can help them.

For example, the European Union gives money for local projects. The European Union does this through a programme called “the European Structural Funds”.



Moreover, the European Union makes sure that all project financed by this programme are accessible for all disabled people.

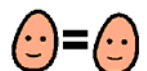


Programme overview

The conference has 3 main sessions.

1. Disability rights through mainstreaming at local level: putting the UN Convention into practice

When we speak about mainstreaming it means that people with disability use the same services and structures as anybody else.



This session 1 looked into “how to do that”. How to make sure that the policies include disabled people?



Several projects were presented.
They showed:



- How a city can be made accessible for all and how this accessibility gives a better quality of life to everyone.
- What are the important things for a good mainstreaming:
 - the participation of people with disabilities in policies
 - the accessibility of these policies
 - the financial support
 - that decision-makers are willing to change things for a better life
- The importance of training disabled people so they are able to talk with politicians. Only then will the governments and the disability organisations understand each other.



2. Involving disabled people in all decisions affecting them

When people discuss about disability policy, they should always do this together with disabled people.



This is how the UN Convention was written. The United Nations listened to the organisations of disabled people before writing this important document.



This should be done also at local level. There are examples of good practice on how local authorities can work together with organisations of disabled people.



A programme of the European Union gives money for local project. It is called the European Structural Funds. All projects supported by this programme must be accessible for people with disabilities.



To make sure that this happens, disabled people are working in some regional and local committees. These committees checking the projects to make sure they are accessible.

3. From the European Union to local community and from local community to the European Union

The European Commission can give real support to local authorities. Between 2004 and 2006, the European Commission gave money for a lot of projects.



Many of these projects helped local authorities in their work of involving disabled people in all areas of life.

For example, there has been a project on how to make tourism more accessible for disabled people.

The European Union also writes some important document. For examples in terms of transport, accessibility or employment. Then the towns and villages can use these documents to make things better in their region.



What happened and what was said

Opening session

3 people introduced the conference:

- Mr Vladimir Spidla, European Commission
- Mr Yannis Vardakastanis, European Disability Forum (EDF)
- Ms Valérie Létard, French Ministry



Mr Spidla explained what the European Commission is doing to give a good life to disabled people.

He gave the example of the European Structural funds which finances many projects for disabled people.

He also spoke about the importance

- of the UN Convention
- of the new European law for non-discrimination
- and of the new programme of the European Commission which will run from 2011 until 2020.



Mr Vardakastanis spoke about the importance for disabled people of actions at local level.

He also spoke about the importance of involving them in all decisions that concern them.

This is written in the UN Convention in the Article 4.



Ms Létard said that France wants to fight against discrimination.

She said that this fight is also important at local level.

France organised many congresses where good practices were shared

- about how to work with UN Convention
- about how to better include disabled people in employment
- about good education for disabled children

But Ms Létard also said that good practices exist in other countries. Countries need to work together for a better life for disabled people.



Session to explain the main topics of the conference

2 people spoke during this session:

- Ms Ana Pelaez Narvaez,
from the Spanish National Organisation for the Blind
- Mr Rudolf Niessler, from the European Commission

Ms Pelaez spoke about the UN Convention.

She said how important this document is.

All disability organisations should work on this document, including the ones at local level.

She gave the example of Spain.

Disability organisations worked with the Disability Council on how to best translate this Convention into Spanish.

Mr Niessler said that it is important that regional policies meet the needs of people with disabilities.

Projects financed by the European Structural Funds have to be accessible for all.

The European Commission wrote a tool-kit about this.

This should help the staff of the Structural Funds to do that.



Plenary session 1:

Disability rights through mainstreaming at local level: putting the UN Convention into practice

3 people spoke about this topic at the conference.
Then there was a discussion with the participants.

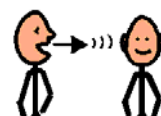
From those 3 speeches and the discussion,
we can draw some conclusions.

1. The European Union wants
to protect people with disabilities against discrimination.
To do this, the EU wrote for example some laws
against discrimination of disabled people.
2. The UN Convention is an important document
in the fight against discrimination.



3. The European Union will have a role to play in making sure that each European country put this Convention in practice.

4. All decision-makers must talk with disability organisations. This is written in the UN Convention.



5. Policies should be written once the discussions with disability organisations have taken place. At European level, there is also a need to talk with local level before writing new policies.



6. It is very important to make sure that disabled people know about their rights. It is very important to make sure they know about the new Convention.



7. Accessibility for all is still a problem because there are still many things which are not accessible for disabled people.



8. Another problem is to make sure that policies meet the needs of all people with disabilities.

Recommendations from participants:

- Mainstreaming must be done at all level: European, regional, national and local.
- Mainstreaming should be promoted everywhere. People should also check that mainstreaming is a reality in all areas.
- Governments should promise to always discuss with disability organisations before writing new policies.
- This should also be the case at local level.
- Conferences and events are good places to share best practices. The European Commission, national governments, local authorities and disability organisations should organise more things like these.



Plenary session 2: Involving people with disabilities in all decisions affecting them

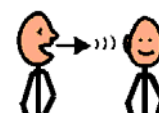


3 people spoke about this topic at the conference.
Then there was a discussion with the participants.



From those 3 speeches and the discussion,
we can draw some conclusions.

1. Decision-makers must listen to people with disabilities.
And people with disabilities must be supported
to say what they think.
They should get some money and personal assistants
to be able to say what they think.
2. There are key things to make good discussions:
 - People should be trained
 - People should be sharing information
 - People should know about their rights
 - People should get some money to take part,
for example thanks to the European Structural Funds
3. Training of the staff of local administration
like the town hall or the local social services
is also very important.
4. Sharing information
and making sure that the information is accessible
is also very important.



Recommendations from participants:

- People with disabilities should have a clear role
in creating policies at local and regional level.

End of first day – close of conference

Mr Moore said that Human Rights in general are important. He knows that many rights are still not respected in the EU, especially for people with disabilities.

This is why it is good to have the new UN Convention.

And this is why the European Commission is working on a new law against discrimination.

He also thinks that disabled people should be more listened to.



Plenary session 3: From EU to local community and from local community to EU

4 people spoke about this topic at the conference. Then there was a discussion with the participants.



From those 4 speeches and the discussion, we can draw some conclusions.

1. European laws are useful for a better integration of people with disabilities, even at local level.



2. The European Commission gives 2 kinds of support to local level:

- Help in writing new policies
- Help with the money, thanks to the European Structural Funds



3. There are still many negative attitudes towards disabled people.

4. People with disabilities need to be stronger. They need training. They have to be empowered.



Recommendations from participants:

- It is good that the EU gives money to projects. But the EU needs to make sure that all these projects are fully accessible.
- Some money should be given to disability organisations to help people with disabilities to become stronger.



Conference closing

2 people spoke at the conference closing:

- Mr John Patrick Clarke, European Disability Forum (EDF)
- Mr Johan ten Geuzendam, European Commission



Mr Clarke repeated how important the Convention is.

But he also said that

the sharing of information and of good practices is important as well.

He insisted on the importance

of making the disability organisations stronger.

And on the importance of the money they should get to be able to take part in the development of new policies.

There will be soon a new Disability Action Plan for European countries.

This should be used as a good tool to make the life of disabled people better.



Mr ten Geuzendam said that

links between local and European level are important.

He summarised some key ideas which came out of the conference:

- Making disabled people stronger
- Listening to them
- Making other people know about the needs and wishes of disabled people



Mr ten Geuzendam said that society must do everything possible for people with disabilities to be included.

The European Commission wants

the rights of people with disabilities to be respected.

He called on participants of the conference

to speak with their national government to stop discrimination.

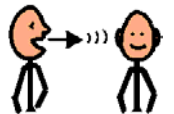
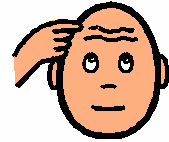


Key recommendations from the conference

There are key recommendations coming out from all the speeches and all the discussions with the participants. These recommendations concern 4 different topics:

1. Mainstreaming

- Mainstreaming is very important. Disability issues must not be forgotten. People must think about disabled people when they write new policies. This is important in all areas of life. And it is even more important in the areas like
 - Accessibility
 - Education
 - Training
 - Social services
- Important activities around mainstreaming should be promoted. For example
 - Sharing information and best practices
 - Making sure disabled people can talk with politicians
 - Making disability organisations stronger
 - Making sure other people know about the needs and wishes of disabled people
- Discussions between disability organisations and decision-maker should not happen just once. These discussions should be seen as something important which will from now on always exist in the future.



2. Inclusive policies

- Disabled people and politicians should understand each other. Therefore, they should discuss a lot with each other. Discussion is the key thing to develop inclusive policies at local level.

3. Consultation

- All people should take part in the discussions. People with disabilities themselves, of course, but also organisations and parents associations working with people with disabilities.
- There are many good things happening around Europe. It is important that people know about these things and try to make these good things happen in their country as well. So sharing information and good practices is important. This can be done for example at conferences and events.



4. Funding

- Money of the European Union should only go to project which fully respect the UN Convention.
- Some money should be given to disability organisations so they can get stronger and be involved in the discussions with politicians.

