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3 - 4 December 2018

European Day of Persons with Disabilities



CONFERENCE REPORT

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Social Europe



On 3-4 December 2018, the annual conference celebrating the European Day of Persons with Disabilities (EDPD), organised by the European Commission together with the European Disability Forum (EDF), took place in Brussels, Belgium.

Similarly to previous years, the event brought together politicians, high-level experts and self-advocates to discuss the challenges, solutions and projects that are being implemented to improve the lives of persons with disabilities. This was the first year that the European Union (EU) and all Member States ratified the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, or the Convention), following Ireland's ratification of the Convention earlier this year. The EDPD is part of the EU's wider efforts to promote the mainstreaming of disability issues and to raise awareness of the everyday challenges faced by persons with disabilities. This year, the EDPD focused on three important topics:

- the potential shape of the next European Disability Strategy;
- the possible ways to implement a new European Disability Strategy, notably in the context of the next Multiannual Financial Framework;
- and the accessibility of European cultural heritage to persons with disabilities.

This report summarises the main points and challenges that were highlighted during the European Day of Persons with Disabilities conference by the different speakers and participants.

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European Day of Persons with Disabilities

3 - 4 December 2018

Executive summary

This year's conference celebrating the European Day of Persons with Disabilities (EDPD) brought together politicians, high-level experts and self-advocates from European Union (EU) Member States to discuss the challenges and solutions to improve the lives of persons with disabilities across the Union. Panellists and delegates highlighted that "there is still a lot to be done" to implement the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, or the Convention), but it was also a day to celebrate what we have achieved so far to ensure the full participation of persons with disabilities in our societies.

2018 is the first year that the EU and all Member States ratified the UN CRPD. Following political agreement, the European Accessibility Act will enter into force in 2019 and persons with disabilities will have better access to a range of goods and services. Together with the Audio-Visual Media Services Directive, in which accessibility provisions were also introduced, it is an important step towards an inclusive and accessible EU. As Joost Korte, Director General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion said, the Accessibility Act should be considered as the first stone of a house that we will keep on building together.

In 2019, the European Commission will evaluate the implementation of the current European Disability Strategy and will launch a broad consultation to gather ideas for the shape and content of a potential future Strategy. The UN CRPD, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the European Pillar of Social Rights will continue to guide future disability policies at EU level. Organisers of the EDPD wanted to hear what persons with disabilities and self-advocates feel are the most important areas that should be covered in a potential future European Disability Strategy. Among many important areas; social inclusion, independent living, freedom of movement and social security coordination, accessibility and universal design, employment and vocational training were mentioned. Education is another important area, as EU exchange and mobility programmes should support inclusive education and equal opportunities for young persons with disabilities to participate in Erasmus+, DiscoverEU, and the Solidarity Corps. These programmes provide great opportunities for young people, and those with disabilities should be provided with accessible information, personalised support and reasonable accommodation to benefit from these programmes on an equal basis with others.

The 2018 EDPD gave the first opportunity for participants to discuss not only the potential shape of the prospective European Disability Strategy, but also possible ways of implementation, such as in the context of the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). The proposed funding for the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) shows that the European Union is fully committed to a Social Europe and aims to remove obstacles to social inclusion for persons with disabilities in line with the obligations of the UN CRPD and with respect to EU competencies. Furthermore, other funding instruments (e.g. the Justice, Rights and Values Fund) should continue funding important projects to improve equality and ensure the rights of persons with disabilities across the EU. An explicit aim of the next proposal for the MFF is to make EU funds simpler and more efficient for Managing Authorities and for beneficiaries. The European Commission is committed to making Social Europe a reality through the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, and to supporting the capacity-building of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) active in the fields of social inclusion for marginalised groups, including those working for and with persons with disabilities.

In the context of the 2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage, there was a timely discussion at the EDPD on how to make cultural heritage accessible to persons with disabilities in the EU. While in general we still have a long way to go to ensure full accessibility of the cultural wealth of the Union, great progress is being made in some places. Delegates heard about the impressive achievements of the City of Salzburg, a World Heritage Site, and the Louvre Museum. The new Spanish technical standard "Accessibility of Immovable Cultural Heritage" shows that it is possible to make cultural heritage accessible, but commitment, knowledge, and consensus are needed to make it happen.

Day 1

OPENING PANEL

Speakers

- **Jooste Korte**, Director General, Directorate-General for Employment (DG EMPL), European Commission
- **Rodolfo Cattani**, Member of the Executive Committee, European Disability Forum
- **Max Rubisch**, Head of the Disability Law and Disability Policy Division, Austrian Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection

Emmanuelle Grange, Head of the Disability and Inclusion Unit, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion at the European Commission warmly welcomed the delegates of the 2018 European Day of Persons with Disabilities conference. This year again, the European Commission tried to further improve the accessibility of the conference by providing sign language interpretation, audio description, a velotypist, an easy-to-understand illustrator and accessibility cards, as well as language interpretation into five languages. Furthermore, an exhibition of accessible games was organised in the lobby, where participants could also interact with a robot called PACA and test accessible voting booths to cast a virtual vote ahead of the 2019 European elections.

Joost Korte, Director General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion at the European Commission, underlined in his welcoming words that the EDPD aims to contribute to **building an inclusive Europe that leaves no one behind**. Therefore, it remains a key annual event for the European Commission to raise awareness of the challenges faced by persons with disabilities. Mr Korte summarised the most important achievements of 2018 as part of the implementation of the UN CRPD at EU level.

In November 2018, after three years of negotiations, the European Parliament, the Council of the EU and the European Commission reached a provisional agreement on the **European Accessibility Act (EAA)**. While several non-governmental organisations raised concerns that the act stays below their expectations, this agreement is an essential step towards a **more inclusive and accessible European Union**. It is foreseen that the Directive will be adopted before the 2019 European Parliament election and more than 120 million Europeans are expected to benefit from this piece of legislation in the coming years. The EAA will ensure that **phones, computers, payment terminals, banking services, audio-visual media, e-books and e-commerce will be accessible across the EU**, as well as the '112' emergency telephone number and electronic communication in general. Elements of public procurement and the built environment are also covered in the future legislation.

As Mr Korte emphasised, the Accessibility Act can be a catalyst to make even more products and services accessible in the future. It will show people that **accessibility and universal design are useful for everybody and are economically profitable**.





“Let’s consider the current text of the European Accessibility Act as the first stone of a house that we will keep on building together”.

Joost Korte
Director General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion at the European Commission

It means that not only all citizens, but also businesses will benefit from the accessibility requirements when they place their products on the internal market. The Director-General thanked all those stakeholders who worked hard to make the act a reality, with special regard to the Estonian and Austrian Presidencies of the Council of the EU for their achievements in the Council at different steps of the process; Marianne Thyssen, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility for her dedication; as well as the European disability movement for sharing their expertise during the legislative process.

“Let’s consider the current text of the European Accessibility Act as the first stone of a house that we will keep on building together.” – Joost Korte

A year after the proclamation of the **European Pillar of Social Rights**, it is time to implement this joint commitment made by public authorities, social partners and NGOs, reminded Joost Korte. Principle 17 of the Pillar, on the inclusion of persons with disabilities, will be implemented at EU level through the European Semester, EU legislation (e.g. the European Accessibility Act) and funding (e.g. European Social Fund Plus). Nevertheless, the European Commission counts on Member States and civil society to contribute to the full realisation of this principle at all levels.

Rodolfo Cattani, Member of the Executive Committee of the European Disability Forum (EDF) acknowledged achievements in protecting the rights of persons with disabilities in the EU since the last EDPD conference in 2017. Now that all EU Member States have ratified the UN CRPD, all governments must incorporate the provisions of the Convention in their legal framework and develop comprehensive strategies to implement the UN CRPD. When it comes to the EU level, the European Disability Forum is calling for a **comprehensive strategy for the implementation in the period 2020–2030**, following the recommendations made by the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities back in 2015. The rights and perspectives of women and children with disabilities among other specific groups at risk of discrimination should be mainstreamed throughout that strategy. Mr Cattani emphasised that the **future European Disability Strategy should be integrated in the next Multiannual Financial Framework**, because EU funding plays a key role in creating UN CRPD-compliant services and structures in the Member States. The EDF is closely following the upcoming negotiations on the future European Social Fund, European Regional Development Fund, the Common Provisions Regulation, Erasmus+ and the regulation establishing the European Rights and Values programme.

In line with the well-known motto of the disability movement, “Nothing about us without us!” and the relevant articles of the Convention (Articles 4.3 and 33.3), persons with disabilities want to participate

in a meaningful way in policy and decision-making processes concerning their lives. EDF suggests that the EU set up a **structured dialogue with the organisations representing persons with disabilities** in all EU decision-making processes with a specific budget to ensure their effective involvement.

After campaigning for a **European Accessibility Act** for over ten years, the outcome of the negotiations was rather disappointing for the EDF. Important areas, such as the built environment, transport and public procurement, were left out of the mandatory clauses of the act. Mr Cattani reminded participants that besides persons with disabilities, the growing ageing population will also directly benefit from the Accessibility Act. It is difficult for the organisations representing persons with disabilities to understand Member States’ reluctance to adopt a more ambitious act and create a fully accessible single market. Nevertheless, by complementing other recently adopted EU Directives on information and communication technologies with specific provisions on accessible audio-visual media, the EAA will bring positive change to the lives of millions of Europeans.

With the **European Parliament** elections taking place in May, 2019 will be a crucial milestone for the European Union and its citizens. Mr Cattani highlighted that **many persons with disabilities are still deprived of the right to vote and to stand for election**. EDF has launched a petition “Elections for all” and is calling on all citizens and allies of the disability movement to sign and support this campaign.

Finally, Mr Cattani welcomed the efforts of the European Commission to promote cultural initiatives that aim to reinforce attitudes of inclusiveness, solidarity and non-discrimination. It is important to remember that persons with disabilities were segregated and discriminated against for centuries and have only been recognised as equal citizens in recent years. Therefore, EDF strongly believes in the motto **‘United in diversity’**, and considers diversity a value, not a threat.

“The European Disability Forum will continue to fight for the values enshrined in the European Treaties and in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities because we still believe in the European Dream.” – Rodolfo Cattani

Max Rubisch, Head of the Disability Law and Disability Policy Division at the Austrian Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection, took the floor on behalf of the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. He conveyed the greetings of Ms Beate Hartinger-Klein, Federal Minister for Social Affairs.

The Austrian Presidency hosted several events aimed at persons with disabilities, and one of the thematic priorities of the Presidency was the **impact of digitalisation on the world of work** – a particularly relevant topic for persons with disabilities. The Presidency worked closely with European disability organisations, for instance by supporting the ‘Employment for all’ conference organised by the European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD) on 27 September 2018 in Vienna. An important outcome of this event was the adoption of the Vienna Declaration on inclusivity in the labour market.

Furthermore, on 15-16 November 2018, the Austrian Presidency hosted the **first meeting of Ombudspersons for Persons with Disabilities in Europe**, where they discussed how to address challenges faced by persons with disabilities in accessing education, employment and vocational education training (VET) to ensure that the inclusion of persons with disabilities will be considered in shaping future EU policies.

Mr Rubisch, who was part of the team negotiating the **European Accessibility Act** for the Presidency, underlined the importance of the EAA from two main aspects:

1. Improving the social inclusion of persons with disabilities: the act is part of the implementation of Articles 9 (‘Accessibility’) and 19 (‘Living independently and being included in the community’) of the UN CRPD into EU law to ensure the full participation of persons with disabilities in society;

2. Making the internal market more barrier-free for enterprises: the act will require the same accessibility standards for a list of important goods and services (e.g. banking services, electronic books, electronic communication etc.) that circulate in the EU internal market, meaning that industry, including manufacturers, importers and traders will all benefit from the act.

He thanked all previous EU Presidencies who worked on the file, as well as the disability movement, the European Parliament, the European Commission, the Secretary-General of the Council of the EU and the legal service for their dedicated contribution throughout the legislative procedure. The EAA is a complex, technical Directive and Member States had fears about the costs and potentially negative implications of the act on the market. While the organisations of persons with disabilities expected more from this Directive, Mr Rubisch described the final text of the Accessibility Act as the **best political compromise that could be achieved under the given circumstances to ensure significant improvement in the living conditions of persons with disabilities.**



PANEL ONE

The path towards the new European Disability Strategy

Moderator

Catherine Naughton, Director, European Disability Forum

Speakers:

- **MEP Helga Stevens**, Co-Chair, Disability Intergroup, European Parliament
- **Emmanuelle Grange**, Head of the Disability and Inclusion Unit, DG EMPL, European Commission
- **Francesca Sbianchi**, Member of the Executive Committee, European Youth Committee
- **Humberto Insolera**, Member of the Executive Committee, European Youth Committee
- **Dominique de Marné**, Member of the Executive Committee, European Youth Committee
- **Francisco J. Trigueros Molina**, Vice-President, European Deafblind Union
- **Mihaela Ivanova**, Self-advocate, Lumos

Part 1

MEP Helga Stevens, Co-chair of the Disability Intergroup and the first deaf female member of the European Parliament, was pleased to see hundreds of delegates celebrating the European Day of Persons with Disabilities this year. Ms Stevens opened her speech by emphasising that with the ratification of the UN CRPD by Ireland, **all EU Member States, as well the EU itself, have legal obligations to implement the Convention.** While the UN CRPD does not create any new rights, it clarifies that persons with disabilities should enjoy the rights guaranteed by earlier UN Human Rights Treaties. Ms Stevens reminded all present that in 2015 the EU received recommendations from the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on how to implement the Convention at EU level. Yet, **a comprehensive legal review to harmonise EU law with the provisions of the UN CRPD** has not taken place, nor has the Optional Protocol to the Convention been ratified by the EU.

As Rapporteur of the Employment Committee's mid-term report on the 2010-2020 European Disability Strategy, Ms Stevens presented the European Parliament (EP)'s views on the progress made in the eight areas covered in the Strategy:

Furthermore, she underlined the responsibility of EU institutions in light of the UN Committee's recommendations to uphold the rights of persons with disabilities. The EP report observed that persons with disabilities still face **numerous barriers to freedom of movement, or other fundamental EU citizenship rights.** This situation is largely caused by the lack of mainstreaming the needs of persons with disabilities across all relevant EU policies. For example, deaf persons are provided with a certain number of hours of sign language interpretation in Belgium, but if they wanted to work in Germany, they are not necessarily entitled to the same level of support services, due to the **lack of coordination of social security systems across the EU.**

Accessibility is a prerequisite to ensure equal rights and social inclusion. Ms Stevens called upon the European Commission to set mandatory requirements on accessibility in public spaces, including the built environment. She made it very clear that the **cost of inclusion** should not to be considered as a reason to deny someone the opportunity to participate in society, as persons with disabilities can make important contributions if they are provided with the necessary support.



Accessibility



Health



Social protection



Equality



Participation



External action



Education and training



Employment

Ms Stevens suggested that the **future European Disability Strategy should be based on a comprehensive policy review, reflect the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), include indicators and benchmarks, with adequate budget and a clear timeline for implementation.** While preparing the 2020-2030 Disability Strategy, it will be necessary to carry out a broad consultation with all relevant stakeholders (European Commission, European Parliament, Council of the EU, civil society organisations) for the implementation of the Convention.

Emmanuelle Grange, Head of the Disability and Inclusion Unit, DG EMPL, explained the upcoming formal evaluation process of the current European Disability Strategy. In line with the European Commission's 'better regulation' approach, the aim of this evaluation process is to assess whether the Strategy was useful, determine whether it brought EU values to policy developments in the eight areas covered in the Strategy, and propose how to move forward based on these findings. The Roadmap explaining the content and objectives of the evaluation was open for feedback earlier in Autumn 2018 and is published on the Commission's website (www.europa.eu).

The European Commission is currently in the process of designing the evaluation, which will involve a **public consultation** by mid 2019. The results of this consultation will be published and will be discussed at the next European Day of Persons with Disabilities

conference in November 2019. Furthermore, an **objective and factual report** will be prepared by an external evaluator **by January/February 2020**, building on input from local, national and EU level stakeholders (public authorities in the disability field, social partners, organisations of persons with disabilities etc.). Based on these two outcomes, the Commission will prepare and publish a **Staff Working Document by June 2020** that will direct future policy development through the proposals submitted to the next College by the second semester of 2020. The reports will be available in accessible formats too, including easy-to-read.

While it is too early to determine the content or shape of a potential Disability Strategy, the UN CRPD, the SDGs and the European Pillar of Social Rights will guide the development of any future instrument on disability policy at EU level. Ms Grange encouraged all stakeholders to **provide ideas and contributions to the Commission on what should be the priorities of a potential Post-2020 Strategy**, but always keeping in mind the **share of competences between the EU and Member States.**

Sustainability is another important element to promote actions that are long-lasting, such as deinstitutionalisation and independent living, as Ms Grange summarised: *"It would be a 10 years' strategy, but we have to put actions in place that would last even beyond it".*



SUMMARY OF THE DEBATE

David Adams, President of the European Guide Dog Federation, reminded all participants that double discrimination is still a real challenge for many persons with disabilities in 2018. He shared the experiences of his recent trip to Berlin, where he was not allowed to sit in the hotel's breakfast room nor enter the Reichstag with a guide dog. While a lot of progress has been made to promote the rights of persons with disabilities, there is more to be done to recognise guide dogs in future policies. In her reply, Ms Stevens said that she understood the frustration about the lack of recognition of guide dogs in many EU countries, and explained that she recently signed a Charter on assistance animals to start the discussion on this very important topic.

Sari Hirvonen-Skarbö, Vice-President of the European Association of Cochlear Implant Users (EURO-CIU) raised the issue of recent cuts in the provision of speech to text interpretation services, available to hard of hearing people in Finland. While communication services are of key importance to ensure the social inclusion of persons with disabilities, they fall under the competences of Member States.

Another intervention from the Vice-President of Women to Act underlined the importance of making a gender-neutral budget when planning the future Disability Strategy.

Part 2: The views and expectations of persons with disabilities regarding the European Disability Strategy

Francesca Sbianchi, Member of the EDF Youth Committee, shared her experiences as a young person with visual impairment and highlighted the importance of **empowerment and self-determination** to be aware of one's own rights and potentials. The UN CRPD is calling for the full participation of persons with disabilities by **breaking down barriers, combatting stereotypes and raising awareness**. However, many of the provisions of the Convention have not yet been implemented, or persons with disabilities are not aware of the policies and programmes that are put in place with the intention to improve their lives. For instance, the European Commission finances several programmes that can support the social inclusion of persons with disabilities (e.g. Solidarity Corps, DiscoverEU etc.), yet there is little awareness about the availability and accessibility of those programmes.

Surprisingly, only 1% of the beneficiaries of the Erasmus+ student exchange programme are persons with disabilities. Despite **Erasmus+ explicitly promoting the inclusion of persons with disabilities**, there are many **physical and administrative barriers** that prevent them from using this programme. For example, if a blind student is provided with accessible accommodation too far from the host university in an unknown town, it can raise problems of mobility and security. Furthermore, without advance payment, students with disabilities often struggle to cover the costs of moving abroad. Due to the lack of portability of social benefits across the EU, persons with disabilities are often prevented from moving abroad. Initiatives such as the **EU Disability Card**, which ensures the recognition of disability status in another EU Member State, are helpful in overcoming these barriers. As Ms Sbianchi emphasised, **international mobility programmes should be designed in a flexible way to accommodate the specific needs of all beneficiaries**. There is now an **Inclusive Mobility Alliance** that brings together different organisations and services working on youth policy and tertiary education, that works to increase the number of students with disabilities abroad by making recommendations on how to make Erasmus+ more inclusive.

Besides education, **employment** is another important area that contributes to the economic independence of young persons with disabilities and improves their self-esteem and personal growth. The future Disability Strategy should explicitly support persons with disabilities to **access the open labour market** and be provided with reasonable accommodation.

"I am a forward-looking person and I have no fear my dreams won't come true. I hope there is a future where persons with disabilities do not have to shy away from studying abroad, because there are obstacles in their way. I am a young person who believes in Europe and in Europe's capacity to respond effectively to the needs of its citizens." – Francesca Sbianchi

Humberto Insolera, Member of the EDF Executive Committee, opened his speech by highlighting that **the next EU Disability Strategy will be an important tool to guide the implementation of the UN CRPD at EU level**. The current Strategy has proved to be useful in the implementation process so far, as the Commission has proposed several Directives, including the European Accessibility Act, or the Directive for public authorities requiring accessibility in technical specifications in the last couple of years.

Ideally, the future Disability Strategy should cover all provisions of the UN CRPD taking into account where the competences of the EU lie, with budget allocated for its implementation accompanied by a well-resourced monitoring mechanism. As other speakers mentioned, it should be aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals and the European Pillar of Social Rights. In order to realise the rights enshrined in the UN CRPD, it is important to adopt a **budget that supports the systemic implementation of the Convention**. There is a need for more coherence between the internal and external actions of the EU and its Member States, especially regarding some emergency policy areas, such as the situation of migrants and refugees with disabilities, legal capacity, or liberty. As non-discrimination is another cornerstone of the enjoyment of human rights, EDF will continue advocating for the adoption of the **Horizontal Equal Treatment Directive** that has been stalled in the Council of the EU for the past years.

In line with General Comment No.7 recently published by the UN CRPD Committee, persons with disabilities and their representative organisations should be involved in evaluating the current Disability Strategy, shaping the future Strategy, and developing all EU policies affecting their lives.

Dominique de Marné, another member of the EDF Youth Committee and a representative of Mental Health Europe noted with surprise how little mental health is mentioned in discussions on disability.



In her brief intervention, she highlighted the importance of **involving young people in discussions about disability** at EU and national level and possibly making young people one of the cross-cutting focus areas of the future Disability Strategy. **Mental health problems** often start at a young age, but remain invisible, therefore it is important to encourage young persons with mental health problems to share their stories through initiatives, like the 'Each of us' campaign launched by Mental Health Europe. Compared to previous years, Ms de Marné was glad to see more young people in the audience and encouraged them to express themselves and ask for help if needed. She explained the challenges persons with invisible disabilities face when seeking help, and the importance of making people feel comfortable. **Persons with psychosocial disabilities have different accessibility needs** and their reasonable accommodation requires different forms of support, for instance by providing quiet rooms during a busy conference.

Francisco J. Trigueros Molina, Vice-President of the European Deafblind Union explained to delegates of the EDPD that the deafblind community is heterogeneous and consists of four groups of people with distinct, unique characteristics:

- People with congenital deafness and blindness
- People who were initially deaf and acquired blindness
- People who grew up with a visual impairment and acquired deafness
- People who were afflicted by deafness and blindness at some stages of their life, following a medical intervention, or accident

Consequently, the communication is also different and includes a variety of interpretation methods (e.g. touch interpretation, tactile signing, distance sign language, whispering etc.), based on the different needs of people belonging to these groups. Due to these very different needs, and unlike in the deaf or blind communities, there is no common identity for deafblind people. This makes it even more difficult to fight against existing communicational and physical barriers. Furthermore, deafblind people need highly trained professional interpreters and guides who have the necessary skills to provide person-centred support and interpretation.

There is very little awareness of the needs of deafblind people. The European Deafblind Union has been advocating for the **recognition of deafblind people through the introduction of a legal definition** across the EU since 1999. According to some estimations, there are about 3 million deafblind people in Europe. However, definitions differ from one country to another. A common definition would foster better data collection on the number of deafblind people and help tailor policies to the specific needs of this group. Deafblind people hold offices at regional, national and international organisations and are actively participating in political life, but this is only possible with the support of professional interpreters. Yet, some EU Member States do not recognise deafblind people, or the funding available for interpretation services is limited and inadequate. One of the key objectives of the European Deafblind Union is to **ensure access to interpretation services for all deafblind people**. Finally, Mr. Trigueros Molina also raised awareness of the red and white stick that shows that someone is deafblind and improves safety and communication in daily life.

Mihaela Ivanova, a self-advocate from Lumos, who spent three years of her life in an institution, isolated from her family, gave a powerful speech about Europe's role in supporting the social inclusion of persons with disabilities. She sees the path to equality as a ladder that Europe must climb. Firstly, the most vulnerable people, children and adults in institutional care, should be supported by **closing all big institutions and investing resources into the development of community-based services**. People need extensive support during the deinstitutionalisation process, as it is often frightening to leave institutions and move to new places. **Supporting families** is very important, so they will not leave their children in institutional care as a last resort. Ms Ivanova wants to see the future European Disability Strategy focus on **deinstitutionalisation efforts** to support everyone, including children and adults with severe disabilities, **to live independently and receive support in the community**. Furthermore, the voices of persons with disabilities should be listened to through accessible consultations and dialogues with policy makers. As she eloquently put it, 'we are all together on that ladder to create equality in Europe'.

"Our human rights matter but do not cost. Our right to participate and say what is important for us at any moment of life is priceless. Every country and institutions should have accessible ways of asking us and taking into consideration our opinion." – Mihaela Ivanova



SUMMARY OF THE DEBATE

During the debate, several disability activists took the floor to discuss what they want to see in the future European Disability Strategy.

Cesar Gimenez from ENIL raised the importance of launching deinstitutionalisation programmes for people with mental health problems as part of the future Strategy. Furthermore, he highlighted that it would be important to provide students with disabilities with personal assistants in tertiary education.

Ricard Lopez from the European Deafblind Network added to the earlier discussion on the accessibility needs of deafblind people that interveners play a key role for people who are primarily blind and have an acquired hearing impairment, and that they should also be recognised in the future Strategy.

James Crowe, President of the European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD) underlined that the next Disability Strategy should provide guidance to service providers on how to implement the rights outlined in the UN Convention, especially in the process of transitioning from institutional to community-based care.

Pietro Cirrincione, Vice-President of Autism Europe emphasised that people with non-visible disabilities, such as people with autism, are often neglected by public services. It is important that the next Strategy and the implementation of the UN CRPD consider the needs of everyone and remove all barriers by 2030.

Pirkko Mahlamäki, Executive Committee member of the European Women's Lobby thanked for the testimonies of women who had been freed from institutional care. In order to ensure more equality for women and girls with disabilities, the next Disability Strategy should recognise the need to promote gender equality.

John Dolan, CEO of the Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI) expressed his disappointment over the European Accessibility Act that is considered as the best compromise achieved by countries that all ratified the UN CRPD. He wants to see more serious political commitment from Member States when agreeing on the next Disability Strategy.

Gaston Bricout, Blue-book trainee at the European Commission emphasised that as a person on the autism spectrum he finds often counter-productive that cognitive, mental disabilities and autism are discussed and approached at the same level, while people have very different support needs. A comprehensive approach would be more helpful in the long run.

Kamil Goungor, Chair of the EDF Youth Committee thanked all speakers and called for the inclusion of deinstitutionalisation and the right to live independently as one of the focus areas in the next Disability Strategy.

Bianca Faragau-Tavares, Policy Advisor at Eurocities, highlighted the important role local authorities can play in implementing the UN CRPD, as many accessibility provisions affecting infrastructure and services can only be mainstreamed there. There are already good examples of cities stepping up to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights. For instance, Stuttgart allocated 3 million EUR for specific measures that will facilitate the inclusion of persons with disabilities.



PANEL TWO

How will the next Multiannual Financial Framework contribute to the implementation of the new strategy?

Moderator

Emmanuelle Grange, Head of the Disability and Inclusion Unit, DG EMPL, European Commission

Speakers:

- **Andriana Sukova**, Deputy Director-General, DG EMPL, European Commission
- **Ann Branch**, Head of Job Creation Unit, *Invest EU Programme*, DG EMPL, European Commission
- **Daniela Bankier**, Head of the Programme Management Unit, *Rights and Values Programme*, DG JUST, European Commission
- **Tuija Oivo**, Director, Finnish Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment
- **Nadia Hadad**, Member of the Executive Committee, European Disability Forum
- **Luk Zelderloo**, Secretary General, European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD)



Part 1

Andriana Sukova, Deputy Director-General of DG EMPL at the European Commission, provided a summary of how the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial (MFF) could contribute to a European Disability Strategy. The common understanding is that an economically strong Union goes hand-in-hand with improving the lives of all EU citizens. However, many of the 80 million citizens living with disabilities are facing far too many obstacles preventing them from exercising their rights and fully participating in society. The **European Social Fund (ESF)** and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) have already been helpful financial instruments in supporting the social inclusion of persons with disabilities in the current programming period. In 2015 and 2016, altogether **601 511 persons with disabilities benefitted from ESF-supported initiatives** across the EU.

In the proposal for the next MFF, the European Commission put forward an improved funding tool to invest in people and to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights, the so-called **European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)**. This will merge five existing EU funds, the European Social Fund (ESF), Youth Employment Initiative (YEI), Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD), Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) programme and the EU Health Programme. The ESF+ falls under the cluster '**Investing in People, Social Cohesion and Values**' under the new heading 'II Cohesion and Values'.



The European Commission has proposed **EUR 101.2 billion** to fund the ESF+ (around 27% of the overall Cohesion policy budget), which shows the commitment of this Commission to making **Social Europe** a reality. In the proposal, **25% of the funding** is earmarked to be used **for social inclusion measures** (compared to 20% in the current period). This will include specific actions supporting people at risk of discrimination, for instance through labour market integration of persons with disabilities to reduce the employment rate gap. Furthermore, in countries where **youth unemployment** is high, at least 10% of their ESF+ will be required to support young people in finding training, or apprenticeship opportunities, as well as jobs.

Another important element in the future ESF+ will be the so-called **'enabling conditions'**, a continuation of the 'ex-ante conditionalities' from this programming period, that will have to be respected by Member States throughout the funding period. The implementation of the UN CRPD, as well as non-discrimination measures, are embedded in these enabling conditions. Moreover, Member States and the Commission shall also support specific targeted actions, including the **transition from residential/institutional care to family and community-based care**.

Finally, the **partnership principle** will remain key to the ESF+, which implies close cooperation between the Commission and public authorities at national, regional and local levels in the Member States, social partners and organisations representing civil society. The involvement of civil society organisations was very successful in this funding period. The Commission therefore is planning to **strengthen good partnerships with a renewed structural dialogue**. The **European Regional Development Fund** also

greatly contributes to the social inclusion of persons with disabilities, by financing projects in the field of **employment, education, housing and health**. The ERDF supports investments in **deinstitutionalisation** through creating community-based infrastructure and limiting funding under ERDF for any new investments in residential care that leads to the segregation of people.

"I hope I gave you an idea how future ESF+ will support everyone in Europe, so everyone feels part and feels they can contribute with their possibilities and abilities." – Andriana Sukova

Ann Branch, Head of the Job creation unit, DG EMPL at the European Commission presented the future **InvestEU Fund**. This will be an important programme to complement the ESF+ and will help to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights. InvestEU will build on the European Fund for Strategic Investment (EFSI) by bringing together all previously existing market-based financial instruments. The idea behind EFSI, launched by President Juncker in 2015, was to **boost the economy by mobilising private financing for strategic investments**. After the crisis, unemployment remained high, and the aim was to generate new investment at a value of EUR 500 billion by 2020. EFSI enabled high-speed internet in rural areas, improved healthcare and renewable energy. The European Investment Bank will handle about 75% of the volume of InvestEU. According to the proposed budget, the overall guarantee is worth EUR 38 billion and will hopefully leverage EUR 650 billion of investment over seven years.

Since 2015, 4% of EFSI investment has supported social infrastructure, but some stakeholders have criticised it as not enough. While about EUR 300 million investment already targets micro-financing for vulnerable groups in the existing instruments, the Commission understand that more can be done in the next MFF, given the **importance of social investment**.

In the InvestEU proposal, one of the four policy windows is '**Social Investment and skills**'. Under this window, **EUR 50 billion investment is expected** during the next EU funding period to build a stronger capital market for social infrastructure promoters, to invest in education, child care, social housing, long-term care and other areas and to support skills and training for students, workers, as well as education and training providers, among others. There is clearly a **lot of potential to finance initiatives that are relevant for persons with disabilities**.

The Commission recognises that financial instruments are very challenging and technical assistance is necessary to help stakeholders understanding the potential of this programme. Therefore, the Commission will create an **InvestEU Advisory Hub** with a single point of entry, and an **InvestEU Portal** to provide visibility and connect potential investors with ideas.

Ms Branch concluded that the ambitious proposal of the InvestEU shows that this Commission is serious about creating a more Social Europe and

to implement the Pillar through social investment. InvestEU will offer great potential for additional funding for the labour market integration and social inclusion of people in vulnerable situations.

Daniela Bankier, Head of the programme management unit, DG JUST at the European Commission, provided an overview of the **Rights and Values programme**, that will replace the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (REC) after 2020. The REC has been an important programme in **financing organisations of persons with disabilities** and activities that protect the rights of persons with disabilities. The Rights and Values Programme merges REC with the Europe for Citizens Programme (currently managed by DG HOME). It will be part of the 'Investing in People' strand under the next MFF with a **proposed overall budget of EUR 947 million**. Out of this budget, EUR 305 Million will be allocated to the Justice Programme and EUR 642 million to the Rights and Values Programme.

As President Juncker said, "*Budgets are not bookkeeping exercises, but an expression of our priorities and ambitions.*" The new fund will aim to **sustain open, democratic and inclusive societies**. It will empower people through protecting and promoting rights and values such as equality, democracy, the rule of law and respect for human dignity, as enshrined in the EU Treaty.

European Fund for Strategic Investments: EU-wide results

EIB Group figure as of 15/05/2018

Of which
€41.6 billion
signed

EFSI investment by sector

Smaller companies 28%

RDI 22%

Energy 22%

Digital 11%

Transport 9%

Social infrastructure 4%

Environment and resource efficiency 4%

€57.5 billion
Approved EFSI financing

EIB-approved: €43.3 billion
EIF-approved: €14.2 billion



In the 2014–2020 funding period, the REC programme supported actions such as **trainings for legal and policy practitioners** to raise their awareness and expertise on the UN CRPD and EU law related to disability, as well as the **European Network of Academic Experts in the field of Disability (ANED)** to provide data and information on the situation of persons with disabilities in the EU. The programme supported the **launch of the European Disability Card** and **awareness raising initiatives**, such as the Access City Award, a now well-known prize recognising leading European cities in accessibility.

Currently the REC Programme is supporting 23 European networks of civil society organisations, including **7 EU-level networks of disability organisations**. These organisations represent the interests and needs of the 80 million persons with disabilities in the EU, and work on issues such as employment, education, social protection, accessibility or independent living.

Under the Rights and Values programme, six main activities will be funded:

- Awareness raising;
- Training relevant stakeholders;
- Mutual learning among stakeholders;
- Analytical and monitoring activities;
- Development and maintenance of ICT tools;
- Capacity development of key European level networks and supporting civil society organisations.

Ms Bankier summarised that there will be many similarities between the REC and the future Rights and Values programme, however some changes will be introduced to simplify the new instrument and make it more efficient and easily accessible for NGOs.



High speed internet access for
11 million
households

Better healthcare for
1 million
people

Renewable energy
4.2 million
households





SUMMARY OF THE DEBATE

Jyrki Pinomaa, President of Inclusion Europe, clarified with the speakers that there will be no investments into institutional care for persons with disabilities in the next funding period.

Klaus Hoeckner, Managing Director of the Austrian Association supporting Blind and Visually Impaired People, asked whether the Commission plans to introduce one access point to guide EU citizens through all these funding opportunities? Panellists from the European Commission explained that it is not possible to have an EU level access point for funds that are implemented under shared management with the Member States. However, the accessibility of the websites of the Commission will be further improved. For the Rights and Values programme, national contact points will be established with the aim to improve knowledge about access to funding.

Giampiero Griffo, Board Member of EDF, explained that despite the European Commission recognising additional costs, such as personal assistants in EU funded projects and events, these costs are often not covered at the national level. He suggested that the Commission raises awareness about this and encourages Member States to cover additional costs. Ms Sukova responded that the Commission is actively working with Member States on sharing good practices of eligible projects, but the funding priorities and criteria are always set up at national level.

Frank Sioen, Advocacy officer at the European Network on Independent Living (ENIL), expressed his concern over the language in the proposed regulation for the next MFF that may still leave room for the misuse of funds by investing in institutional care for persons with disabilities. Ms Sukova clarified that the European Commission is not supporting the building of new institutions at all, but on the contrary, pushing for national deinstitutionalisation strategies to be implemented throughout Europe. It is challenging to create a smooth and sustainable transition process and to ensure that everyone can live in a decent place once they leave the institutions. Ms Branch reaffirmed that her team works closely with the Disability and Inclusion Unit of DG Employment to ensure that money is invested in line with human rights principles. Her unit is currently working on investment guidelines that will be attentive to these considerations.

Part 2: What does civil society want to see in the next Multiannual Financial Framework?

Tuija Oivo, Director at the Finnish Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, presented the results of a recent report; **'Paths to employment for people with partial workability – benefits, services, support measures'** that she co-authored with her colleague, Raija Kerätär. Their task was to review the status of people with partial workability in the labour market, their transition to and from disability benefits and the services that can help people stay in employment. The report examined the situation of the long-term unemployed with reduced workability due to illness or injury.

The report showed that while the health status of unemployed people is worse than of those who are working, they use the health system even less often. The majority of decreased workability of the long-term unemployed is not recognised and many people are lost in the system, both in terms of benefits and services. This is due to the lack of coordination between social, health and unemployment services in Finland, which presents a serious problem to assess the workability of persons with disabilities and help them to access the labour market or social services.

The authors of the report propose a **Workability programme**; a long-term, comprehensive strategic programme with the inclusion of different levels of administrative branches. Its objective will be to **increase the working life inclusion of people with partial work abilities and the long-term unemployed** and ensure that they will receive the services and benefits they need. The programme will be implemented in the next EU funding period, largely supported by the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) that seeks to promote employment, competence and social inclusion. According to the plans, this national programme will employ 5000 persons with disabilities through public procurement. The Finnish Parliament discusses the proposal on 11 December 2018 and the aim is to get their commitment to continue the preparation of the process as part of the investment priorities of Finland under the ESF+.

Nadia Hadad, European Disability Forum Executive Committee Member, provided an overview of why EU funds matter to persons with disabilities. Since the EU and all Member States have ratified the UN CRPD, the EU budget should be a tool to implement the Convention through supporting projects and actions. Ms Hadad recognises the **key role EU Funds played in supporting the transition from institutional to community-based care** in the current funding period. EDF believes that ESF+ and ERDF in the next MFF should be invested with the following priorities

in mind to ensure the full participation of persons with disabilities in societies:

- Implementation of the UN CRPD;
- Implementing the SDGs;
- Ensuring persons with disabilities can live in the community and not in institutions;
- Accessible built environment to favour inclusion;
- Accessible products and services;
- Improving accessibility of housing to give persons with disabilities more options for independent living;
- Investment in programmes that favour inclusive education and participation in the labour market.

Ms Hadad emphasised the role of EU funding to improve the well-being of all people in the EU and to provide those who require extra support to be fully included. EU regulations, policies and programmes should be in line with the UN CRPD and other relevant human rights obligations.

Luk Zelderloo, Secretary General of the European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD), provided the important **perspective of service providers** on what EU funds mean to them to be able to achieve the objectives of the UN CRPD. The European Structural and Investment Funds are extremely important to **finance innovation and quality improvement** in the social sector. In the disability sector, the UN CRPD is calling into question the way in which care was provided to persons with disabilities in the past and requires community-based social services that bring support closer to the individuals. EASPD is working closely with organisations of persons with disabilities to make this a reality through co-production. EASPD's position is that the proposal of ESF+ and ERDF in **the next MFF has the potential to contribute to further implementation of the Convention**.

Invest EU will also play an important role to **boost social investment**, as part of the Juncker plan to relaunch economic activities in the EU by providing **quality loans**. Mr Zelderloo is convinced that social service providers should embrace this new programme, however there is not enough knowledge, or capacity in the sector yet to fully understand the potential of InvestEU. Nevertheless, there are already remarkable initiatives in some Member States. For instance in Ireland, discussion started about building 2000 accessible houses to finalise the process of deinstitutionalisation, and financed through the Juncker plan. Loans and other market-based financial

instruments can be very useful in the implementation of the Convention to invest in day-care centres, respite services, accessible housing and more.

Mr Zelderloo conveyed four key messages that service providers want to see in the next MFF:

1. Investment needs in support services:

after ten years of underinvestment in social services, investment should move away from traditional forms and towards person-centred, community-based solutions.

2. Social inclusion as a target: earmarking social inclusion is very important, and it is a pity that Horizon Europe will only focus on ageing, but not on disability.

3. Improve access to EU funds: simplification is high on the agenda of Member States and it should also reach end users and smaller NGOs to enable them to use EU programmes. It is very positive that a capacity-building budget is foreseen at a value of EUR 500 million, it could build the capacity of NGOs to better understand financial mechanisms.

4. EU Budget = quality investments: EU budget should go into accessible, quality projects. It is important to keep enabling conditions strong throughout the negotiations with the EP and the Council.

To conclude, Mr Zelderloo recommended that strong legal frameworks are necessary for the next MFF to promote positive developments, for better monitoring

mechanisms to be put in place, improved access and management of the funds, as well as cooperation and partnership with users to develop projects that are addressing the real needs. He also warned that any delay in the adoption of the next MFF may have dramatic consequences on social service providers.

"Let's put the wallet where the mouth is, that should be our joint ambition." – Luk Zelderloo



SUMMARY OF THE DEBATE

Jose Smits, Secretary General of Inclusion Europe, called for a joint strategy under the next MFF to accelerate the transition from institutional to community-based care. While the General Comment No.5, issued by the UN CRPD Committee on the Right to Independent Living, already gave some clarifications, speakers agreed that more debate and knowledge would be helpful in the frame of the consultation of the EU Disability Strategy and before the implementation of the next MFF. This can ensure the implementation of sustainable deinstitutionalisation projects across Europe, in which no one is left behind.

Francisco J. Trigueros Molina, Vice-President of the European Deafblind Union, raised his concerns about the risks of decreasing public responsibilities when investing in social support services for persons with disabilities, with the introduction of the new financial mechanisms under InvestEU. He emphasised that loans should not replace grants, but they can indeed bridge the gap and contribute to the implementation of the CPRD.

Claire Desaint, EDF Women Committee, highlighted the importance of integrating gender budgeting from the outset of planning the next seven years' financial framework.

Helena Corens, Youth Committee of the International Federation for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus (IF), also wondered how to ensure that public authorities do not shy away from their responsibilities of investing money in a UN CRPD compliant way? Mr Zelderloo reassured her that the new instruments hold a lot of potential and it is also in the interest of authorities to use these opportunities and invest money in areas that are crucial to realise the Convention.

Day 2

PANEL THREE – Making cultural heritage accessible to all

Moderator

Catherine Magnant, Advisor, Culture and Creativity Unit, DG EAC, European Commission

Speakers:

- **Cathy Losson**, Head of the Cultural Democratisation and Local Action Service, Musée du Louvre
- **Inmaculada Placencia Porrero**, Senior Expert, Disability and Inclusion Unit, DG EMPL, European Commission
- **Gauthier Cocle**, Policy Officer, Belgian Ministry of Social Affairs
- **Nieves Peinado Margalef**, Architect, Centro de Referencia Estatal de Autonomía Personal y Ayudas Técnicas del Imerse
- **Anja Hagenauer**, Deputy Mayor, City of Salzburg

Cathy Losson, Head of the Cultural Democratisation and Local Action Service at Musée du Louvre, presented the efforts and commitment of the museum to make the building and their exhibitions accessible for all. In 2015, an assessment was carried out to identify accessibility barriers and found over 3000 points where the historical building - once a fortress, but a museum since 1793 - lacked accessibility. Following the results, the Musée du Louvre developed a comprehensive methodology to improve accessibility for all people regardless of the type of their impairment, through universal design and support. The three golden rules in this process have been:

1. Considering the overall experience of the visit to the museum;
2. Experimenting and piloting ideas before implementing them;
3. Discussing the accessibility solutions with the public.

As part of making the museum more accessible, an important goal was to train the 2300 staff members on the rights and support needs of persons with disabilities. The trainings are provided in close collaboration with the organisations of persons with disabilities and serve the purpose of raising awareness among employees. An annual pilot committee was set up to find solutions that will improve accessibility through cultural mediation.











A wide range of accessibility measures are offered to individual visitors as well as to the around 800 groups of persons with disabilities visiting the museum each year. These measures include accessible information on the website of the museum and in the newsletters, brochures with Braille inserts, simplified access to the museum and the availability of white sticks. Currently, they are experimenting with the use of a dedicated 'Need help?' badge that would make trained support staff more visible to visitors with disabilities.

Another innovative solution is the tactile gallery and the fully accessible 'Petite Galerie', where visitors are introduced to the general exhibition. The Louvre also carries out work outside of the museum, for instance in more than 20 hospitals and provides a targeted programme for persons with Alzheimer's disease and to young people on the Autism Spectrum.

Furthermore, each January the Musée du Louvre organises an Accessibility Week with over 750 participants and there is also a yearly flagship action to promote disability awareness in the museum.

Inmaculada Placencia Porrero, Senior Expert, Disability and Inclusion unit, DG EMPL, presented the **EU Disability Card pilot project** that helps persons with disabilities travel more easily between EU countries through a system of mutual recognition of their disability status. The pilot project was initiated in the 2010 European Disability Strategy to develop an instrument that would improve freedom of movement for persons with disabilities. The pilot Disability Card covers **leisure, culture, transport and sport**. Following a call for proposals, the pilot project was launched in 2016 with the participation of eight EU Member States:

	Belgium		Italy
	Cyprus		Malta
	Estonia		Romania
	Finland		Slovenia

The EU Disability Card is the size of a credit card and includes the picture, name and other basic information of the card holder (in Braille too). The pilot projects were very different in each participating Member State. Some countries only set up the framework and started to investigate which organisation (e.g. a Ministry or an NGO) would be the best to manage the card. Other countries went further and explored which providers would accept the card, and issued the card to persons with disabilities. The package of benefits also differs from country to country, for example in some cases transport services are not covered.

As part of the evaluation of the 2010-2020 European Disability Strategy, the European Commission will carry out a study to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the pilot EU Disability Card in each country to enable

comparison and identify a cost-effective model. If the results of this assessment are positive, the aim will be to extend this pilot to an EU-wide initiative.

Gauthier Cocle, Policy Officer, Belgian Ministry of Social Affairs, shared the experience of the EU Disability Card pilot in Belgium so far. The decision was to include three areas: sport, leisure and culture and make sure that persons with disabilities can enjoy many advantages within this scope. Since the start of the project in 2017, the card is issued on request, for persons with disabilities who are recognised by one of the five institutions responsible for integration policies in Belgium. So far, 27 000 Disability Cards have been issued in Belgium and there are more than 200 partners involved.

Organisations that produce the card were selected via public procurement and a system was established to facilitate the sharing of data among them. Since the Belgian federal government did not adopt any law in relation to the EU Disability Card, the participation of different service providers was voluntary. A specific media label was created for service providers who agreed to be part of the initiative, so persons with disabilities can easily check the validity of their card in ticket offices, or on the website of the providers.

Despite being a challenging exercise, the Belgian authorities carried out broad consultations with all relevant stakeholders in these matters, including the organisations of persons with disabilities from the very beginning. Furthermore, capacity-building was provided to civil servants in the Ministries responsible for the three target areas.

Advantages of the Disability Card include free admission or discounts for the person with disabilities and/or the accompanying person (or the interpreter), free audio/visual guide, adapted explanatory brochures or leaflets, a specific pass in leisure parks for easier access to attractions, and many more. It is important to raise awareness among persons with disabilities about the existence of the card and provide them with more information about the list of partners and benefits, therefore a dedicated accessible website in four languages was created and is available at: <https://eudisabilitycard.be/en>.

Among the challenges, Mr. Cocle emphasised that users of the card would want **more Member States to be involved**, so they can enjoy mutual recognition and benefits in more countries. Since none of the neighbouring countries of Belgium took part in the project, persons with disabilities found it hard to use and enjoy the card abroad. Unfortunately, the card is not a solution to the remaining accessibility barriers in sports halls, concert halls and other public spaces. Besides working continuously towards accessibility, Member States should also raise awareness about the importance and potential of the EU Disability Card.



Nieves Peinado Margalef, Architect at the Centro de Referencia Estatal de Autonomía Personal y Ayudas Técnicas at Imserso, shared the experiences of a newly introduced Spanish technical standard; 'Accessibility of the Immovable Cultural Heritage' (Spanish Technical Standard UNE 41531: 2018). It took over seven years to introduce the technical standard and Ms Peinado Margalef described in detail the importance of this standard in making cultural heritage more accessible. This is in accordance to the definition, developed by the Council of Europe in the Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society:

“Cultural heritage is a group of resources inherited from the past which people identify, independently of ownership, as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions. It includes all aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time”.

Building on this definition, it is important to recognise that cultural heritage is in constant progress and is defined by the interactions between people and places throughout time. On the one hand, we have responsibility to **preserve cultural heritage** in the best possible conditions. Nevertheless, more than 140 of the UNESCO Cultural Heritage Sites

are cities and thus form a 'living cultural heritage'. In many, the majority of the population are older people with mobility limitations. Therefore, it is a reasonable approach to aim **making cultural heritage accessible** in the 21st century. As Ms Peinado Margalef said:

“We should consider accessibility as a new value for cultural heritage in the 21st century, it is a key factor to preserve it.” – Nieves Peinado Margalef

The scope of this standard is to make accessibility easy at the immovable cultural heritage, respecting their essential values, by providing architectural and constructive intervention criteria, as well as an application methodology. The implementation of the standards should be based on **attitude, knowledge and consensus**.

Anja Hagenauer, Deputy Mayor, City of Salzburg, presented the comprehensive actions that have been carried out in Salzburg, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, to make the city fully accessible for persons with disabilities. Ms Hagenauer highlighted Salzburg's interest in having as many tourists with disabilities as possible, contributing to the over 1.8 million overnight tourists per

year. Salzburg won the EU Access City Award in 2012 which gave extra motivation to continue making the city completely barrier free. Undoubtedly, it is a very challenging task, but currently 95% of the historical city centre is accessible for persons with physical and visual impairment.

Most of the efforts are overseen by the accessibility manager of Salzburg and the Disability Advisory Board that meet four times a year and helps identify and solve gaps and problems with the level of accessibility in the city. For instance, it was realised that finding a barrier-free toilet contributes greatly to having a relaxed holiday, thus the city tries to offer as many accessible public toilets as possible. In December 2018, the City Council of Salzburg will introduce 200 specific measures in collaboration with persons with disabilities to further improve the accessibility of the city. The example of Salzburg shows that even medieval fortresses, or historical palaces, can be accessible if there is political commitment to make a fully inclusive city a reality for all.



SUMMARY OF THE DEBATE

Mario Sel, IF Flanders, acknowledged the importance of the EU Disability Card in improving the current challenges for freedom of movement, but reminded that the card should be automatically provided to all persons with disabilities and not only upon request.

Louise Danielsson, Board Member of EUD, asked if the Louvre is planning to introduce video guides in sign language? Ms Losson confirmed that tours and visits are already offered in sign language and there are also videos in sign language available in the Louvre.

Frank Sioen ENIL, raised the issue that it is often unclear to both service providers and persons with disabilities what are the benefits covered under the EU Disability Card. He shared a personal story when he went to a theatre. While a Flemish disability card entitles him to bring his personal assistant for free, this was not the case with his EU Disability Card. Mr Cocle explained that in this pilot phase, the participation of service providers in Belgium was voluntary. In the future, a great challenge will be to ensure that initiatives are complementary and contribute to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in all regions. Ms Placencia Porrero underlined that this is exactly the type of feedback the European Commission is looking for in order to improve the Disability Card initiative.

Sari Hirvonen-Skarbö, EURO-CIU, mentioned that some persons are considered 'not disabled enough' for the EU Disability Card, which can negatively impact persons who are hard of hearing, due to the lack of accessibility in many museums, cinemas and other facilities for this target group. Ms Placencia Porrero reminded participants of the voluntary nature of the EU Disability Card and that it is up to Member States to decide who is issued with a disability card under their national regulations. However, the European Commission will take this kind of feedback into account during the evaluation and forward them to the national authorities.

Alexandra Nothnagel, Marie Curie Alumni Association, asked about any future work planned on the adaptation of work places for persons with disabilities, including those in higher education, to improve the mobility of students and researchers from 2019 onwards? Ms Placencia Porrero mentioned a number of existing measures, such as Erasmus+ provides measures to ensure reasonable accommodation for students with disabilities. However, it would be worth going into more detail for this topic at one of the similar events for a better picture of the extent reasonable accommodation is provided to persons with disabilities at work places, as it is an obligation under EU law.

Francisco J. Trigueros Molina, European Deafblind Union, expressed his concerns about Member States not taking the accessibility and reasonable accommodation needs of deafblind people into account, when implementing the EU Disability Card project (e.g. he needs two personal assistants and not only one).

Concluding remarks for the 2018 European Day of Persons with Disabilities

Speakers:

- **Katarina Ivanković Knežević**, Director for Social Affairs, DG EMPL, European Commission
- **Alexandra Mischie**, Romanian National Authority for Persons with Disabilities
- **John Patrick Clarke**, Vice-President, European Disability Forum



Katarina Ivanković Knežević, Director for Social Affairs, DG EMPL, European Commission, summarised the key messages of this year's conference celebrating the European Day of Persons with Disabilities. Once again, the conference brought together politicians, high-level experts and self-advocates from EU countries to discuss the challenges and solutions to improve the lives of persons with disabilities across the EU.

Panellists and delegates highlighted "there is still a lot to be done" to implement the UN CRPD, but it is also a day to celebrate what we have achieved so far to ensure the full participation of persons with disabilities in our societies. Following the political agreement earlier this year, **the European Accessibility Act will enter into force in 2019** and persons with disabilities will have **better access to a range of goods and services** across the EU.

In 2019, the Commission will carry out a **comprehensive evaluation of the implementation of the current European Disability Strategy** and will launch a broad consultation for the shape and content of a potential new Strategy. The Commission will continue working closely with organisations of persons

with disabilities to find the best solutions to tackle existing challenges that prevent the full participation of persons with disabilities in society.

Some areas of key importance were already mentioned during the EDPD, including **social inclusion, independent living, freedom of movement and social security coordination, accessibility and universal design, education, employment and vocational training**. The UN CRPD, the Sustainable Development Goals and the European Pillar of Social Rights will continue to guide future disability policies at the EU level. It was clear from the discussions that crosscutting issues, such as **gender and the LGBTQIA+ equality perspective**, or the **challenges young persons with disabilities face** will need to be better mainstreamed in future EU disability policies.

The proposed funding for **ESF+** under the next Multiannual Financial Framework shows that the European Union is **fully committed to a Social Europe**. It aims to remove the obstacles from the social inclusion of persons with disabilities in line with the obligations under the UN CRPD and with respect to EU competencies.

Other EU funding instruments such as the **Rights and Values Fund** will continue to support important projects and civil society organisations working towards the equality and rights of persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups. A clear aim for the **next MFF is to make funds more accessible, simpler and efficient for everyone** in Europe. There are also new EU financing mechanisms in the Commissions' proposal, such as InvestEU that can play an important role in supporting persons with disabilities through various social investments. The Commission is committed to implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights not only through various legislative and non-legislative instruments, but also through funding.

In 2018, the **European Year of Cultural Heritage** was celebrated, thus it was timely to discuss how accessible cultural heritage is for persons with disabilities across the EU. While there is still a long way to go in **ensuring equal access to the cultural wealth of the Union**, great progress has already been made, for example in Salzburg, which is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, or in the Louvre Museum.

Every year, the European Commission tries to make the EDPD more and more accessible. This year for the first time there was an Easy-to-read illustrator, who captured the key messages from each speaker in drawings. As the EU is gearing up for next year's European elections, the Commission wanted to hear participants' opinions on three important questions:

1. Whether we need a European Disability Strategy for 2020-2030?
2. If so, what should be the top 3 priorities for this potential Strategy?
3. And finally, the participants' guesses for who is the winner of the Access City Award in 2018?

Ms Ivankovic Knezvic shared the results of this mini in-house referendum where participants cast their votes in a booth. The results clearly showed that participants want to see a 2020-2030 European Disability Strategy and voted for the following priorities:

1. Accessibility of the built environment, transport and Information and communications technology (ICT);
2. Employment;
3. Education;
4. Political participation.

Finally, Ms Ivankovic Knezvic thanked the European Disability Forum for the successful partnership in organising this conference, as well as all the other NGOs, delegations and stakeholders for participating in the fruitful discussions and for sharing their valuable experiences from the national and European level.

Alexandra Mischie, from the National Authority for Persons with Disabilities, spoke on behalf of Romania's upcoming Presidency of the Council of the European Union and presented aspects of their work that will relate to persons with disabilities. The National Authority is the central public administration, subordinated to the Ministry of Labour and Social Justice, which is responsible for coordinating the implementation of the UN CRPD in Romania. The Romanian Presidency will place strong emphasis on promoting **labour mobility and fair working conditions**. They plan to take a holistic approach to finalise the negotiation on the future European Labour Market Authority and will have a realistic approach to move ahead with negotiations regarding the dossier on the coordination of social security systems.

Another key priority will be **gender equality** with an emphasis on supporting women in the labour market. The Presidency recognises that the equality between men and women is not only an issue of fundamental rights, but also a prerequisite of a prosperous society. Their aim will be to support initiatives that contribute to women's economic independence, such as closing the gender pay gap, or encouraging women in leadership positions.

The Romanian Presidency will also investigate how Member States can better support the **participation of persons with disabilities in the labour market**. At the same time, as part of supporting efforts to improve the **work-life balance** of parents and carers of children with disabilities and allow them to stay in the labour market, the Presidency will proceed to conclude the negotiations with the European Parliament on the Work-Life Balance Directive proposal. Regarding the EU Accessibility Act, the Romanian Presidency is satisfied with the outcome of the negotiations, as it strongly believes in the EAA's positive impact on the lives of persons with disabilities and of all society.

During the Romanian Presidency, two main events related to persons with disabilities will be hosted: the board meeting of the European Disability Forum will be complemented by side events, co-organised with the Romanian National Disability Council (CNDR) and the National Authority on Persons with Disabilities, focusing on **young people and employment**. This will include a capacity-building seminar on the **use of EU Funds for the transition from institutional to community-based care** and independent living, co-organised by the European Commission and the Ministry of Labour and Social Justice through the National Authority for Persons with Disabilities. Another priority for Romania is supporting the **deinstitutionalisation of persons with disabilities** together with developing measures to prevent institutionalisation and ensure supported living. In the 2014-2020 EU funding period, Romania committed to use considerable amounts of EU Funds to remove barriers that prevent persons with disabilities from the **full participation in society**.



They will continue working with governmental and non-governmental stakeholders to develop person-centred support services and implement the legal obligations under the UN CRPD.

John Patrick Clarke, Vice-President of the European Disability Forum, summarised the most important points of the 2-day debate that should not be forgotten in the years to come. First of all, the European Disability Strategy has already proven to be an important tool to achieve concrete results in disability policies at the EU level, for instance by the adoption of the European Accessibility Act.

'But the next strategy has to be the most inclusive and most ambitious one because we will face many political difficulties at EU level in the years to come and a sound strategy can help us to make progress also in difficult times'. – John Patrick Clarke

The next Multiannual Financial Framework and EU funding is another important tool to **advance the participation of persons with disabilities**, as it can be used to improve accessibility, or end institutionalisation in Europe for once and for all.

He considered the discussion about the accessibility of cultural heritage to persons with disabilities a very timely one and emphasised the importance of hearing about good practices on inclusion as part of the European Year of Cultural Heritage.

Finally, ahead of the 2019 European elections, Mr Clarke underlined that persons with disabilities are important part of the electorate, thus Member States should ensure **full accessibility throughout the elections**.



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