

EUROPEAN DAY OF **PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

ACCESS CITY AWARD 2021

1 - 2 DECEMBER 2020



CONFERENCE REPORT

#EDPD2020
#EUAccessCity

#EUDisability
#WeAreEUCitizens

Social Europe

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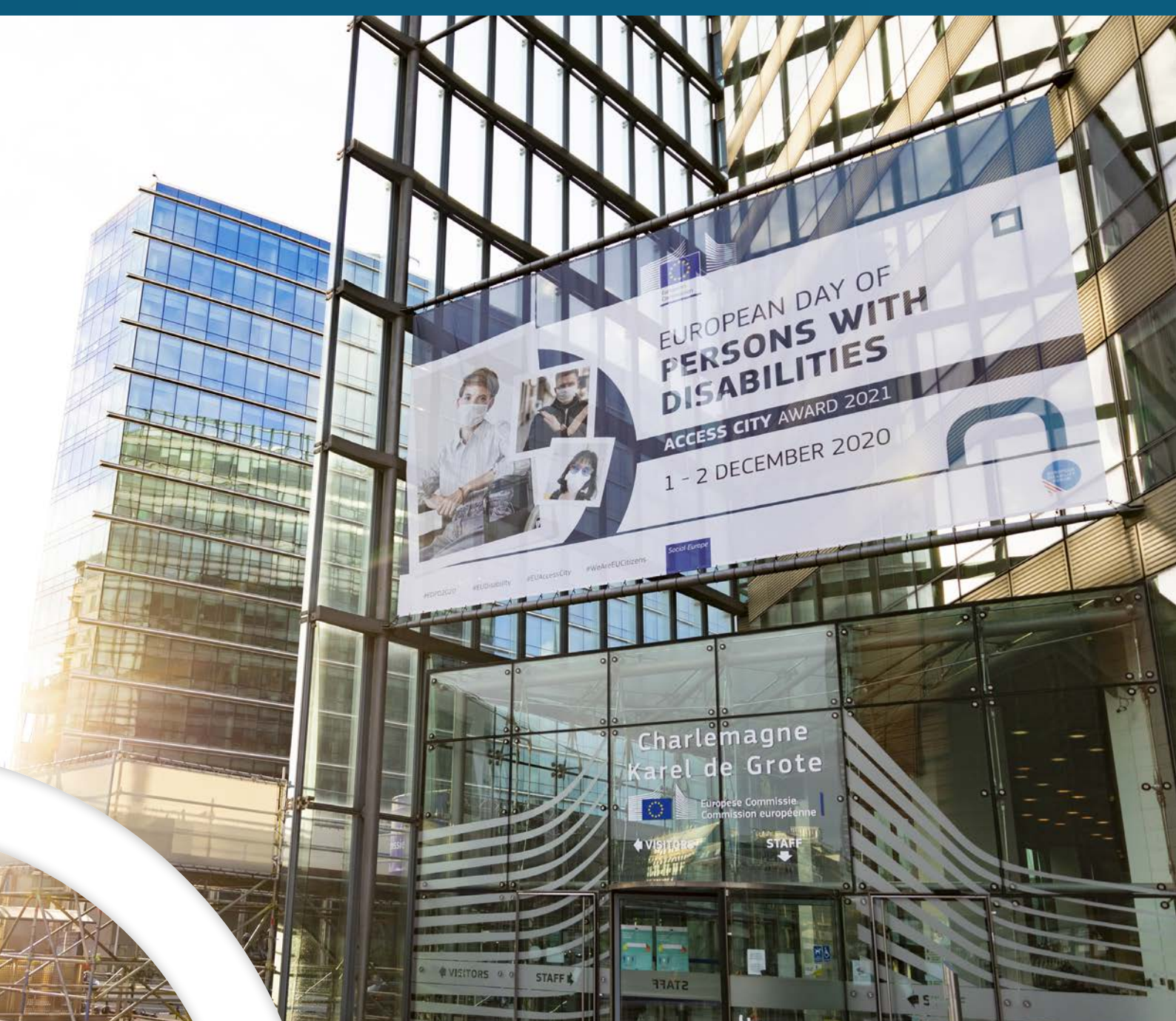
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INTRODUCTION

It is clearly an understatement to say that 2020 has been an unconventional and particularly challenging year for everyone.

However, how has the unprecedented Covid-19 pandemic impacted life for Europeans with disabilities? What comes next now that the European Disability Strategy is officially drawing to a close? What lessons can we learn for the next Strategy? And what does all this mean for future actions to break down the remaining barriers to a fully inclusive and accessible society?

These and many other questions were discussed during the adapted online version of the 2020 European Day of Persons with Disabilities (EDPD) conference on 1 and 2 December.

Every year, the EDPD is organised by the European Commission, in partnership with the European Disability Forum (EDF).

The EDPD is one of the EU's main instruments to raise awareness and tackle everyday challenges facing Europeans with disabilities, enabling better policy and practical actions on the ground.

Policymakers, civil society representatives and members of the disability community joined equality advocates, specialists and other supporters in a range of themes to discuss ways to improve the lives of persons with disabilities.

This report provides an independent account of the main points and challenges highlighted by speakers and participants during the #EDPD2020 conference.

DAY 1

1 DECEMBER 2020



“ Equality and non-discrimination are fundamental values set out in our Treaties. This is the European Union that I want, the Union that we are working to build. And there is progress, even in these difficult circumstances.

Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission

OPENING AND WELCOME

Speakers

- Introductions and event overview by **Katarina Ivanković Knežević**, Director of the Social Affairs Directorate, DG EMPL, European Commission
- Opening statement by **Ursula von der Leyen**, President of the European Commission
- Welcome by **Dr. Rolf Schmachtenberg**, Permanent State Secretary at the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, German Presidency
- Welcome by **Ioannis Vardakastanis**, President of the European Disability Forum
- Welcome by **Joost Korte**, Director General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, DG EMPL, European Commission

Finding the true meaning of ‘united in diversity’

Kicking off the European Day of Persons with Disabilities (EDPD), the opening words were delivered by the **European President Ursula von der Leyen** in a recorded address to the several hundred participants who had signed up to the two-day online event.

President von der Leyen made it clear that disability is a priority of this European Commission, a point that was echoed by several contributors during the event. She highlighted that in these difficult times we have learned how important it is for everyone to be masters of their own life. Everyone has the right to a good job and working conditions, to live independently, and to enjoy equal opportunities and rights in a life without barriers.

The crisis put in sharp focus the inequalities that already exist today, she said, in things like healthcare,

education, support services and more. The Next Generation EU Recovery Plan will help to shape a more inclusive society, through “green” and “digital” ambitions and by investing in skills and infrastructure, removing barriers to health, jobs and more. A “renovation wave” under the European Green Deal can pave the way for more accessible buildings.

“Equality and non-discrimination are fundamental values set out in our Treaties,” said the President. “This is the European Union that I want, the Union that we are working to build.” She called for further progress even under difficult circumstances like Covid-19 and said that the Commission’s Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities due next year will be pivotal in creating a place where we all share the same rights, all equal with our differences, a continent finally and truly “united in diversity”.



Dr. Rolf Schmachtenberg, Permanent State Secretary at the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, German Presidency

Dr. Rolf Schmachtenberg, Permanent State Secretary at the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, said the current German Presidency knew when it started on 1 July that fighting the Covid-19 crisis would be a big responsibility. The key would be to build bridges because more social protection and justice would be crucial. The Presidency’s signature achievements, he said, have thus been based on the three European Council conclusions. These are to pursue greater protection for seasonal and mobile workers, offer a robust response to the Covid-19 pandemic, and strengthen human rights as well as global supply chains. He also highlighted efforts under the Presidency to tackle youth unemployment and reinforce the Youth Guarantee. The review of the 2010-2020 Strategy offers some “good lessons”, he said, determining what has been achieved but also what is still needed, especially in terms of monitoring. Here, Germany is motivated and will strive for social justice for all, and the EDPD is important to continue the progress.

Ioannis Vardakastanis, President of the European Disability Forum (EDF), was encouraged by President von der Leyen’s clear priority and mandate to create a “Union of equality”. He said that the EDPD takes place at a crucial time for the EU and its citizens who are experiencing a powerful second-wave in the Covid-19 pandemic, a disease that has already brought so much suffering to people with a disability or chronic disease across the Member States.

As the EDPD’s co-host, he also outlined the Day’s goals in that light. He asked for a review of the vaccination programmes to better take into account persons with disabilities, and high-risk needs into account, and urged everyone to join forces to make 2021 a year of a “new vision for all citizens in Europe, and for those who are suffering from inequality, discrimination and poverty”.



Ioannis Vardakastanis, President of the European Disability Forum

Looking back, looking forward

Joost Korte, Director General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL), looked back at the achievements of the past ten years under the outgoing Strategy. A period that really put disability

“

For persons with disabilities, the Union of equality will materialise in the new Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on which colleagues and myself are working actively.

Joost Korte
Director General for Employment,
Social Affairs and Inclusion, DG EMPL

on the policy agenda and brought it into the sphere of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. He underlined the notable progress in the EU with the European Accessibility Act and the European Disability Card, now piloted in eight countries and with calls to be rolled out more widely.

He reminded participants of advances thanks to the European Pillar of Social Rights, and in broader awareness and campaigning against discrimination in many facets of life – education, training, social protection, health, external relations. However, he noted that the pandemic has highlighted the barriers and additional hardships that many people with disabilities continue to face. The “new normal” conditions after the pandemic “have to be designed together with you”. The coming ten-year Strategy for a barrier-free Europe is a chance to build a “Union of Equality”, empowering persons with disabilities to participate fully in society and the economy.

A LAST ROUND OF INSPIRATION FOR THE STRATEGY ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES 2021-2030

Speakers

- **Richard Smith**, Managing Consultant with ICF's Employment, Skills, and Education Research Practice
- **Gunta Anca**, European Disability Forum Secretary
- **Jonas Ruskus**, Expert Member of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- **Gerard Quinn**, United Nations Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- **Inmaculada Placencia Porrero**, Senior Expert, Disability and Inclusion Unit, DG EMPL, European Commission (Chair)

Last round of inspiration

Several experts working in the disability field offered some inspiration and insights ahead of the upcoming Union of Equality: Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2021-2030).

The session chair, **Inmaculada Placencia Porrero**, Senior Expert, Disability and Inclusion Unit (DG EMPL) said the conference had all the ingredients to help finalise the new Strategy. A strong purpose, solid dialogue, knowledgeable people, as well as the information and tools needed to shape actions and policies responding to the needs and expectations of people with disabilities.

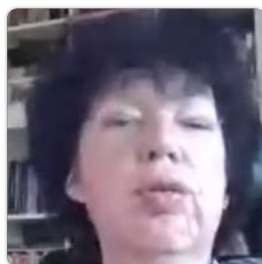
It is a valuable "last chance" to gather structured input from stakeholders on how the next Strategy – which builds on experience from previous Strategies and Action Plans dating back to 1996 – can respond to and feed into realising the "transformative power" of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), she explained.

Richard Smith of ICF presented the main findings of the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 evaluation carried out by his firm. He noted key differences across the different action areas implemented in the Member States, though all contributed in varying degrees to important change in overall disability policy towards a human rights-based approach.

Overall, 67% of the actions included in the Strategy were considered to be fully implemented, 27% were partially implemented. When looking at the different parts of the strategy, 82% of actions in the area of equality were implemented compared to 18% in external action, although some 82% were partially achieved in that category (see chart for a breakdown).



Richard Smith



Gunta Anca



Jonas Ruskus

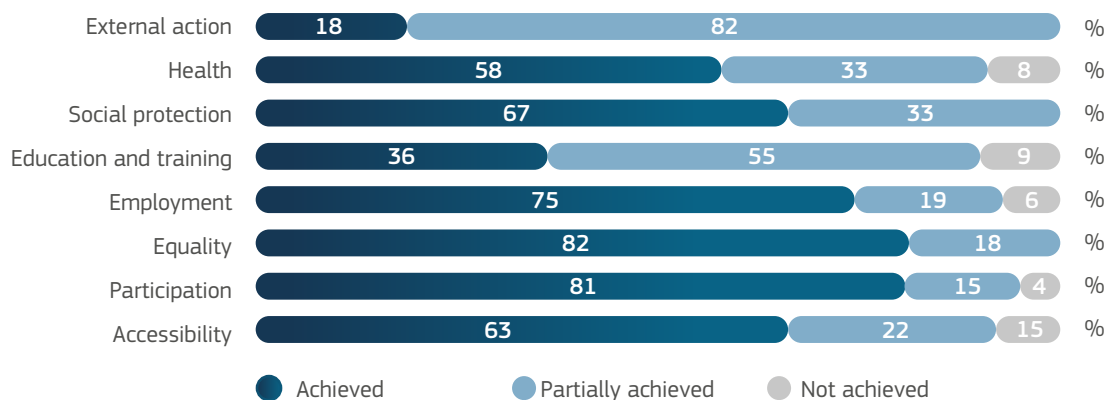


Gerard Quinn



Inmaculada Placencia Porrero

Share of EU level actions implemented for the 8 areas of action




“Outcome indicators to monitor change over time between people with disabilities and people without disabilities, between different groups and different countries would have provided a useful framework to understand progress,” he observed.

According to their evaluation and interpretation, having dedicated experts in European institutions


would help to mainstream disability strategies with wider policies. This, along with several other specific recommendations on how to design and deliver actions which are more tangible and closer to the needs of persons with disabilities were presented (e.g. see box).

DESIGN



- Disabled people’s organisations should have a central role in design, implementation and monitoring of new strategy.
- All eight areas of action included in the Strategy continue to remain relevant.
- The EU should take legislative action to implement the requirements of the CRPD and address the current gaps, particularly in the area of consumer protection and equality.
- A disability-specific OMC should be considered, as well as further EU funding.

DELIVER



- A dedicated budget for implementation of the Disability Strategy, used in combination with existing EU funds, could increase efficiency by enabling more actions of scale.
- Strengthened coordination within and between EU institutions, and greater awareness raising efforts to ensure persons with disability are under aware of opportunities.

Smith recapped the other main findings of the evaluation and stressed that a better framework for monitoring and evaluation was needed alongside clear indicators and benchmarks, as well new/better data that is disaggregated and more comparable.

As EDF’s General Secretary, **Gunta Anca** spoke about the Forum’s position paper and consultations on the Strategy’s review, calling for far-reaching measures, of which should include a more intersectional approach recognising multiple and often compounded forms of discrimination, as well as better governance and management. To address the question of how to mainstream disability policy and action, she recommended the creation of “focal points” within all EU institutions, agencies and external delegations. Other ideas include creating a “CRPD Unit” in the Commission’s DG for Justice and Consumers, as well as a Discrimination Rights Committee. She said the EDF warmly welcomed the broad scope reflected by the European Commission and the commitments made by the Commissioner for Equality **Helena Dalli**.

The EDF General Secretary detailed additional elements of her organisation’s position on the future Strategy and policy agenda. Most importantly, she said, is to ensure that people with disabilities have the right to a decent standard of living, access to education, social inclusion, as well as employment and social protection. She called for greater protection from discrimination in all fields and the freedom to live, work, travel and vote. In short, the EDF wants to see better alignment between actions across the Union and all CRPD articles, as well as with the 2015 CRPD Committee’s concluding observations.

She closed with a call to put a full implementation plan in place and highlighted the important roles and responsibility of the EU institutions in monitoring and reporting, for example, and urged the European Council to finally adopt the Equal Treatment Directive. More consultation and dialogue should be part of a new system of on-going engagement, she stressed, and reminded the Commission that the EDF is at their disposal for future discussions.

Grounds for improvement

Jonas Ruškus, Expert Member of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, cast a critical eye on the EU's performance in certain aspects of the disability area and Member States' implementation of the Convention. He called for the Commission to better acknowledge the human-rights model of disability as the main "vector" and focus for guaranteeing civil rights, as provided in the CRPD; freedom to make "own choices", access to services, ensure independent living, etc. This must all be addressed in the Strategy in the next decade.

In 2015, the Committee observed some progress but also identified gaps across the EU, pointing out that there are "negative and positive human rights" that need to be addressed. A negative right, for example, forbids individuals or governments from acting against the right holder, while a positive right obliges others to act with respect to the right holder. The fundamental freedoms of persons with disabilities and psycho-social or cognitive disorders are affected in several ways, he observed.



Still today, more than a decade after the adoption of the CRPD, EU Member States are reluctant to abolish the discriminatory substitute decision-making regimes and recognise equality before the law

Jonas Ruškus,
Expert Member of the United Nations
Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Ruškus elaborated, giving several examples of poor progress. People with disabilities are being treated as objects rather than the subjects of rights, which is an outmoded "paternalistic medical model".

Involuntary internment and forced medical treatment on the grounds of someone's impairment, he said, are also incompatible with the human-rights model advocated



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under the Convention. "It is discriminatory in nature and amounts to the arbitrary deprivation of liberty."

Deinstitutionalisation efforts are poor in Member States, despite EU Structural Fund support, he noted, adding that the rights to freedom, personal assistance, access to community services and facilities and support are not fulfilled. Here, he stressed that "positive rights" such as supported decision-making, reasonable accommodation, and access to general services must go together with "negative rights" that guarantee equality before the law, security and freedom to all persons with disabilities.

Gerard Quinn, in his first public intervention in the EU as United Nations Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, followed up by saying Europe has the right "headline ideas" but needs to follow through with processes for implementing and administering community living. Innovation is needed for more resilient and inclusive living for persons with disabilities, but also for older people, he said.

Europe is taking stock of more than 40 years of dialogue in the disability area, as captured in the Convention. He applauded what he called "co-production approaches" to policy as a crowning achievement of the EU for building trust and a "common language" on justice and rights. He said an EU Fundamental Rights Agency to assess progress, including on the provision and use of better, more comparable data in policy, would be a step forward.

Quinn spoke about deep structural inequalities that persist and how poor and unstable conditions are bad for everyone, however are much worse for people with disabilities, leading to greater isolation, unequal medical treatment and additional socio-economic risks. Human rights are not something to be "added on the edges", they need to be grounded in all action from the core. Several examples on how the US deals with the civil rights of persons with disabilities were offered.

Under the CRPD, he said equality also means freedom of travel and is anchored in "personhood and autonomy" that takes into account the "accumulated disadvantage" that people with disabilities face. He mentioned "intersectional impacts" as important to creating deeper and more active citizenship.

Looking forward, he added, when the UN wants to "unpack compliance issues with rights", it looks to three indicators: substance, process and outcomes. Substance refers to law and high-level policy documents. The EU is advanced here, he suggested, except perhaps in the slow progress enacting the Equal Treatment Directive. As a "natural leader and international innovator" the EU inspires others. "Citizens need you to succeed and greater leadership to make the CRPD real around the world."

Questions and views from the floor

Participants requested the floor to ask their questions and issue statements about the subjects being discussed. Several questions were made via the digital chat function. These have been grouped for simpler reporting.

Participants

Women and girls with disabilities are facing greater risk of violence (all forms, including forced sterilisation and custody) during the Covid-19 pandemic.

- ▶ Are we going backwards?
- ▶ How does the EU intend to tackle this problem in the Strategy?

Request for Strategy to address de-institutionalisation, and for Member States to be held to account on how they spend allocations to implement this. Appreciation of the CRPD's attention on people with invisible disabilities and mental health, in particular.

- ▶ Which specific indicators are used to measure progress for people with disabilities, e.g. less unemployment?

Answers grouped

G. Quinn: "Extremely important" questions on gender; mention of the Women Enabled International's report which has "gruesome" detail on women and girls' exposure to domestic violence as independent living was reduced. "Flanking" policy developments on gender in the EU are increasingly including disability elements, which is important for the Strategy going forward. On de-institutionalisation, a "moral urgency", good living conditions and services are needed, and innovation is key to delivering them. Europe is doing the right things but the new Strategy is needed to join the disconnected dots.

G. Anca: Full de-institutionalisation is not practical because institutions are needed for severe disability. Agreed that the Strategy needs stronger monitoring on how the funds are used and for whom. On indicators, State employment agency figures are used, but they tend to lack detail because the understanding of "looking for a job" is unclear. Figures need to be adjusted to the new world of work and a true definition of "active job search".

J. Ruškus: A UN Committee working group on de-institutionalisation is creating guidelines to help stakeholders comply with the Convention. Regional consultations are planned in January and February 2021 to enable disability organisations to voice concrete proposals on how to handle it.



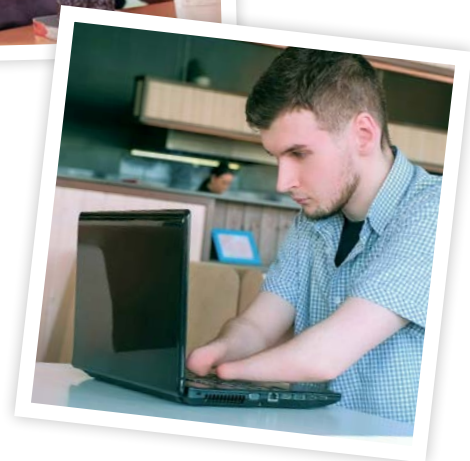
How can we do a better job on gender, indigenous people with disabilities, older persons with disabilities and maybe even prisoners with disabilities?

Don't forget how Covid-19 brought about the hidden pandemic of domestic violence against women and children

Gerard Quinn,
United Nations Rapporteur on the
Rights of Persons with Disabilities

In what was a "rich session", I. Placencia Porrero provided a helpful recap for all participants who had heard about the progress and areas for improvement under the current Strategy, with timely reminders that the next one would adequately reflect human rights as per the Convention, and focus on close cooperation between the EU and Member States.

A wide range of priorities were raised, from employment to de-institutionalisation and the need to provide good community-based services as an alternative. The importance of stronger monitoring and better indicators within a framework for evaluating progress under the next Strategy was also stressed. Covid-19 came up often and attendees were reminded that there will be a dedicated session during Day 2 of the event. They were also encouraged to tune into the Accessible City Awards in the afternoon.



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ACCESS CITY AWARD 2021 CEREMONY



The City Award Winners 2020

In a special pre-recorded Award Ceremony, the six finalists of the 11th annual Access City Awards were congratulated ahead of the announcements of the eventual winners. Several special award categories this year showcased progress being made in different facets of inclusion.

“Society should be accessible by default,” said European Commissioner for Equality Helena Dalli who got proceedings underway by thanking all of the cities involved in this year’s Award, calling them “leading examples” for investing in accessibility.

Accessibility is a prerequisite to participating in society equally, and to moving around and living as independently and autonomously as possible. The Commissioner called for “positive change” that takes into account the Convention, EU legislation and the European Pillar of Social Rights. That is where the new Strategy comes in, as a “European reference” for all persons with disabilities, and for European and national lawmakers.



Helena Dalli, Commissioner for Equality



Society should be accessible by default.

Helena Dalli,
European Commissioner for Equality

She said there is still a long road ahead to reach what President von der Leyen called the “Union of equality”, but she remains confident it can be achieved if the focus is right. Here, she said access is a broad subject, not just the built environment but also services, products, transport, as well as access to information (digital and traditional means) and assistive technology. The upcoming Union of Equality: Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities must therefore be ambitious, she said, and also reflect the Covid-19 recovery.



Joost Korte, Director General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, DG EMPL, European Commission

Alongside the traditional categories, a special prize on how well cities responded to the Covid-19 pandemic was added to mark this particularly challenging year. A total of 50 applications were received for the ACA 2021, leading to six finalists, three winners and three special mentions.

The high number of submissions for the Awards, even during this crisis, showed cities’ unwavering dedication to accessibility, the Commissioner concluded.

- ▶ **WINNER:** Jönköping (Sweden)
- ▶ **RUNNER UP:** Bremerhaven (Germany)
- ▶ **SECOND RUNNER UP:** Gdynia (Poland)

Three further special prizes were awarded:

- ▶ **SPECIAL MENTION:** Poznań (Poland), accessibility of its public services in times of the pandemic
- ▶ **SPECIAL MENTION:** Komotini (Greece), accessibility as an opportunity for the whole city
- ▶ **SPECIAL MENTION:** Florence (Italy), accessibility of its built environment.

DAY 2

2 DECEMBER 2020

WEBINAR

DAY
2

COVID-19 AND THE RECOVERY. WHAT ABOUT PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES?

Speakers

- **László Bercse**, Vice President of Inclusion Europe and Chair of the European Platform of Self-Advocates
- **Sophie Rattaire (replaced by Miroslava Kachler)**, Inter-ministerial Coordinator for Universal Accessibility, French General Secretariat of the Inter-ministerial Committee on Disability
- **Anastasia Pharris**, Expert at the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control
- **Thomas Signal**, Policy Officer, European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities
- **Catherine Naughton**, Director of the European Disability Forum (Chair)

Covid-19 and the recovery

This was a recurring question leading up to the European Day of Persons with Disabilities. At the time of writing (mid-December 2020) Covid-19 had infected nearly 73 million people and killed 1.62 million. The impact of the pandemic on people with disabilities has been profound, but in many ways difficult to substantiate due to a lack of good quality, comparable data. This was one of many issues raised during Day 2 of the event.

There were many references to Covid-19 on Day 1 and its presence was evident in the 'virtual' way that everyone had to meet, noted **Catherine Naughton**, Director of the European Disability Forum and moderator. This session, she added, is an opportunity to look forward at what can be done, and how people with disabilities can be part of the economic recovery, benefit from the funding and be part of the European response. "We know the pandemic will still be with



Catherine Naughton,
Director of the European Disability Forum (Chair)



László Bercse, Vice President of Inclusion Europe and Chair of the European Platform of Self-Advocates

us for some period to come, although there is light at the tunnel with the vaccination,” she said before handing over to **László Bercse**, Vice President of Inclusion Europe and Chair of the European Platform of Self-Advocates.

After an introduction to Inclusion Europe’s remit, which has members in 40 European countries and represents over 20 million citizens, he said he admired how people with intellectual disabilities, their family members and service providers were coping with Covid-19. They have faced isolation, especially those in care institutions. Services and support have been under great strain. Students and workers with intellectual disabilities are struggling to stay connected and work.

He summed up the situation: “Online meetings of course are not for all people. Some of us do not have the computers or phones to do it. Some of us do not have internet connections. Many people with intellectual disabilities have lost their jobs. Many of us feel that we were left out. Our needs were often not considered when preparing measures and solutions.”

Information about what to do and must be presented in accessible language, he said. In the UK, the Covid-19 death rate among people with disabilities is three times higher. This sort of figure in other European countries is unknown because those details are not recorded. Many people with intellectual disabilities have been denied proper healthcare when sick with Covid-19. Conditions have been terrible, he explained, but the “bad things happening during the pandemic are not new to us”, they just made discrimination, isolation and lack of healthcare worse. Governments must investigate what is happening, learn from the experience and listen to disabled communities. “Our lives have the same value as everyone else.”

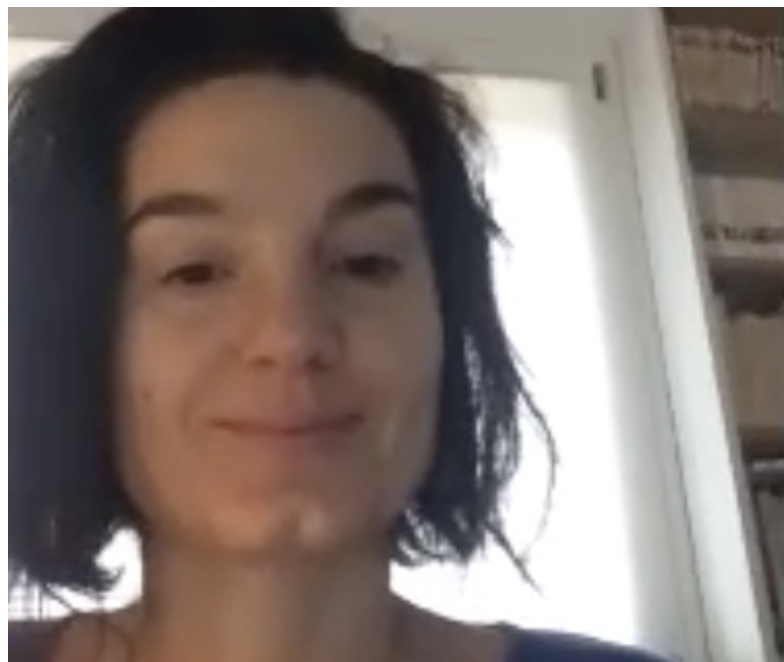
Representing France’s Inter-ministerial Committee on Disability, **Miroslava Kachler** explained her government’s policies and implementation of the UN Convention and how it is responding to the Covid-19

crisis, including measures to mitigate the impact on people with disabilities.

A cross-ministerial Steering Committee has been handling all aspects to ensure an inclusive society with access to employment, services, information, training, etc. before, during and after the crisis. She outlined various priorities to tackle discrimination which are constantly reviewed by the Council, and listed the funds being made available in general solidarity programmes and as part of the Covid-19 Recovery Plan. These include specific measures for accessible transport, support and anti-poverty measures for low-income households, as well as improved healthcare services such as remote consultations and e-health tools.

Among the measures, extra payments are being offered (e.g. €100 per child and €550 per household) to all low-income families and for those receiving housing benefits. A total of €95 million has been put aside to ensure people are properly fed. In a broader measure, France is tackling labour discrimination by demanding 6% of public sector jobs go to people with disabilities.

Throughout next year, she noted, a series of new and reinforced actions should “catalyse inclusivity” based especially on communication, flexibility, simpler administration, and access to the digital world. The Covid-19 crisis has no doubt been a “testing time affecting our lives and our people”, she said, and it has been central to France’s plans to encourage more solidarity and joint action.



Miroslava Kachler, Inter-ministerial Coordinator for Universal Accessibility, French General Secretariat of the Inter-ministerial Committee on Disability

The Covid-19 ‘wake-up call’



Anastasia Pharris, Expert at the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, gave a general review of the status of Covid-19 and presented conclusions from a study conducted by the Centre over the summer. She presented the latest global case rates and death rates, including those for the EU and UK, which had recorded 13 million cases and more than 300,000 deaths by the beginning of December. For the latest figures and information, she recommended people visit the [ECDC Covid-19 dashboard](#) and country overviews.

She spoke of the different waves of infection but also about improved understanding of how fast it spreads in regional and local situations, which informs responses by public, health and social services, especially those aimed at people with disabilities who are more vulnerable during the pandemic. The ECDC’s reporting takes a broad view of measures aimed at people facing difficulty due to Covid-19. The highest risk category covers those who are

medically vulnerable due to their age or medical history, as compared to those who are vulnerable or adversely affected by the measures imposed to suppress the spread, which make an already difficult situation worse (social, economic, mental) for people with disabilities. There are diverse groups affected, she said, which makes it hard to represent in the reporting.

“A lot of this has impacted people with disabilities very much ... issues around physical distancing, requests to stay at home, and those policies have made a lot of the services that many of us are used to providing or receiving look different in the past half year and impacted some populations severely,” she said. “Some of the services that they need to receive have not been able to be provided in safe ways or at all.”

The ECDC’s research has charted what action is needed and what measures are now considered best practices (see below).

Proposed good practices for consideration by national/regional authorities and by civil society and other service providers

PROPOSED GOOD PRACTICE	ACTION NEEDED BY NATIONAL AND/OR REGIONAL AUTHORITIES	ACTION NEEDED BY CIVIL SOCIETY/SERVICE PROVIDERS
1 · Continuity of service provision	✓	✓
2 · Provision of material support	✓	✓
3 · Use of online and other digital technologies	✓	✓
4 · Prevention of COVID-19 infection for both users and staff/volunteers		✓
5 · A community engagement approach	✓	✓
6 · Clear communication between service providers and service users		✓
7 · Staying socially connected		✓
8 · Collaboration between national/regional authorities and civil society service providers	✓	✓
9 · Equality and human rights	✓	✓
10 · Needs assessments and evaluation of services	✓	✓
11 · Flexibility with service level policies while ensuring continued legal protection	✓	



Anastasia Pharris, Expert at the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control

Civil society has made a huge contribution and learned valuable lessons, while national and regional authorities have provided financial support, good communication, collaboration and contributed to a wider framework for action based on equality and human rights. Pharris cautioned that civil society's work may not be sustainable over the longer term without extra support, and it should not replace Member States' obligations to ensure access to care and support for people on their territory. Despite good signs with the vaccine, she warned that the crisis is not over. It will continue to impact lives for some time.

"[Covid-19] was a wake-up call to many of us that we need to ensure that we have systems in place if another pandemic comes ... so the most vulnerable are taken care of," she said. In that way, we can at least see the "silver lining in the Covid-19 cloud".

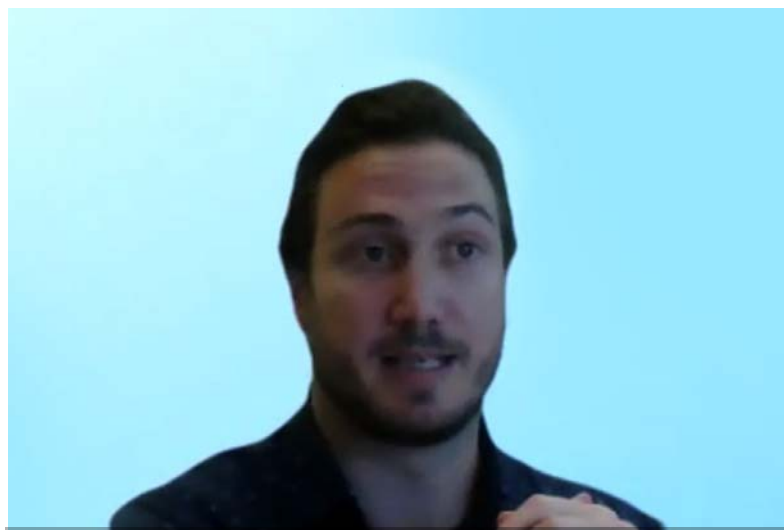


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Thomas Bignal, Policy manager at the European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities, naturally looked at the pandemic from a service provision perspective. He focused on structural investment needs and other specific reinforcement measures specifically for people with disabilities living in institutional settings and community facilities. An acute shortage of staff, inadequate infrastructure, poor training, poor use of digital solutions were among the main issues identified during the crisis.

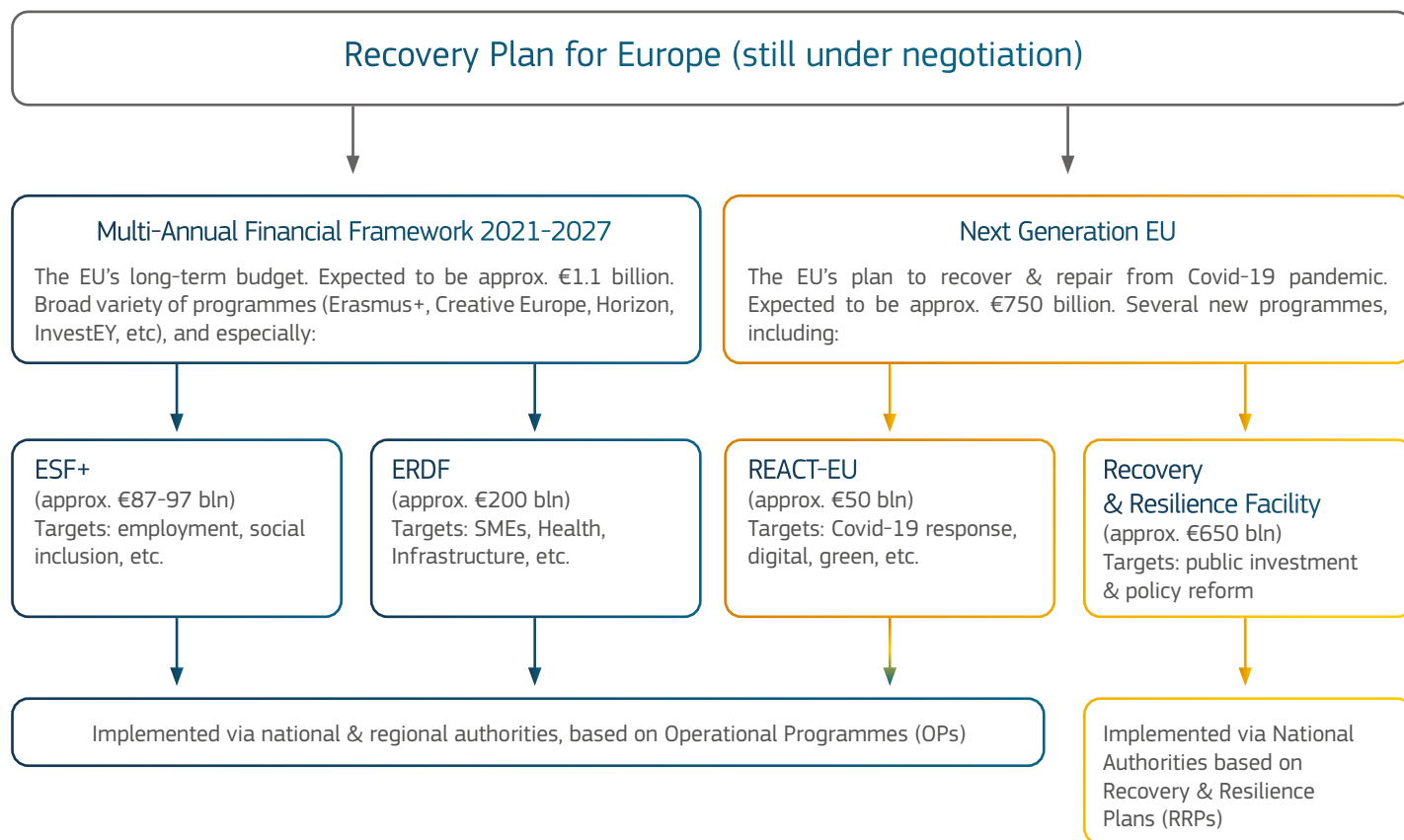
The crisis also highlighted that new forms of service, greater emphasis on co-production, and expanded use of online platforms are needed, especially as de-institutionalisation gains momentum. This also implies more and better support for social economy enterprises and employment needs in the sector, and additional resources to cover the costs of providing safer services, such as personal protective equipment, and training in their use. Governments have not covered this, he pointed out.

He shared a helpful chart (see below) summing up what the EU has agreed in terms of funds to aid the recovery, explaining some of the features and figures associated with these initiatives and programmes. These include the European Social Fund (ESF+) which is the main investment instrument on areas such as de-institutionalisation employment and inclusive education. Indeed, some 25% of the budget goes towards social inclusion projects and to promoting the principles of the UN Convention. Similar to the ESF, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) has wide potential for boosting social inclusion through regional and national programming, directed more towards the economy and the Pillar of Social Rights. Meanwhile, he explained that REACT-EU is the EU's new instrument focusing on the crisis and recovery support process, which tops up the ESF and ERDF.



Thomas Bignal, Policy Officer, European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities

WHAT IS THE EU RECOVERY PLAN?



Signal added that these funds should be in line with the UN Convention as one of the so-called “enabling conditions”, but expressed concern that no clear conditionality applies to REACT-EU. Regional authorities have to implement it, so we have to be “vigilant it is used the right way”, he cautioned.

He also mentioned the importance to Member States of the loans and grants available via the **Recovery and Resilience Facility**, to mitigate the impact of the pandemic and make economies and societies more sustainable, resilient and better prepared for green and digital transitions (see figure below).

Emphasis should be on “fair investments”, he said, targeting the implementation of the EU Pillar of Social Rights which includes many elements for people with disabilities. National governments are preparing their Recovery Resilience Plans, outlining how they plan to use the available money, which have to be submitted by the end of April 2021.

There are lots of opportunities for people with disabilities and services for people with disabilities in these programmes, he said. “We advise our members to speak to national policymakers and authorities, to make sure they design the programming and planning for these funds, and make the UN Convention a priority in the use of the plans. Signal also encouraged the European Commission to factor this into its upcoming Strategy.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO BOTH PUBLIC INVESTMENTS AND REFORMS

€672.5 billion

Up to €312.5 billion in grants

Up to €360 billion in loans

Questions and views from the floor

Participants requested the floor to ask their questions and issue statements about the subjects being discussed. Several questions were made via the digital chat function. These have been grouped for simpler reporting.

Participants

- ▶ How do we respond to the silent epidemic of violence against women with disability (before and now even more under Covid-19)?
- ▶ Is there enough research on the effects of social distancing and isolation for people with disability?

Mask-wearing is problematic for daily life and a communication barrier especially for deaf people, and people with disabilities need extra assistance in public and other domains.

- ▶ Is there a medical position on the safety of transparent masks?

Women with psycho-social disabilities face great risk during Covid-19 and general discrimination has increased.

- ▶ How can we be engaged in the recovery planning, as we're often invisible?

Answers grouped

A. Pharris: There is a double impact for women with disabilities under Covid-19 and it needs to be studied. We saw examples of short-form social media formats as one option for better engaging. On whether we thought pandemics like this were possible, yes we did given the globalised society and ease with which viruses spread. It is now more important to have good surveillance in place and to have systems to act quickly; pandemic preparedness is now really being tested and reviewed in light of the most vulnerable populations. On vaccines, the risks and needs are different so the ECDC is really looking at this at the 'population level' to see who needs protection first. The Centre expects quite a quick rollout at the beginning of 2021, so the mask questions might be dealt with then. As to the safety of transparent masks, that is not known but the ECDC can look into it.

M. Kachler: Indeed classic masks hinder persons with disabilities and France is reviewing the transparent mask question. As to protecting women during this time, several measures and services including special helplines and a reporting mechanism organised through pharmacies are offered. Plans are underway to develop resource centres for domestic abuse victims and people with disabilities experiencing violence. Training on this for professionals is also planned for 2021. Awareness-raising in schools is also important.

T. Signal: On the question touching on emergency support under Covid-19 for institutions and care settings, the move towards a "medical approach" and measures to protect older people did not work very well. Many residents moved out to be with families who lacked support and preparation. It was the "wrong understanding" of de-institutionalisation, moving them home or into families who were not prepared. Everyone needs to plan better how to deal with a pandemic as a sector and to develop better de-institutionalisation platforms and processes.

Organiser: As to the question (posted in the chat) on exchanging good practice for people with disabilities and vaccination for people with sensory disabilities, the EDF will pass on the question to the relevant partners so that vaccinations are rolled out with full consent and awareness.



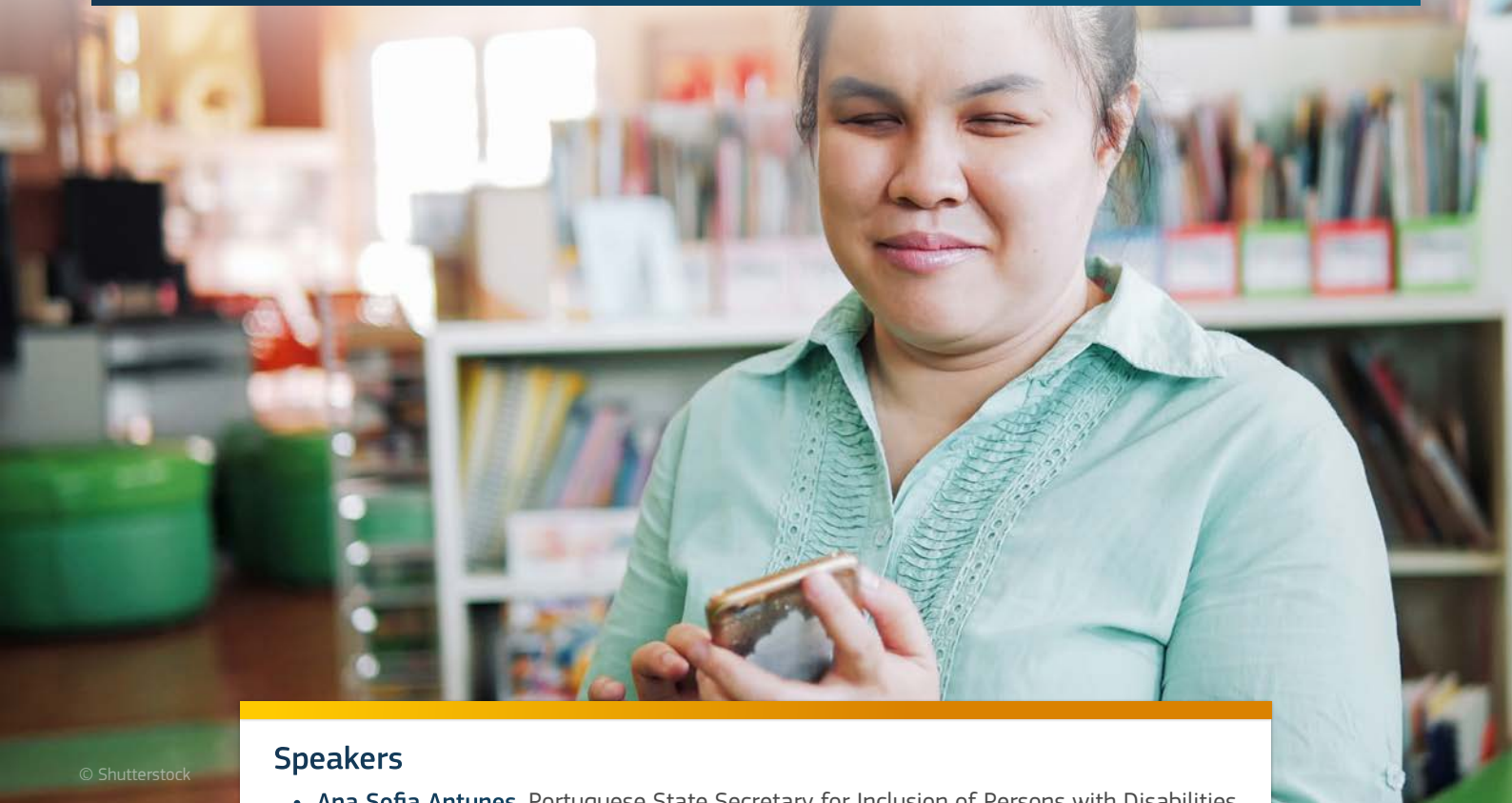
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Many of us feel that we were left out. Our needs were often not considered when preparing measures and solution. Our lives have the same value as everyone else.

László Bercse, Vice President of Inclusion Europe and Chair of the European Platform of Self-Advocates

CONCLUSIONS FROM THE EVENT



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Speakers

- **Ana Sofia Antunes**, Portuguese State Secretary for Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities
- **Ana Pelaez**, Vice President of the European Disability Forum
- **Katarina Ivanković Knežević**, Director of the Social Affairs Directorate, DG EMPL, European Commission

Conclusions about social inclusion Investing in a more equitable Europe

The European Commission's **Katarina Ivanković Knežević**, Director of the Social Affairs Directorate (DG EMPL) thanked everyone for their excellent contributions during the second day of the EDPD conference. An important take-home point, she suggested, is that we are all facing similar challenges around the world so there is a collective will to act. Covid-19 was a red line running through talks at the UN Conference of the State Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, that she attended the day before. This shared condition "obliges us to do as much as possible in order to mitigate all of the challenges".

Representing the incoming Presidency of the Council of the EU, **Ana Sofia Antunes**, Portuguese State Secretary for Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, said disability and inclusion will be at the centre of her country's political agenda. The EU is home to some 100 million people with disabilities so their "social



Ana Sofia Antunes, Portuguese State Secretary for Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities

inclusion is an investment in our common future, a more equitable and inclusive Europe". She underlined the need to implement the requirements of the UN Convention, but also the EU Treaties, Charter on Fundamental Rights and the Pillar Social Rights.

Disability questions must be present and expressed in the Action Plan to implement the Pillar which is in final stages of preparation, she revealed. This is an essential condition for social rights, sustainable development, and justice to all, especially during challenging times like Covid-19 which affect, among others, access to healthcare, social protection, employment, infrastructure/services.

Persons with disabilities need to be able to participate in all decisions affecting them, and that their interest/needs be taken into account in a more ambitious, effective and action-oriented Strategy that leaves no one behind. As a government official and a person with a disability, she stressed the importance of implementing this new Strategy. To that end, the Presidency is organising a high-level meeting in Lisbon, to discuss an effective plan for turning the Strategy into "concrete and effective actions".

Thanking the Commission and all the organisers for their work during the two-day EDPD, **Ana Pelaez**, Vice President of the EDF, spoke about the importance of Covid-19 in terms of the Strategy and highlighted several points that need to be urgently addressed.

The pandemic has revealed weak points in our society, economy and democracy, she said. People with disabilities are at the "back of the queue" for medical treatment, "left behind" in tele-schooling, vulnerable to domestic violence, and struggle to access the information, support and social services they need. This is compounded by the lack of data to assess the full extent of the problem. The EDF has helped to bring these issues to the surface and urges that they are reflected in a "solid Strategy" to ensure progress in times of crisis.

She expressed concern that the EDF has not been sufficiently consulted on the policy directions or seen a draft, and stressed the value of cooperation between all relevant stakeholders throughout the process. "We must be at the table where we can discuss these issues, and our voices must be heard," she said.



As the incoming Presidency, inclusion of people with disabilities questions will be at the core of our political agenda [...] an investment in our common future and also in a more inclusive Europe

Ana Sofia Antunes, Portuguese State Secretary for Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities

K. Knežević thanked the Portuguese Government for planning the conference scheduled on 19-20 April 2021, for putting forward the Council Conclusions, and for implementing actions at Member State level,



Katarina Ivanković Knežević,
Director of the Social Affairs Directorate, DG EMPL, European Commission

"where it really happens". She underlined that the drafting of the Strategy is ongoing and that several rounds of consultation have been carried out with Commissioner Dalli's involvement. She assured participants that the "perspectives and objectives" for improving the lives of people with disabilities in all areas are the same.

As a final wrap up of the two-day meeting, she said that the first panel was indeed a great opportunity to get some final inspiration, feedback and insights – the positives and areas for improvement – on the Strategy ending in 2020. Frank exchanges and contributions from civil society have played a big part in the evaluation. The importance of an intersectional approach which better covers the needs of women and children with disabilities was also underlined. 'Substitute decision' regimes, self-determination, de-institutionalisation, independent living and related care aspects, data deficiencies and many other issues are key points for the future Strategy, she underlined.

The second panel offered first-hand testimony and valuable accounts of the problems that people with disabilities have encountered during the Covid-19 pandemic. The digital world is not as accessible as we would like. Civil society has done a valiant job but will need more support. Innovative solutions, financial incentives and targeted programmes are needed. Some examples of French initiatives were helpful and may inform future actions in the upcoming French Presidency in 2022. Participants learned about the EU Recovery Plans, the ESF+, ERDF and REACT-EU, which all need to line up with the UNCRPD's "enabling conditions".

After a final word of congratulations to all of the winners and finalists of the 11th edition of the Accessible Cities Award, the Director of the Social Affairs Directorate closed the meeting with a final wish: "Thank you to all of you who have been with us. We hope indeed to see you face to face in 2021, but in the meantime, please stay safe and take care of yourself and your loved ones."

GETTING THE MESSAGE OUT

Raising awareness is a critical part of what the European Commission and European Disability Forum want to achieve with the European Day of Persons with Disabilities. A flagship in both organisation's annual calendar, it is a chance to **underline the challenges, herald the achievements and connect policy with actions** on the ground throughout Europe.

Delegates at the conference were encouraged to share their ideas and further discuss all topics on the agenda via social media and through dedicated channels: #EDPD2020 #EUDisability, #EUAccessCity and #WeAreEUCitizens

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