



Study supporting the evaluation of the European Disability Strategy (2010- 2020)

Synopsis Report

March, 2021



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion

Unit C3

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Manuscript completed in March 2021

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Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2021

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PDF ISBN 978-92-76-30619-1 doi:10.2767/676968 Catalogue number: KE-03-21-094-EN-N

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1 Introduction

This Synopsis Report presents an overview of the consultation work for the study supporting the evaluation of the European Disability Strategy 2010- 2020 (EDS). This study was conducted by ICF on behalf of DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission (DG EMPL). Prior to the study, an Evaluation Roadmap was published for consultation between 29 August and 26 October 2018. The 13 respondents to the consultation included 10 non-governmental organisations (NGOs), 2 business associations and one private citizen. Key issues arising from these submissions were:

- EU Disability Strategy should recognise that there are different forms of disability, which impact on citizens in various ways and require varied and personalised forms of intervention and support;
- People with disabilities should be involved in the research and consulted on the drafting of online consultation;
- Full accessibility is necessary during targeted consultation, including interpretation if necessary, in order to reach a larger number of respondents;
- Any new European Disability Strategy should promote the role of the social economy in integrating people with disabilities into society and the economy.

These aspects were considered in the design and delivery of the study supporting the evaluation. The consultation activities undertaken were:

- A public consultation published on the European Commission's 'Have your say' portal. 2,547 responses were submitted from all EU Member States. 573 (22.5%) responses were from organisations, whereas 1974 (77.5%) responses came from individuals. Two versions of the questionnaire, a standard version and an easy-to-read version, were published, each accessible in all 24 official EU languages;
- 20 semi-structured interviews with various types of EU stakeholders, covering EU institutions and bodies, Disabled Persons' Organisations, social partners, academia and education, service providers/ private business representatives, and equality and human rights bodies.
- 162 semi-structured interviews and 17 focus groups with Member State stakeholders.

This Synopsis Report is structured as follows:

- Section 2 describes the consultation methods used in the study and how the methods were implemented, as well as outlining the stakeholders consulted, how that was done and how their contributions inform the study.
- Section 3 identifies the issues and challenges encountered during the consultations. It describes how these were addressed and summarises the lessons learned from the implementation of the consultation activities.

2 Target groups and consultation undertaken for the evaluation

Different target groups were established for the study:

1. General public (people with/without disabilities);
2. EU-level stakeholders;
3. Member State-level stakeholders.

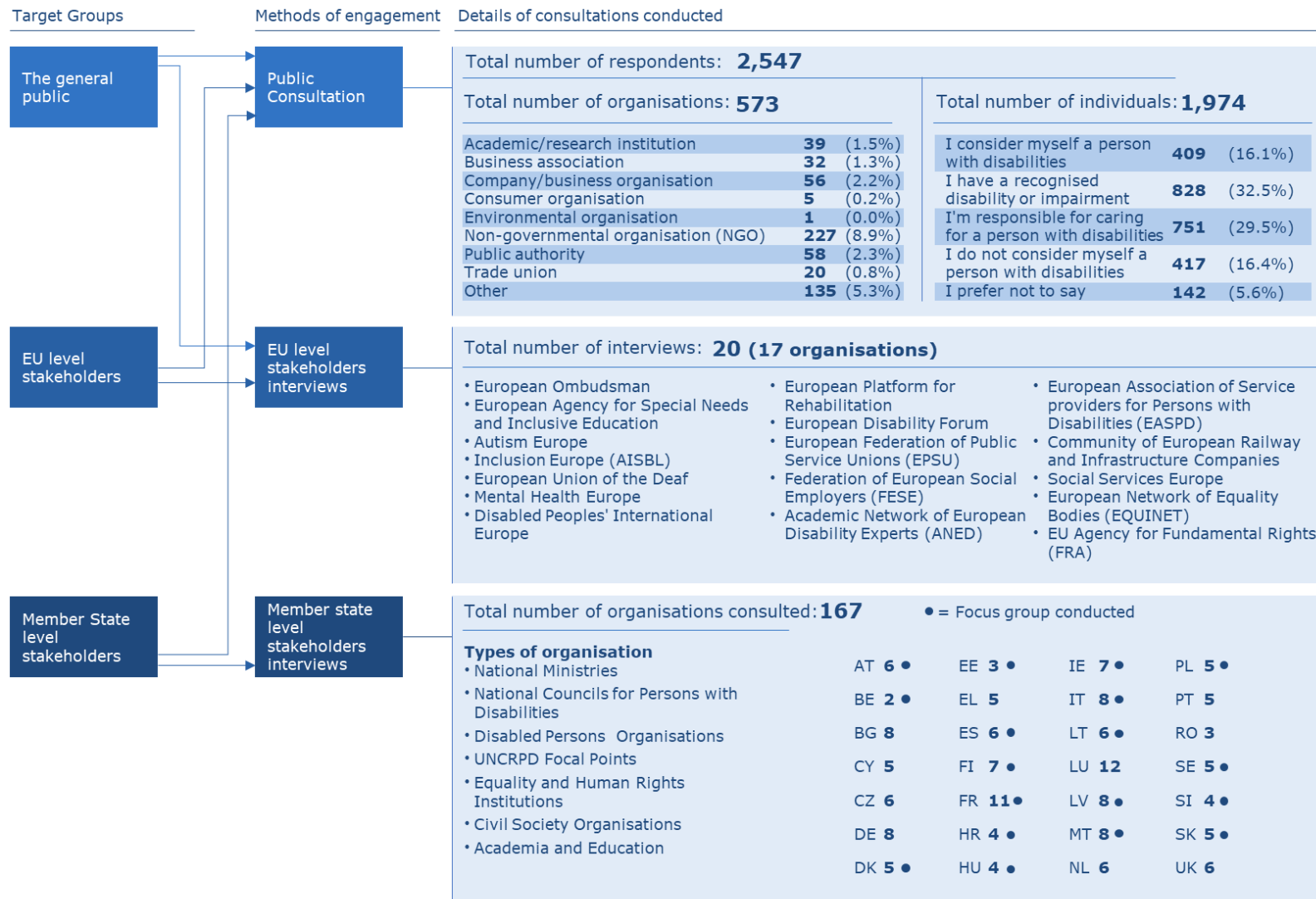
Before starting the evaluation activities, a consultation strategy was prepared in order to identify the main stakeholders relevant for the evaluation and to define the most appropriate method for consultation.

The general public was to be engaged mainly through an online open consultation. Several institutional stakeholders (High Level Group on Disability, the Disability Inter-service Group of the European Commission, the Work Forum on the Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and EU-level civil society organisation) were to be consulted during the meetings regularly organised by the European Commission throughout the year. Other high-level stakeholders (Disability Intergroup of the European Parliament, European Ombudsman, Academic Network of European Disability Experts) were to be consulted via ad hoc meetings and interviews. Further consultations held at national level were to be carried out via questionnaires and ad-hoc interviews.

Once the evaluation started, specific stakeholders were identified through a process of detailed stakeholder mapping. A document review established the rationale, inputs, activities, outputs, and expected outcomes of the Strategy, which then enabled a mapping of stakeholders involved in the design and delivery of the Strategy at EU and Member State level. The stakeholders and targeting methods were agreed with DG EMPL.

The methods used to collect particular forms of data from stakeholders are described in the remainder of this section. An overview of the target groups, consultation methods, and those consulted is provided in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Consultation methods and their target groups



The following sections detail the consultation activities undertaken.

2.1 Public consultation

The public consultation was hosted on the European Commission website¹ and ran from 31 July 2019 to 13 November 2019. It collected views from a wide range of respondents (including stakeholder organisations and interested citizens living in the EU) on their perceptions of the EDS and its implementation to date, together with their opinions on important future priorities for disability policy.

The questionnaire was developed based on discussions with DG EMPL and the Inter Service Steering Group established by the European Commission to oversee the study. It sought to ensure that the public consultation would meet the requirements of the evaluation and provide the European Commission with a useful evidence base for further actions in the disability policy area.

ICF worked with Member State experts to promote the public consultation among key national stakeholders and their networks at both EU and Member State level. In addition, ICF worked with the European Disability Forum (EDF), an umbrella organisation for people with disabilities, to promote the public consultation by creating social media posts in different EU languages that were sent out through EDF's social media channels. Two versions of the questionnaire were published, a standard version and an easy-to-read version (to meet the needs of people with disabilities) and each was accessible in all 24 official EU languages.

A total of 2,547 questionnaire responses were received, with respondents ranging from EU and non-EU citizens, academic/research institutions, business and consumer organisations, environmental organisations, NGOs, public authorities, trade unions and other stakeholders. A total of 573 (22.5%) responses were from organisations, with 1,974 (77.5%) responses from individuals, including EU and non-EU citizens.

In addition to the responses to the public consultation questionnaire, a total of 107 position papers were received, 37 in English and 70 in other EU languages. These documents were systematically analysed by a native speaker researcher to determine their relevance to each evaluation criterion. Of the 107 position papers submitted, 49 contained particularly relevant information. Key point summaries were prepared and incorporated into the study's evidence base.

2.1.1 Results from the public consultation

This section sets out the results from the public consultation, by evaluation criteria.

2.1.1.1 Effectiveness

The public consultation provided a range of useful data to understand the overall progress for people with disabilities and the contribution of the Strategy to that progress. The majority of respondents held positive views of the effectiveness of the Strategy:

- Overall, 56% of respondents agreed or somewhat agreed that the situation for people with disabilities has improved over the past 10 years in their Member State, with 52% agreeing or somewhat agreeing that the Strategy had contributed to this improvement.
- Of respondents with a disability, 52% agreed or somewhat agreed that the situation for people with disabilities has improved in the past 10 years in their Member State, with 48% agreeing or somewhat agreeing that the Strategy contributed to improving the situation.
- 74% of organisations and 51% of individuals agreed or somewhat agreed that the situation of people with disabilities has improved over the past 10 years in their Member State. 63% of organisations and 47% of individuals somewhat agreed or agreed that the Strategy helped to improve that situation.

- Of those stating they had knowledge of the Strategy, 33% agreed or somewhat agreed that the situation for people with disabilities has improved over the last 10 years in their Member State, with 52% agreeing or somewhat agreeing that the Strategy was part of that improvement.

Looking at views on the different areas of the Strategy, the following key points emerged:

- The highest shares of respondents with knowledge of the Strategy and who believed it had helped to improve the lives of people with disabilities were in the areas of accessibility (66%), participation (55%), education and training (54%) and equality (51%).
- The areas that those with knowledge of the Strategy stated had had least impact on improving the lives of people with disabilities were external action (24%), employment (40%), health (41%) and social protection (48%).
- For every area of action (with the exception of external action), a greater number of respondents without a disability agreed or somewhat agreed that there had been progress. The split between those with a disability and those without a disability in terms of the improvement stemming from the Strategy were:
 - Accessibility 63% / 74%;
 - Participation 51% / 69%;
 - Equality 47% / 65%;
 - Employment 37%/ 52%;
 - Education and training 53% / 60%;
 - Social protection 44% / 64%;
 - Health 38% / 53%;
 - External action 28% / 23%.
- Respondents contributing on behalf of organisations typically stated that the Strategy had more impact than respondents in their capacity as EU citizens. However, the differences in views on the effectiveness between these types of respondents was much narrower than the differences between respondents without a disability.

2.1.1.2 Efficiency

Views on the adequacy of the resources provided for the Strategy were somewhat mixed:

- An average of 22% of respondents with knowledge of the Strategy agreed that funding for each area of action was adequate (39% disagreed or somewhat disagreed). The proportion of respondents who agreed or somewhat agreed that the resources were adequate varied between 15% (external action) and 26% (accessibility);
- The proportion of respondents that did not agree that funding for the Strategy was adequate ranged from 28% (external action) and 44% (employment);
- Respondents with disabilities or those caring for someone with a disability were more likely to disagree that the Strategy was adequately resourced than those without a disability. Additionally, a higher share of organisations than individuals agreed that the Strategy was adequately resourced.

2.1.1.3 Coherence

In relation to measures established in Member States, responses showed a mixed picture of coherence with the Strategy:

- Around 40% of respondents agreed or somewhat agreed that the national priority measures of their country were in line with the eight areas of action of the EDS. This view was most frequently expressed by organisations (50%) and least frequently by individuals (30%) and those with disabilities (35%);

- When looking at the different areas of action of the Strategy, survey respondents felt very differently about the various thematic areas:
 - In accessibility, a greater share of respondents (51%) than for other areas of the Strategy agreed/somewhat agreed that there was alignment between national policy and the Strategy. The area of external action contained the lowest share (22%) of respondents agreeing/somewhat agreeing that the actions of the Strategy were consistent with national policy;
 - Of those respondents that disagreed/somewhat disagreed that national priorities were aligned with the Strategy (36%, on average), the areas most commonly identified as lacking coherence with national policy were employment (43%) and social protection (40%).

2.1.1.4 Relevance

Analysis of the responses from the public consultation found that the thematic areas of the Strategy were considered relevant for the future, with around 66% of respondents believing seven of the eight areas to be relevant for the future, and 55% considering external action relevant.

2.1.1.5 Added value

The majority of the public consultation respondents held the view that Strategy provided added value:

- At Member State level, 52% of respondents agreed or somewhat agreed that the Strategy had helped to improve the situation for people with disabilities, compared to 53% noting that effect at EU level;
- Relatively few respondents stated that the Strategy had not helped to improve the situation of persons with disabilities. 27% stated they somewhat disagreed or disagreed that it had helped at Member State level, compared to 11% in relation to the EU;
- Interestingly, a high level of respondents did not know whether or not the Strategy had helped to improve the situation for persons with disabilities at EU level (20%) or worldwide (38%).

2.2 EU stakeholder interviews

Consultations with EU-level stakeholders took place through face-to-face interviews or telephone interviews (to accommodate availability/interviewee preference). Interviews were conducted between September 2019 and December 2019 and lasted between 45 and 90 minutes.

These interviews helped to further develop the desk research findings and allowed stakeholders to directly contribute evidence to answer the evaluation questions.

The semi-structured interviews used a topic guide covering key issues to inform the evaluation framework. Individual questions were formulated to assess the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and added value of the EDS, to understand the current situation of people with disabilities in the EU, and to gather opinions on the future direction of EU Disability Strategy. Interview questions were tailored to the type of stakeholder consulted.

20 semi-structured interviews were conducted with the EU-level stakeholders. An initial list of relevant stakeholders was identified through desk research and refined based on suggestions from the Inter Service Steering Group.

The semi-structured interviews included a total of 17 organisations. One individual was interviewed per organisation, with two individuals from the European Disability Forum interviewed, and three from the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA). Table 1 outlines the interviews undertaken with the EU-level stakeholders.

Table 1. EU-level stakeholders interviewed

Stakeholder types	Stakeholder organisations
EU institutions and bodies	European Ombudsman EU Agency for Fundamental Rights
Disabled Persons' Organisations (DPOs)	Autism Europe Disabled Peoples' International Europe European Disability Forum European Union of the Deaf Inclusion Europe (AISBL) Mental Health Europe
Social partners	European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU) Federation of European Social Employers (FESE)
Academia and education	Academic Network of European Disability Experts (ANED)
Service providers/private business representatives	European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD) Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies European Platform for Rehabilitation Social Services Europe
Equality and human rights bodies	European Network of Equality Bodies (EQUINET)
Other	European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

2.3 Member State stakeholder interviews and focus groups

A network of disability experts from each Member State was established by the ICF study team to conduct the national level consultation and research, including desk research, stakeholder interviews and focus groups. Focus groups were organised through the national councils for people with disabilities (or similar organisations in Member States where such organisations do not currently exist). Member State experts also conducted semi-structured interviews, both face-to-face and via telephone. Interviews and focus groups were conducted between September 2019 and December 2019, with national representatives and key stakeholders in order to supplement evidence gathered through the desk review.

The stakeholder consultations at Member State level aimed to build on the information gathered through the initial desk review. More specifically, they gathered further information and opinions on the progress of implementation in specific areas of action, particularly focusing on national-level actions motivated by the Strategy.

Outputs from these activities (i.e. desk review, semi-structured interviews and focus groups) were summarised by Member State experts in a standardised country report template. The interviews and focus groups adhered to a topic guide, focusing on assessing the extent of change in Member States in the issues covered by the EDS since 2010, particularly relating to accessibility, participation, equality, employment, education and training, social protection and health. The topic guide also included questions to understand drivers of change in national disability policy and changes attributed to the EDS.

A total of 162 interviews and 17 focus groups were conducted with Member State stakeholders.

3 Issues encountered and actions taken during the consultations

Throughout the course of the study, a range of challenges emerged in relation to the consultation methods. This section describes the issues and the actions taken by the study team for each of the consultation activities.

3.1 Public consultation

A number of issues were encountered during the public consultation and these are described below, along with the mitigation measures that were put in place. Relevant lessons for future consultations are reflected in Section 3.4.

1. Time constraints meant it was not possible to pilot the public consultation with representative organisations for people with disabilities or other relevant organisations. To ensure that the public consultation could be concluded and analysed prior to the European Day of Persons with Disabilities at the end of November 2019, an important priority was to launch the public consultation before the summer. During the period of the consultation, ICF worked with Member State experts to report issues to DG EMPL as they were detected, and these were then rectified by DG EMPL.
2. There were particular access issues which inhibited the ability of respondents to answer questions. These included language defaulting to EN after some filter questions and these issues were resolved very quickly. Some stakeholders reported that the requirement to register prior to completing the public consultation deterred them from taking part. In addition, stakeholders reported technical issues, such as being unable to fill out certain required fields, which deterred them from submitting their response. These issues were reported to DG EMPL and promptly resolved.
3. There was a low response rate in some Member States, including raw data that enable the number of responses to be understood and the geographical spread to be easily determined. This issue was mitigated by contacting the relevant Member State experts and urging them to publicise the consultation and encourage stakeholders to complete it.

Some stakeholders raised the possibility of conducting a further consultation (following completion of the evaluation) that would focus solely on the post-2020 priorities and forms of delivery. This could be considered, as it has the potential to produce a clearer and more precise set of results.

3.2 EU stakeholder interviews

Some stakeholders mentioned that they had already responded to the public consultation and felt that additional involvement through interviews was redundant. Others pointed to their extensive involvement in the previous evaluation and felt that further involvement would add little value. These issues were immediately flagged with DG EMPL, and a clear communication channel (email, telephone and face-to-face meetings) was maintained to ensure a timely response and identify and approach other relevant EU-level interviewees.

3.3 Member State stakeholder interviews and focus groups

Member State experts pointed to several issues that hindered their research activities. The timing of the evaluation was an issue, with national experts finding it difficult to secure interviews or focus groups with stakeholders during the summer holiday period. In addition, some mentioned that stakeholders were initially hesitant to take part, assuming that their identity would be disclosed. This issue was easily mitigated by assuring both Member State experts and relevant stakeholders that their identity would be kept anonymous. The interviews were kept as succinct as possible, with interviewees permitted to provide written information if they preferred. In addition, some stakeholders refused to participate for accessibility reasons (e.g. not wanting to travel long distances or not having access to technology to participate in the interview or focus group). The Member State experts who raised such issues were provided with additional resources (i.e. cost of renting accessible venues and travel costs) to hold focus groups in accessible venues and

hold interviews face-to-face in locations easily accessible for interviewees. This was required in three cases.

3.4 Lessons for future consultations

This section summarises the lessons inherent in the issues described above and which may be applied for future consultations:

- In order to identify and prevent accessibility difficulties and technical issues, the public consultation questions should be extensively piloted with representative organisations for people with disabilities and other relevant stakeholders. This could be done through a soft launch, for example, with a small sample of stakeholders invited to complete the questionnaire before it is made openly available. This would also ensure applicability of the survey questions in assessing the various aspects of the Strategy.
- The requirement to access the public consultation questionnaire using an EU login hindered participation, particularly among those with disabilities, who were particularly important in this consultation. The EU login requirement provides important security for consultations, however alternate solutions to using the EU login could be investigated and tested to ensure adequate security is maintained. This would be particularly useful where the involvement of people with disabilities is required.
- To reach the widest possible audience and obtain a good response rate, efforts should be made to promote the public consultation extensively prior to publication. This consultation was promoted after its launch, through established social media platforms of stakeholder organisations that were familiar to people with disabilities, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter.

References

¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/runner/ConsultationDisabilityStrategy?surveylanguage=EN>

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