

European Day of Persons with Disabilities 2021

Summaries

**Session 3:
Children with disabilities**

Speech of Zuzana Konradova



Zuzana Konradova works for Eurochild
as a Thematic Coordinator
in the field of Children in Alternative Care.

She says that children with disabilities face multiple challenges
because of their disability
but also because of how society treats them.

These challenges include

- not enough available good quality, inclusive and accessible early childhood education and care.
- not enough available accessible health care and rehabilitation.

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic

have only made these challenges harder.

During the lockdowns,

disabled children and young people did not get the care they needed.

Access to rehabilitation, assessments and examinations

was put on hold.

Not enough accessible services in the community

and not enough inclusive education

push children with disabilities to alternative care.

In most **EU** countries,

children with disabilities are too often in out of home care.

EU stands for European Union.

There has been significant progress in Central and Eastern Europe.

EU funding has been used to return people from institutions

to in home care.

In Bulgaria, Romania and Poland

there has been a transformation of large children's homes.

Members of Eurochild have given many good examples

about what works well

to make sure the needs of children with disabilities are met.

Like supporting children with disabilities

to be returned from institutions to in home care

and developing professional family foster care

by putting in place professional systems for supporting foster parents.

Many good changes have been made in EU **policies and initiatives**.

Policies and initiatives are rules for how an EU country should be run.

The countries that showed the most steady change for both children and adults were mostly countries that have been helped by EU funding.

This year EU policies have been put in place

to further support social inclusion of children with disabilities.

As well as to support inclusive education.

Part of this is improving the support teacher education system.

We believe more needs to be done

to make sure policies are carried out properly

and to make sure that the public are involved.

The public can come up with new and different ways to solve problems.

Even though the EU have promised to move care from institutions

to family and community based care,

there are not enough ways to check the progress.

Part of this is that countries currently do not need to report their progress

to the rest of the world.

Because of this there is not enough information to learn from.

Eurochild and UNICEF worked together in the DataCare Project

to research how EU countries collect information

about children in alternative care

and how they share it.

Speech of Nora Shabani



Nora Shabani is the Disability Focal Point at UNICEF Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia.

She says that children with disabilities, and especially children with severe disabilities, are left behind in the process of returning children from institutions to in home care. The barriers to this for children with disabilities are complicated. The medical definition of disability means that only children with visible and severe disabilities, or with certain kinds of disabilities, are identified as disabled. Institutions and special schools are still thought to give the best care and support. There is not enough access to inclusive education, this often causes parents to turn to institutions and special schools. Parents often have to deal with difficult situations to be able to keep their children in the family.

This can be effected by others people's opinions and feeling pressure from society.

Many key services do not provide enough support to parents of children with disabilities.

Services that can be improved

to support parents of children with disabilities:

- Family counseling services
- **Early identification and intervention.**

This means identifying that a child has a disability and making plans on how to support them.

- **Gatekeeping mechanisms.** These are the processes and rules we use to make sure the right decisions are made for children's care.
- Community support services.

Parents often cannot afford the extra cost that comes from caring for a child with disabilities.

Other care options, like specialized foster care, are needed to help children with disabilities to be returned from institutions to in home care.

But in many countries there are not enough of these care options for children with severe disabilities.

Child protection systems need to have

well trained and supported foster care families.

They need to be supported to provide emergency and longer term care along with trained professionals.

There are many challenges to providing this support in remote and rural areas.

The COVID-19 pandemic made these challenges harder.

We think it is a good idea

that the new EU Disability strategy aims to make new **disability indicators** for adults and children.

A **disability indicator** is a way to identify and research people who are disabled, with the goal of improving their inclusion in society.

What we learn from research should be used

to make policies that help improve support systems and access to them.

The EU supports children with disabilities

being returned from institutions to in home care.

They do this by encouraging

the use of **structural and investment funds**.

Structural and investment funds are money shared out by the EU to the member countries.

The money is to be used to support job creation and a healthy European economy.

The new **strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

suggests that we change the way we support children with disabilities being returned from institutions to in home care.

The **strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

describes what problem people with disabilities face in the European Union

and says what the European Union will do

to improve the lives of people with disabilities.

The strategy suggests that different sectors work together

to support children with disabilities

being returned from institutions to in home care.

The focus on social protection systems will help children with disabilities and their families.

Children with disabilities and their families

are often put into a situation of poverty and social exclusion.

Sharing and learning about their social protection systems

can help to find the root cause of this.

The EU will help to guide EU member states

and they will encourage sharing and learning.

We must all work together to promote community based care

and to support children with disabilities

being returned from institutions to in home care.

The EU must also work to support social inclusion for people with disabilities in their **enlargement and neighborhood policies**.

Enlargement and neighborhood policies are rules and plans about how new countries can join the EU.

Some countries must agree to improve things about their country before they can join.

Closing Session 3

Speech of Pietro Barbieri



Pietro Barbieri is President of **European Economic and Social Committee** (EESC) Thematic study group on disability rights.

European Economic and Social Committee is an organisation in the European Union.

The **European Economic and Social Committee** is called the 'EESC' for short.

The job of the EESC is to promote human rights and the law.

The Disability Studies Group was made

to support the use

of the UN convention on the rights of people with disabilities.

They want to support the plans of Disabled People's Organisations.

The European Union believes human rights are very important.

We believe this too and that is what drives our actions.

We give opinions on the **draft directive** of the European commission, and also promote our own plans and ideas.

A **draft directive** is a plan to set a goal that all European Union countries must meet.

One of our ideas is about the right to vote.

Too many people with disabilities in different EU countries do not have the right to vote.

The **European Union Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities** describes what problem people with disabilities face in the European Union.

The strategy says what the European Union will do to improve the lives of people with disabilities.

For the strategy we have strongly asked for certain promises.

We shared plans on how to do the strategy,

but we think that there should also be laws

to make sure that the **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** is being used.

The **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

is an international human rights treaty of the United Nations to protect the rights of people with disabilities.

We want to see a new future for people with disabilities without abandonment or isolation.

Inclusion of people with disabilities should start from schools and children.

It is important to have access to education at all levels.

Children with disabilities should have the same opportunities as children without disabilities.

Children without disabilities should be taught about diversity and learn about the differences people with disabilities face.

It is important for people with disabilities to be part of society, filling different roles such as students, workers, entrepreneurs, freelancers, wives and husbands, fathers and mothers, and more.

We believe that this is an important part to people with disabilities' right of citizenship being recognised.