

European Disability Strategy 2010-2020: Analysis of the Mid-Term Review and proposals for the next steps

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I. Introduction

The European Commission refers to the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020¹ (EDS) as the key policy instrument to empower people with disabilities to enjoy their full rights and fully participate in their society. The Strategy identifies the mechanisms needed to implement the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)², the first UN convention ratified by all EU Member States following a commitment to eliminate barriers people with disabilities face and, therefore, improving their lives. The number of people with disabilities in Europe is growing, from 80 million at present and is anticipated to reach 120 million people by 2020. Currently, approximately 33 per cent of people above the age of 75 experience some kind of disability in Europe. Disability-related indicators developed by the European Commission have shown an existing clear gap between people with disability and the rest of the population. People with disabilities have around 70 per cent more chances of experiencing poverty.

In an effort to change the reality of people with disabilities and close the aforementioned gap, the European Union launched the European Disability Strategy back in 2010 with the ambition to complete in a period of ten years the actions included around the Strategy's main areas of action.

EPR would like to highlight the key role of disability-related health and social services in achieving the objectives of the EDS. These services include rehabilitation as well as education, training, vocational (re)integration and independent living activities. This document explains the EDS, the results of the review of its progress and presents recommendations for the remaining time of the strategy, as well as for a future strategy.

II. What is the European Disability Strategy?

The main objective of the European Disability Strategy is to eliminate barriers to the life of people with disabilities that prevent them from fully participating in society and enjoying their rights equally to other citizens. The Strategy focuses on eight main areas for action: Accessibility, Participation, Equality, Employment, Education and Training, Social Protection, and Health and External Action aimed at implementing the recommendations given by the UN to the European Union in applying the UNCRPD. As part of the implementation of the European Disability Strategy, running up till 2020, the European Commission launched a public consultation to review the Strategy's mid-term progress. Aiming at collecting input from stakeholders on so far achieved results and launched on December 2015, EPR responded to the consultation in March 2016 based on member experience and inputs.

The Mid-term Review

The Mid-term review of the Strategy³ considers the inputs to the consultation and provides the Commission's analysis on the barriers people with disabilities most commonly face regarding being able to participate in everyday life activities equally, discrimination, difficulties in employment and access to services. The most critical point of the review is the slow improvement of life of people with disabilities between the start of the Strategy in 2010 and 2015, despite the advocacy work carried out by interest groups and organisations working with people with disabilities. Lack of political will and understanding by policy makers of disability-related

¹European Commission (2010), European Disability Strategy 2010-2020: A Renewed Commitment to a Barrier-Free Europe European Disability Strategy. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:0636:FIN:en:PDF>

²United Nations Division for Social Policy and Development Disability <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>

³European Commission (2017), Progress Report on the implementation of the European Disability Strategy (2010 - 2020) <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=2725&furtherNews=yes>

needs are said to be at the core of the slow pace by which people with disabilities' rights are advancing in the European Union.

Accessibility

During the past five years to which the Mid-Term Review corresponds, actions were implemented in the eight areas of the Strategy. The Strategy review states major progress has been achieved in the area of Accessibility as the Accessibility Act⁴ has pushed forward the area of accessibility where important actions are being taken. This includes the adoption of a Directive on Web Accessibility and the European Accessibility Act. The Accessibility Act is the main legal instrument to improve access to products and services for people with disabilities and it is accompanied by a Directive proposal aiming at uniforming legislation on accessible products and services in the EU single market. The Act will apply to all EU legislation mentioning accessibility; this will mean legislation has to be consistent with the accessibility requirements contained within the Act. It remains unclear whether the Act will include access to transportation. The contents of the Act, proposed by the European Commission, was modified by the European Parliament and at the time of writing is in the process of being negotiated by the Parliament, Commission and national governments.

While civil society organisations stress the importance of accessible environments for the inclusion of people with disabilities in society, and that it should be addressed in the Act, this point has not yet achieved consensus amongst the negotiators.

III. Employment, equality, education and social inclusion

Employment, education and social inclusion remain key areas where improvements are needed for people with disabilities as the review of the Strategy concludes;

EPR believes that after 2020, the follow up of the Strategy should show clear commitment and advancement on these areas.

➤ Employment and Equality:

Employment and equality are two key areas where actions are needed to improve the life of people with disabilities. As stated in the mid-term progress report of the EDS, the employment rate of people with disabilities remains very low. The Strategy aims at improving the situation of people with disabilities in the labour market by facilitating their access to quality jobs in open, inclusive and accessible work environments⁵.

Access to the labour market remains one of the main challenges for people with disabilities. Equality is one of the main areas of action within the EDS and within it; the Employment Equality Directive⁶ provides protection against discrimination on disability. As collected by the consultation's results, one of the main challenges remaining for people with disabilities to be fully integrated in society is lack of equal opportunities in accessing employment.

EPR believes that in line with the philosophy to maximise the potential of each person with a disability, solutions for integration into the open labour market should be prioritised. In that respect, studies and policy analysis have demonstrated that vocational training, vocational rehabilitation services and on the job support, are in most cases an indispensable condition to bridge the gap to the labour market for people with disabilities⁷.

⁴<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1202&langId=en>

⁵ See European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 Mid-term progress report

⁶ European Commission Press Releases Database, Employment Equality Directive, Directive 2000/78/EC. http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-08-69_en.htm

⁷ EPR response to public consultation on the European Disability Strategy.

EPR proposes the following issues to be addressed in the next 5 years, in any future strategy and for initiatives that promote the labour market inclusion of people with a disability to be the subject of EU funding calls.

- Models that promote the employment of people with disabilities, particularly Supported Employment models for the successful integration of people with disabilities in the labour market⁸.
 - EPR suggests a new version of the compendium of good practices on supported employment for people with disabilities should be developed, including on customised employment
 - EPR calls for a renewed version of the guide to social considerations in public procurement to include information on good practices that support the employment of people with disabilities through procurement procedures.
 - EPR calls on the European Commission to fulfil the commitment to “develop models of good practice on reasonable accommodation and good quality jobs with social partners at EU level”, and to include other stakeholders with expertise in this work, such as organisations providing employment integration support and Supported Employment services.
 - EPR calls on the Member States to ensure that wage levels, taking into account additional care and other needs that people with disabilities may have, benefit traps do not constitute a barrier to participation in the labour market.
 - EPR calls on the European Commission to commission a new version of the Compendium of good practice on Supported Employment for people with disabilities in the EU and EFTA-EEA from 2011.
 - EPR stresses the importance of supporting people in the transition from education to employment of independent living

➤ **Education and training:**

The EDS promotes inclusive education and lifelong learning for students with disabilities and support national efforts to facilitate access to quality education systems with individualised support measures⁹. However, education and training remain consistently areas where people with disabilities have more disadvantages, as per the Mid-Term Progress report.

EPR believes that access to quality inclusive education is key for people with disabilities. As the Mid-Term Progress report shows this remain a challenge for many. For this to be achieved, member states should move towards inclusive education models and emphasise and invest within their national programmes on education and focus on vocational training.

EPR proposes the following issues be addressed in the next 5 years, and in any future strategy:

- Education and vocational training programmes that engage employers and mainstream the needs of persons with disabilities.
- The European Commission should take into account the needs of people with disabilities in all skills related initiatives.
- Member States should develop national transition programmes to move towards inclusive education and vocational training.

⁸ See EPR website section on Employment <http://www.epr.eu/our-expertise/>

⁹ See the Mid-term progress report

➤ **Social Inclusion:**

The Progress report indicates 30 per cent of people with disabilities are at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU.

Emphasis on person centred, community based care and independent living

Article 19 of the UNCRPD recognises the equal right of all persons with disabilities to live independently and being included in the community. EPR believes member states shall ensure that persons with disabilities have the right to choose their preferred living arrangements and have access to services and facilities meeting their needs and allowing them to be included in the community. A main common challenge is to improve the quality of services both in institutional and community based settings, through the development of quality frameworks and monitoring mechanisms.

The adoption of the European Quality Framework for Social Services by the Social Protection Committee (SPC)¹⁰, EU advisory policy committee for Employment and Social Affairs Ministers, setting up quality principles that cover various aspects of service provision and within these, disability related issues, shows commitment to move towards affordable and quality service provision for all, states the European Commission on the Mid-Term Progress report.

The promotion and fostering of person centred delivery of services, moving towards a community based care model that promotes and helps independent living of people with disabilities, greater improvements can be achieved in social inclusion. The development of community-based services, striving for a good balance between quality, user-satisfaction and efficiency, is key. In relation to 'proximity', these services should to the furthest extent be offered at a location which is most convenient for the service user.

EPR proposes the following issues to be addressed in the next 5 years, in any future strategy:

- Good practices in contracting high-quality social services should be shared together with the possibilities for and benefits of contracting high-quality social services in public procurement procedures.
- The European Commission should promote the Voluntary Quality Framework for social services by, particularly among public authorities and projects should be funded to implement the framework
- Mutual learning and exchange of good practices could stimulate the implementation of the article 19 of the UNCRPD. By engaging sectoral stakeholders from different member states in debates and comparisons on how to develop quality and cost-efficient community-based services and how to empower people with disabilities to exercise their right to independently choose their living arrangements and their care services, the implementation of the Article 19 could be fully realised.
- Facilitating the links between formal and informal care would help people with disabilities achieve independent living.

EPR recommendations were sent to the Employment and Social Affairs Committee of the European Parliament draft report on the implementation of the European Disability Strategy and were taken on board.

4. Future Steps and Recommendations:

Looking ahead, the current Disability Strategy timeframe is set up to end within three years' time while some of its key milestones have not been achieved. Therefore, EPR strongly believes the upcoming EU Disability Strategy 2020-2030 should revise the remaining gaps and include within its priorities:

¹⁰ See SPC/2010/10/8 final

➤ Funding

- adequate funding should be secured within the elaboration of the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) to make sure all different actions that are to be implemented under the new Disability Strategy can be achieved and hence, the implementation of the Convention (UNCRPD) is completed;
- Further ensure the right of persons with disability to live independently EPR calls for the application of the EU structural Funds to facilitate the development and improvement of community-based services throughout investment in support services for inclusive vocational training, training of staff and to guarantee reasonable accommodation and an inclusive environment.

➤ Monitoring Mechanisms

- Together with budget allocation, a clear and efficient monitoring mechanism shall accompany the new Strategy;
- Outcome measurement to ensure transparency, accountability and optimised service delivery

➤ Implementation

- Mainstreaming of the Concluding Observations of the UNCRPD within EU policy making and laws;
- Work towards further implementation of the Strategy and the Convention at member state level is needed;
- Use the European Pillar of Social Rights and its principles to mainstream disabilities throughout all social policies of the EU monitoring through the European Semester.

The EU has already supported mainstreaming disability in the development of mechanisms accompanying the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Continuation on this work should proceed after 2020 making sure the actions put forward within the Strategy keep being implemented within the framework of the SDGs. Having the Commission's report recognised work remains to be done to achieve the final results of the Strategy by 2020 and a long-term perspective is needed to align EU programmes, laws and policies with CRPD.

The European Platform for Rehabilitation (EPR) is the Network of providers of rehabilitation services committed to excellence and innovation. EPR and its members contribute to a society where every person with a disability and persons in other vulnerable situations have access to the highest quality services that create equal opportunities for all and independent participation in society. More information on www.epr.eu

