

European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 EPR's contribution

Importance of Disability-related health and social services in the EU Disability Strategy 2010-2020

The European Platform for Rehabilitation - EPR welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the new European Disability Strategy 2010-2020. Acknowledging the importance of the implementation of the UN Convention on the Right of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in the new EU Disability Strategy, EPR would like to highlight the key role of disability-related health and social services in achieving the objectives of the UNCRPD. These services include rehabilitation as well as education, training, vocational (re)integration and independent living activities.

Employment of people with disabilities has been a priority area of EU disability policies for several years. It is generally agreed that employment is a way to enhance self-esteem, social status and financial independence, and is the best pathway to social inclusion and independent living. Moreover, it is essential for achieving the objectives of the EU 2020 Strategy. Yet, progress has been slow and the unemployment levels of people with disabilities remain high. 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 disabilities. On the other hand, the debate on employment should also include the 'Disability Management' concept that addresses employers rather than the individual people with disabilities to remove barriers to employment.

EPR and its members believe that rehabilitation services are pivotal in ensuring the creation of comparable living conditions and opportunities, and contribute actively to enhance the physical, mental, cultural and social ability of individuals to participate fully in society and to lead autonomous and independent lives. Also in an inclusive society, rehabilitation services constitute a condition for equal participation, with the remark that prevention gains importance and that a wider range of target groups might be addressed. Rehabilitation should have clearly defined objectives, and its effectiveness needs to be proven by the degree to which a person's functioning is enhanced, the extent to which activity limitations are minimised and the extent to which community participation is maximised.

EPR believes that disability-related health and social services should be tailor-made, and based on an individual needs assessment. The wide range of services that meet the multiple needs of a user should be integrated in a coherent service package, and pro-actively coordinated in the interest of the user. To this aim, the new Disability Strategy should promote case management, partnerships and integrated gateways to services. Finally, the new Strategy should recognise the valuable role of care-givers, family and social network of service users, as a way to facilitate the combination of formal and informal care and services.

Consequently, the implementation of articles 19 and 24-27 of the UNCRPD should get sufficient priority in the EU Disability Strategy 2010-2020, and EPR calls for several actions at both EU and national level to achieve this goal

- **Actions at EU level**

- Considering the new European Employment Strategy (EES) and the related guidelines, EPR calls for a close coordination between the disability strategy and the EES in order to pursue the objective of developing an important framework for a favourable and inclusive open labour market.
- In the light of the European Quality Framework for SSGIs which is currently developed, EPR calls for the promotion of the application of this framework on disability-related health and social services at national, regional and local level. This can be best achieved via a sector-specific quality system that takes into account a multi-stakeholder perspective and the views of service users, service providers, social partners, funders and policy-makers.
- Believing that the engagement of qualified and motivated professionals is the most important asset in adding value to service-delivery to people with disabilities, and taking into account the increasing mobility of professionals in our sector, EPR calls for the development of a European competence framework and related accreditation system of professionals in the rehabilitation and social services sector. Qualifications should be recognised throughout the sector in Europe, and a minimum level of qualifications should be required from professionals.
- EPR conceives the empowerment of people with disabilities is a transversal precondition for the adequate implementation of all articles of the UNCRPD. Consequently, we ask the European Commission to promote and financially support initiatives that concretise the wide concept of 'empowerment', make it measurable, and facilitate the enhancement of empowerment of people with disabilities as well as the environment.
- EPR recommends to stimulate the implementation of Article 19 of the UNCRPD via the organisation of mutual learning and the exchange of good practices. Various sectoral stakeholders from different member States should be engaged 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.

- **Actions to be undertaken by the Member States**

- Article 19 of the UN Convention recognises the equal right of all persons with disabilities to live independently and being included in the community. 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.
- EPR and its members believe in the importance of fostering de-centralization and integration of services. For this reason, EPR calls the Member States to promote de-institutionalisation and the development of community-based services, striving for a good balance between quality, user-satisfaction and efficiency. 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 considers measurement and assessment of final outcomes as an essential element of rehabilitation service provision, and believes that outcome measurement should be used to ensure transparency, accountability and an optimised service delivery. Consequently, it asks public authorities in the Member States to make proper and long-term rehabilitation service contracts with clear, realistic and agreed objectives. Moreover, quantitative and qualitative performance indicators should address the persons most in need. Finally, Member States should encourage and support service providers to engage in international benchmarking in terms of processes, organisational performance and input-output ratios.
- EPR believes that a competitive market for providers of disability-related health and social services can in some cases increase flexibility, effectiveness and efficiency, with positive impacts for both service users and funders. However, Member States should emphasize criteria for quality, expertise and sustainability, and take them into account together with cost factors. Member States should as well avoid excessive administrative burden and bureaucracy.
- To 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 vocational training, training of staff and to guarantee reasonable accommodation and an inclusive environment.

Final Recommendation

The European Platform for Rehabilitation calls upon the European Commission and the Member States members to include the development of a mutually agreed data collection framework for reporting on the implementation of the UNCRPD as priority in the new EU Disability Strategy 2010 – 2020.

EPR strongly recommends that this reporting tool is based on the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) as a conceptual framework. The ICF coding system is internationally agreed, available in many languages, compatible with the principles of the Convention, well defined, logically coherent and capable of producing disaggregated statistical analysis. Using such a data collection framework would enable Member States to:

- Collect aggregated statistical data on the implementation of the UNCRPD in accordance with Art. 31 of the Convention
- Measure the actual impact of implementation actions on the lives of people with disabilities
- Better plan and monitor the implementation of the UNCRPD
- Benchmark on a cross-national basis policy measures, good practices and results regarding the implementation of the UNCRPD