

Kick off meeting for the Provider Forum in Warsaw in 2010 24.11.2009, Warsaw, Poland

1. Aims and objectives

The main aim of the meeting was to bring together Polish representatives of special schools as well as non-governmental organizations (NGO) offering different kinds of services to disabled people in order to set up cooperation with EASPD and organise a provider forum in 2010 in Warsaw.

2. EASPD

EASPD, a not-for-profit NGO in the disability sector, promotes the affairs of over 8000 social services and their umbrella associations. The main objective of EASPD is to promote the equalisation of opportunities for people with disabilities through effective and high quality service systems. EASPD plays a key role on a European level as a representative of disability service providers, working for an inclusive Europe. Knowing that 50% of national legislation comes from the EU, EASPD wants to significantly influence European disability & socio-economic policy by having a permanent presence in Brussels and by working with other European and international networks. EASPD is involved in a number of European transnational projects on a wide variety of topics. For further information about EASPD projects please check our website:

<http://easpd.eu/Projects/RunningProjects/tabid/3538/Default.aspx>

The principles of EASPD are aiming at high quality of services facilitating full participation and inclusion in society in an appropriate way of persons with a disability. To achieve this EASPD is committed to:

- User participation in the development and delivery of services,
- The implementation of governance principles,
- Active life long learning opportunities for staff,
- Focus on accessibility, availability, affordability and adaptability of services.

By becoming a member of EASPD you can play an active role in European development and at the same time strengthen the disability sector to get a stronger grip on the European level.

Membership Categories:

- Umbrella Member Organizations are non profit umbrella groups of service providers for people with disabilities, based in at least one member country of the Council of Europe;
- Single Agency Members are single organizations (governmental, non governmental, for profit, not for profit) providing services for people with disabilities in member country of the Council of Europe;
- Observers: service provider organizations are welcomed to become observer for six months to learn more about the work of EASPD.

If you are interested in the membership, please contact our Communication & Membership Officer, Charlotte Boetticher (charlotte.boetticher@easpd.eu)

3. Provider Forum

The overall concept and idea of these providers' forums is rather simple and straightforward. With the support of the local partners and organisations, we hope to invite service provider organisations, their managers or chairpersons and bring them together in a conference venue for 2 days.

The forums main aim and objective is:

- Bringing service providers from a certain region or country together so that they can network amongst each other. There should be time available at the forum for networking, for the different organisations to explain what they are working on, what their difficulties are, what their target group is, how their sector or their activities are financed. Their relation with authorities, on the local, regional or national level is important as well. In order to facilitate this networking process, we want to gather people that can share know-how on how to organise networking and build structural networks for the future. Outcome: creation of an umbrella structure or structural cooperation between service providing organisations.

- Inform managers and leaders, through training, on the values and principles of the European Union and the Council of Europe in relation to persons with disabilities and in relation to the provision of social services. Here it is clear that values such as full participation, inclusion, freedom of choice, full citizenship, right to employment and many other human rights related values and principles are crucial. On the level of organisation development, it is also necessary to underline that the governance principles, the principles on how to run an organisation and how to build up an organisation are important and crucial. Outcome: Well informed and well-prepared managers and leaders active in the social services sector.

- Spreading information and training people on how to understand and get access to the programs, budget lines and project opportunities launched by the European Commission. The result of that should be a higher capacity in project development, project writing and in project management.

Budget: At this stage EASPD allocated money for a helpdesk in Brussels. We identified staff in Brussels that should support local organisation in preparing and organising a local or national forum. In addition, EASPD will make available trainers and facilitators who can support the local organisations with their knowledge and know-how on European values and principles and/or programs and budget lines. EASPD will send, on the EASPD budget, a staff member to support the local organisation during the forum. We will also find money to provide translation. The local organisation should, with the income from this forum, cover its own costs. As one of the important chapters of the service level agreements, we should come to clear budget arrangements between the local partner and EASPD.

4. The situation of the disability sector in Poland

Under the law, actions for the benefit of the disabled are performed by the national government and local governments. The tasks for the benefit of the disabled are also performed by non-governmental organisations of disabled persons or NGOs that act for their benefit.

NGOs

Most of the NGOs in the disability sector are small organisation (2-4 people), spread in different parts of Poland. Basically there is no information flow between them and often they perceive each other as potential competitors (for example in getting the funds). Therefore the sector is divided and there is no strong representation.

Government

The majority of tasks related to professional and social rehabilitation were entrusted to local governments. The supervision of the execution of tasks is performed by the Government Plenipotentiary for Disabled People – Secretary of State in the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. The advisory body to the Government Plenipotentiary for Disabled People is the National Consultation Council for Disabled Persons. There is also a State Fund for Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons. The money from this fund is allocated by the Chairman of the Fund's Board to:

- 1) Voivodship and poviast-level local governments, to finance specific tasks – based on the relevant formula,
- 2) Entities performing tasks assigned by the Fund or other tasks under the Act.

The Fund's resources will be used to establish new and retain the existing jobs for the disabled, to fund social rehabilitation of such persons and co-finance tasks under governmental programmes.

According to the participants of the meeting it is not easy to get money from the state fund. In order to get the subsidies, an organisation has to take part in the contest and win it. The whole procedure is quite complicated and it is difficult to meet the legislation requirements. Unfortunately, corruption is still a big problem – it happens that even if the competition is held, it is decided earlier which organisation it is chosen. The legislation is not transparent and there is not enough information about the EC funding opportunities. The disability sector is not fully involved in the decision making at the governmental level.

Only 3% of the governmental websites are accessible for persons with disabilities. Introducing an easy to read layout is not obligatory, therefore many institutions are not interested in that matter. There is a need for strong legislation concerning persons with disabilities.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities still has been not ratified by Polish government.

Employment

People with disabilities have a lot of difficulties to find a post, even if they are very well educated. The rate of employment of persons with disability is only 15 %. They usually have to work in the sector of the sheltered employment. Many companies prefer to pay a fine, rather than deal with disabled people. There is a social fear in the society. There is no discussion about quality of services or standards for disabled people. In most cases the only requirement is to make them cheap.

Education

The process of introducing inclusive schools in Poland is still quite new. Integrated schools are politically correct but not always the best solution. Polish schools are focused on theoretical knowledge, not on teaching practical skills. In the mainstream schools there is a problem with bullying and intolerance of disabled children. Therefore parents prefer to send their children to special schools.

Families don't get the right support and they don't have access to the information. Usually one of the parents has to sacrifice the professional career and stay at home with the child.

4. Conclusions

Next meeting will be held **in Warsaw** in the **first week of February 2010** during which further organisational details will be discussed.

The Polish partners will be responsible for:

- inviting speakers representing NGOs, local or/and national authorities as well as education sector;
- booking the conference room;
- media patronage.

EASPD will be responsible for:

- providing experts working on the European level (conference and workshops);
- providing financial support (conference venue, translation etc.), to be discussed with the EASPD Finance & Project Officer.

The provider forum will take place **in Warsaw in May 2010** and will last two days: **13-14.05.2010**. The first day will be a closed event, mainly for the NGOs which were involved in the conference preparation. The meeting will have a form of workshops divided into 3 thematic groups: employment, education, accessibility. The second day will be an open conference concerning UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities ("Bringing the UN Convention to Poland").

Participants

Name	Organisation, function	Website	Email
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Agenda

1. Introduction:
 - a) EASPD
 - General information about EASPD.
 - How do we work – EASPD's 3 pillars: impact, innovation, information.
 - What can we do for you?
 - Membership criteria (SAMO, UMO, SAMO of an UMO, observer).
 - b) Introduction of the participants.
 - c) Key concerns of the sector in Poland.
2. Provider forum:
 - the idea and purpose
 - how did the provider fora looked in the past
3. Possible cooperation with Polish providers, project development, new budget lines.
4. Discussion, questions, suggestions.
5. A.O.B.