

EASPD Review of the European Disability Strategy

The European Disability Strategy (EDS) 2010-2020, adopted in 2010, cements the European Union's commitment to the full implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD), to which it is a party.

Through the Strategy the EU aims to empower people with disabilities so that they can enjoy their full rights, and benefit fully from their participation in society. Importantly, the Strategy re-enforces the EU's shift towards a human rights approach in disability policies. To help achieve the EU's aim the Strategy identifies eight main areas for action at EU level: accessibility, participation, equality, employment, education and training, social protection, health and external action.

In line with the UN CRPD the EDS focuses on the elimination of barriers that should not only lead to the adaptation of the external environment, but also to the provision of individualised support tailored to the specific needs of persons with disabilities. To eliminate these barriers and provide individualised support to people with disabilities the provision of person-centred, community-based services is essential.

EASPD believes that it is important to recognise support services as key facilitators in the achievement of the full implementation of the UN CRPD and that the EDS should help these services to do so. As a result, this report will review the extent to which the EDS 2010-2020 has assisted disability service providers in the full implementation of the UN CRPD.

Methodology and Respondents Profile

The report is based on the feedback from 33 of our members, acquired by a questionnaire on 5 of the key areas of action which we have identified as being particularly relevant to support services: accessibility, participation, education and training, employment and social protection. Participants were first asked to give some general details about their organisation's size and level of operation before being asked for their thoughts on the EDS as a whole and then on each of the 5 key areas.

The 33 respondents were all considered eligible and represent organisations from 19 countries (Figure 1), 4 of which are non-EU countries. These organisations are either single agency or umbrella organisations, and work at a regional or national level to support people with disabilities through a variety of services (Figures 2 and 3).



ORGANISATIONS' COUNTRY OF OPERATION

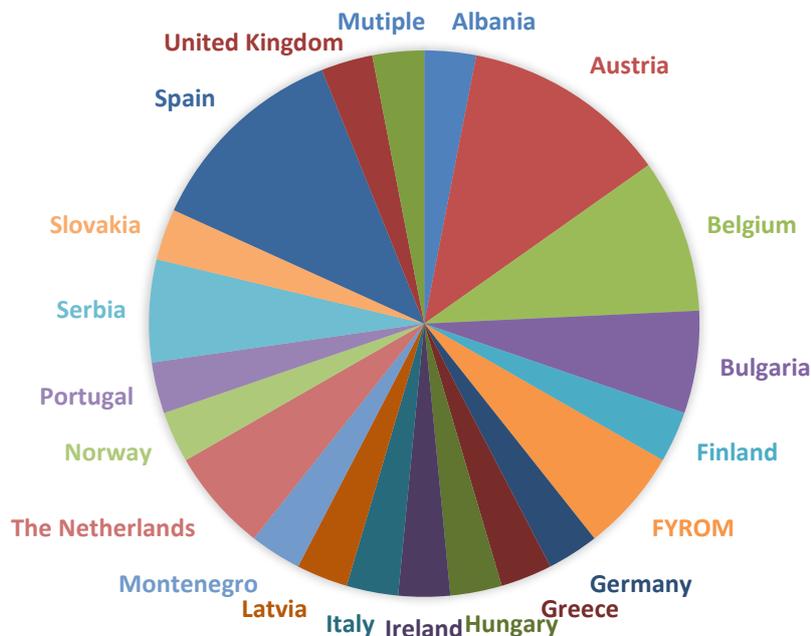


Figure 1 Respondent's country of operation

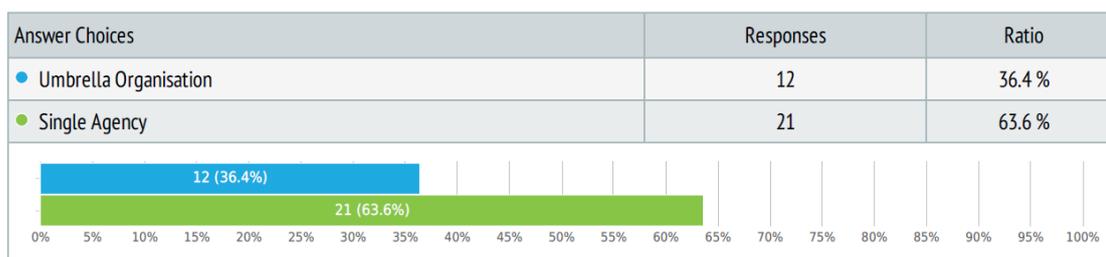


Figure 2 Response to the question: What type of organisation are you?

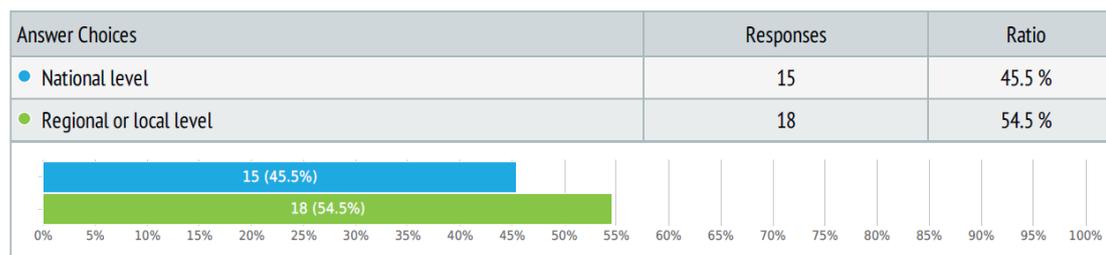


Figure 3 Response to the question: At what level does the organisation work?

General Observations

The European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 is the main instrument of support in the EU's implementation of the UN CRPD. The Strategy provides a framework for EU action and effort to mainstream disability concerns into a number of EU level actions, policies and laws. In its five-year Progress Report, midway through the EDS's term, the European Commission asserted the continued relevancy the Strategy's objectives. The Commission also reasserted its commitment to implementing the Strategy "to raise awareness at EU-level, give financial



support, collect data and statistics, monitor the situation of people with disabilities and act as the Focal Point for the UNCRPD.”¹

Despite the efforts of the European Commission to promote the Strategy and its use in the full implementation of the UN CRPD, the questionnaire indicated that the EDS is not universally understood or applied by organisations operating at a national or regional level. Our inquiry into the use of the EDS, as a framework for the development of our members’ support services, found that although all European members were aware of the EDS (Figure 4) many of them do not refer to the Strategy for further guidance (Figure 5).

A third of those who do not refer to the EDS did not do so because not enough is known about the Strategy, either within their organisation or at a regional level, for it to be applied into operational policies. Over half of the 15 respondents, whose organisations do not refer to the EDS, despite being aware of it, do not do so because either their national strategy or the UN CRPD is more relevant to their work.

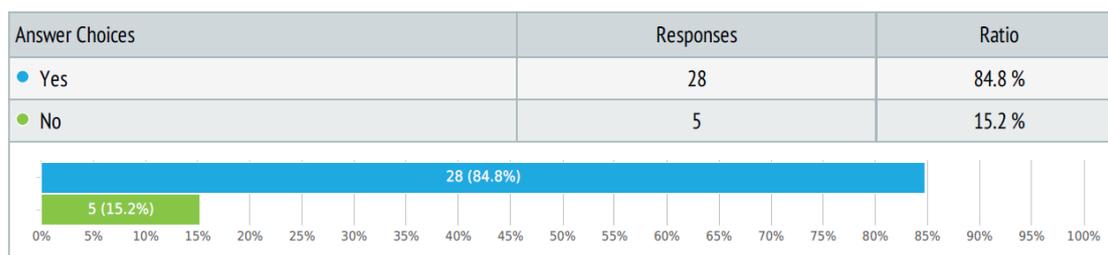


Figure 4 Response to the question: Is your organisation aware of the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020?

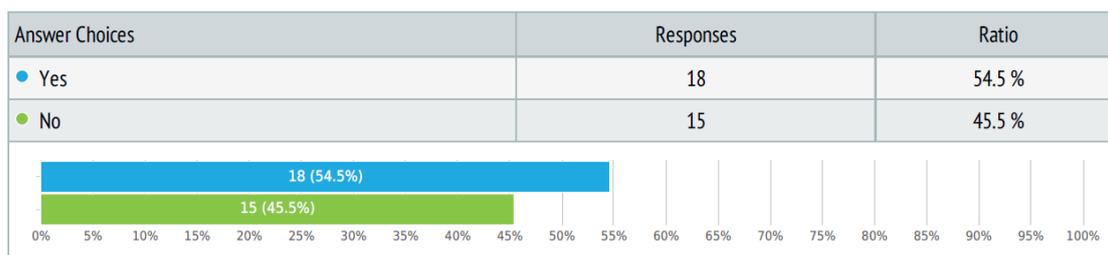


Figure 5 Response to the question: Do you refer to the European Disability Strategy when developing your support

Out of the 8 areas of action of the EDS, EASPD members are strongly involved in activities supporting people with disabilities in the areas of accessibility, participation, education and training, employment and social protection. As a result, members were able to provide feedback on the challenges that impede development in these areas as well as suggest actions which can help to empower people with disabilities so that they can enjoy their full rights, and benefit fully from their participation in society.

Accessibility

For persons with disabilities, obstacles to their full participation are represented not only by the physical environment, transportation and ICT, but also by access to facilities and services. With the help of high-quality, affordable and individualised support services the barriers of accessibility in these key areas can be identified, prevented and eliminated to ensure that persons with disabilities can have full access to all goods and services.

As accessibility is a pre-requisite for the participation of persons with disabilities in society and in the economy, it is a particularly important area of action and an issue that the Commission has placed at the core of the Strategy. In its Progress Report the Commission noted that major progress has been achieved in the area of

¹ [European Commission, Progress Report on the implementation of the European Disability Strategy \(2010 -2020\), 2017](#)



accessibility with the adoption of the Directive on Web Accessibility and the proposal for a European Accessibility Act.

Members Action

EASPD's members are contributing to the implementation of accessibility through a variety of activities such as:

- Providing tailor-made services which support individual accessibility solutions.
- Developing easy read material to improve cognitive accessibility.
- Supporting the adaptation of physical structures to ensure their accessibility to everyone.
- Using adapted computers and accessible technology in their facilities and service provision.
- Working to raise awareness for the rights of people with disability as well as influence local and national policy.

Challenges

Members identified two key challenges which are currently preventing advancements in the field of accessibility. The first was a lack of resources and funding, particularly for the alteration of physical infrastructure, to make all buildings universally accessible. The second challenge to implementing improvements in accessibility is a lack of awareness and the prevalence of traditional attitudes. These problems in attitude and awareness were highlighted as an issue at all levels, starting with policy makers, who lack the political will and urgency to invest in particular areas or to develop appropriate and policies, down to those working in mainstream services, such as the transport system, who do not understand how they can help improve the access people with disabilities have to mainstream goods and services.

Members' recommendations

- The participants of EASPD's survey overwhelmingly recommended action to raise awareness of the importance of accessibility for people with disabilities and the role society has in ensuring this accessibility. These actions should include efforts to embed the concept of universal access in future policy. Member's highlighted the importance of civil society organisations in the successful implementation of awareness raising campaigns which can educate all stakeholders in in the provision of accessible services and goods, including policy makers and politicians.
- The continued implementation of the UN CRPD and the human rights based approach to service provision was also highly recommended. Members emphasised that the provision of person-centred services within the community is vital to ensure the accessibility of goods and services to persons with disabilities. As a result, the EDS must support services as they develop community-based person-centred support to achieve the objectives of the Strategy and the UN CRPD.
- Other suggestions included improving the communication between service providers and public authorities to help to mainstream high-quality disability services, increasing the emphasis of socially responsible requirements in publicly procured service contracts and measuring the success of services using metrics that support social inclusion.



Participation

Active and meaningful participation into society has to be considered as an added value for all. Tools and mechanisms to facilitate active and full participation need to be put in place. Some people with disabilities need additional support to fully participate in society. The EDS aims to achieve the full participation of people with disabilities in society by removing administrative and attitudinal barriers and by providing quality community-based services. To be able to fully participate in society, people with disabilities must be able to fully exercise their fundamental rights, including the right to free movement, to choose where and how to live, and to have full access to cultural, recreational, and sports activities.

Members' Action

EASPD members contribute to the full participation of people with disabilities in a number of ways. Their activities focus on:

- Providing individualised community based services to people with disabilities along their lifespan. The services provided depend on the needs of the individual but education, employment, housing and self-advocacy were identified as key areas of support.
- Conducting training sessions and informative campaigns with and for persons with disabilities to educate entire communities on the rights of people with disabilities.
- Organising events such as conferences and roundtables at local, national and EU level to raise awareness amongst policy makers of the need for people with disabilities to participate fully in society.

Challenges

Respondents identified traditional attitudes and a lack of awareness within society as the biggest challenges to the full participation of people with disabilities within society. Members highlighted that it is proving difficult to change the current 'status quo' to develop more inclusive attitudes and policies. Traditional attitudes promote the continuation of national legislation which prevent people with disabilities from fully exercising their fundamental rights. These attitudes are also making it difficult to overcome traditional problem-solving processes which categorises those held responsible for the rights of people with disabilities into defined groups, or silos. These groupings restrict the number of people held responsible for the full participation of people with disabilities rather than obligating everyone in the community to take responsibility for the full participation of all.

Members' Recommendations

- To increase the participation of people with disabilities in society members again called for efforts to raise awareness for the rights of persons with disabilities. Members also called for the silos of responsibility to be opened up to reflect the reality of universal responsibility and make it easier for society to adapt to meet the needs of people with disabilities. To support this, respondents also advocated for the more effective implementation or the modification of existing laws and for increased political involvement at a national as well as local level.
- Members again asserted the need to continue to develop person-centred, community based services and for the need for additional funding to ensure that this process supports all people with disabilities.

Education and training

Access to education and lifelong learning programmes in mainstream schools are still far from being the reality for many students with disabilities. As Article 24 of the UN CRPD asserts people with disabilities have the right to access quality education systems, with effective individualised support measures. The EDS aims to support



the national efforts of Member States and promote inclusive education as well as life-long learning opportunities for people with disabilities.

Members' Action

Members who completed our survey work in the area of inclusive education and training are active in activities such as:

- Providing personal support to children with disabilities in mainstream schools.
- Providing support to the parents of children with disabilities who are in mainstream schools.
- Training education professionals to help them better support children with disabilities in mainstream schools.
- Running projects with education providers to educate them on how they can make their services more inclusive.
- Developing and running educational activities and specialised vocational training for young people and children.
- Conducting research to monitor inclusive education and life-long learning opportunities for people with disabilities.
- Providing recommendations to authorities in the field of inclusive education.

Challenges

Despite the work of various stakeholders, to provide inclusive education and training opportunities, a “culture of special education” still exists with segregated education systems and professional training centres, hindering full inclusion in this area. Our members identified issues in national or local strategies, for including persons with disabilities into mainstream education systems, as a key challenge to progress in this area. Many felt that either the current inclusion strategies are not being implemented or that a comprehensive strategy, which could be followed universally, was not available in their region of operation.

Other challenges included a lack of funding and specialised teaching assistants to support a unified strategy for inclusion. Finally, members also highlighted the need to mainstream inclusive training into teaching qualifications to ensure that all education professionals understand how they can help to provide an inclusive education.

Members' Recommendations

- Aside from calling for more funding to be invested into increasing inclusion in education and training members suggested that inclusion strategies needed to be revised or fully implemented to ensure a unified response to the continued segregation of education in Europe. These strategies must ensure the better communication between public authorities, service providers and persons with disabilities to ensure that the needs of students are met.
- Furthermore, members suggested that a curriculum should be developed to provide training for professionals in education to teach them how they can provide better support to students with disabilities in their classes.

Employment

People with disabilities continue to be disproportionately excluded from the labour market. Access to employment is a fundamental human right and inherent part of human dignity which supports personal development, economic independence and active participation in the community. Persons with disabilities should be supported to exercise this right and be included in the open labour market.



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EASPD – European Association of Service providers of Persons with Disabilities

www.easpd.eu

In its mid-term Progress Report the European Commission identified gaining equal access to the labour market as a one of the main challenges affecting people with disabilities today. The Commission hopes that through the Strategy, more people with disabilities will be able to gain access to and earn a living on the open labour market.

Members' Action

Supporting people with disabilities to gain access to employment opportunities is a core activity for many EASPD members. To support their activities in this area members:

- Directly employ people with disabilities within their services.
- Provide support services to the people with disabilities to gain employment on the open labour market. These services can include secondment, job coaching, job creation, job matching and support in gaining skills. To be successful these services often investigate the needs of both the employer and employee to match candidates to job opportunities.
- Provide additional support to people with disabilities once they have found employment.
- Manage sheltered workshops or social enterprises which employ people with disabilities.
- Advocate for the need for equal opportunities on the open labour market and the development of new policies.
- Promote good working practices about the employment of people with disabilities with employers.

Challenges

The challenges people with disabilities face, when gaining access to the open labour market, are increased in countries where the overall unemployment rate is already high. For our members who operate in these countries this is a particular problem they identified.

More generally members highlighted that employers often lack awareness of the opportunities people with disabilities hold for their businesses or of subsidies which may be available to them. On top of this, long and bureaucratic employment procedures often deter employers from hiring people with disabilities.

Members also reiterated that meaningful, rather than “fake”, job opportunities, which place people with disabilities in fulfilling roles with fair working conditions, must be made available.

Members' Recommendations

- To support the increased inclusion of people with disabilities on the open labour market, members overwhelmingly recommended the implementation of comprehensive national strategies for an inclusive labour market and more active labour market policies which favour the employment of people with disabilities. To support the development of these policies members suggested the dissemination of best practices to help Member States learn from the success of others.
- Respondents also felt that more awareness must be raised on the economic and social benefits of providing opportunities to people with disabilities, to work on the open labour market, on an equal basis with others. One final suggestion was to enforce a quota system within companies to positively discriminate towards people with disabilities and to ensure that business employ actively try to employ them.

Social protection

People with disabilities are one group in society who have been identified as being more at risk of experiencing poverty and social exclusion. To ensure that people with disabilities can live free of poverty and exclusion, adequate and individualised assistance must always be available to support their needs. The European Commission aims to use the EDS to promote decent living conditions for people with disabilities and support



national measures for quality and sustainable social protection systems. The most recent success of the Commission in this field was the proclamation of the European Pillar of Social Rights on the 17th November 2017.

Members' Action

EASPD's members are contributing to the social protection in a number of ways most often through their provision of inclusive services at no cost to the user. Other activities include:

- Advocating for the rights of people with disabilities and the creation of socially inclusive policies.
- Providing individualised support to people to gain access to housing and public benefits if they have the right to it.
- Developing projects and services which promote the social inclusion of people with disabilities within the community.

Challenges

Members identified a lack of funding as one of the biggest challenges which hinders the ability for all people with disabilities to live inclusively in communities with decent living conditions.

The issues surrounding social protection systems were far more fragmented than the other key areas of action and members recognised a number of varying challenges depending on their country of operation. These challenges included no clear mechanism for establishing social payments; a lack of political willingness; a lack of adequate support services and too much fragmentation in the social protection system.

Members' Recommendations

Again, members recommended increased funding and the provision of person centred, community-based services to protect the social rights of people with disabilities. Other suggestions included the overall reform of social protection systems and working to increase networking and collaboration between sectors.

Conclusions

This report reviewed the extent to which the EDS 2010-2020 has assisted disability service providers to enable the full implementation of the UN CRPD. Using the feedback from 33 of our members we were able to identify the extent to which the EDS supports service providers in the implementation of the UN CRPD and the areas of action where the EDS can provide effective support.

Our members are currently performing a wide variety of activities to support people with disabilities and the full implementation of the UN CRPD. Most importantly our members strive to promote the human rights based approach introduced by the UN CRPD and are committed to provide person-centred, community based services which empower people with disabilities and allow them to flourish in inclusive societies.

Overall the development of individual, person-centred support services based in the communities still require extensive investments in every key area of life.

The biggest challenges to the provision of these services is a lack of awareness; the prevalence of traditional attitudes and a lack of funding. Although a key aim of the EDS is to raise awareness of the rights of persons with disabilities, more needs to be done at all levels of society for improvements to be made. Broader campaigns to change attitudes and raise awareness amongst the general public should run alongside more targeted activities which, for example, inform employers of the benefits of employing people with disabilities or educate policy makers on the role they play in implementing the UN CRPD. Raising awareness of the role everybody in society plays to achieving the full implementation of the UN CRPD can help us to better support people with disabilities and allow them to fully participate in society.



The feedback from our members has shown that there is a need for the creation and implementation of effective national or local legislation and policy to support social services in the full implementation of the UN CRPD. As a broad EU strategy, the EDS is not always applied by our members in their work due to the greater relevance of national or local policies or the UN CRPD. The EDS however supports our members through its aim to support national efforts in the key areas of action. The EDS, and the EU institutions must continue to provide, and increase, this support to ensure that the appropriate assistance is given to Member States and that the creation and implementation of national legislation and policies can assist support services and people with disabilities in the full implementation of the UN CRPD. More can be done however and the European Commission must make the EDS more relevant to service providers and acknowledge the important role support services play in the empowerment of people with disabilities to full implementation of the UN CRPD. This belief has been supported by the European Parliament who, in their resolution on the implementation of the European Disability Strategy, recommends that, *the future strategy should “include the essential role of support services for the enjoyment of human rights of persons with disabilities.”*²

EASPD will continue to highlight the important role of service providers and what the EDS can do to help them provide quality person-centred, community based services to people with disabilities. As the EDS 2010-2020 comes to an end we must look ahead to the EU’s future disability strategy and build upon what we have already achieved to bring us closer to the full implementation of the UN CRPD and the empowerment people with disabilities.

² [European Parliament, Implementation of the European Disability Strategy, 2017](#)

