



European Day of People with Disabilities 2008



Acting locally for a society for all

Presentation Note

Background: Involving people with disabilities in EU policymaking

In 1992 the United Nations set 3 December as the date for the International Day of People with Disabilities. To mark European Day of People with Disabilities, the European Commission organises a policy conference in the first week of December each year, in close cooperation with the European Disability Forum (EDF)¹. This year's Conference will take place in Brussels on 1 and 2 December.

The Conferences for European Day of People with Disabilities form part of the EU's wider efforts to promote the mainstreaming of disability issues, as set out in the EU Disability Action Plan 2003-2010². They stimulate the exchange of information and good practice in areas that are crucial for the social inclusion of people with disabilities and facilitate networking between key players in the disability policy field. In turn, the findings and conclusions feed into the further development of the EU Disability Action Plan.

Context: Time for local action

This year marks substantial progress in the policy process supporting persons with disabilities and the 2008 Conference will focus on how this is experienced at the local level. The process of ratifying the UN Convention³ on the Rights of Disabled Persons is under way. After ratification by the 20th signatory, the Convention entered into force on 3 May 2008. It is acknowledged that disability is a broad human rights issue and a matter of law. In particular, it means that people with disabilities have the same right to equal access to goods and services and to contribute to society and the economy as anybody else. Mainstreaming of disability issues in all policy areas is the main pillar of the Convention and the inclusion of the local level is absolutely necessary if it is to be successful.

¹ EDF is the European umbrella organisation representing the interests of disabled citizens at EU level. EDF membership includes national umbrella organisations of people with disabilities from all EU/EEA countries, candidate countries and other European countries, as well as NGOs representing the different types of disabilities. More information is available at: www.edf-feph.org.

² <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=430&langId=en>.

³ <http://www.un.org/disabilities>.

Compliance of non-discrimination legislation with the UN Convention and the inclusion of the stakeholders in the policy process were also explicitly encouraged by the Slovenian Presidency in its Conclusions following the second informal ministerial meeting on disability issues⁴.

While disability policies fall mainly within the competence of the Member States, the European Union's policies complement and support national developments. The European Structural Funds, which play a key role in supporting national, regional and local developments, are a good example of how it is possible to get closer to the local level. Article 16 of the Structural Funds Regulation⁵ makes accessibility for persons with disability a prerequisite.

In 2008 the Commission also made a proposal for a new legislative initiative to complete the EU anti-discrimination legislative framework, with a view *inter alia* to ensuring non-discrimination on grounds of disability outside the employment sphere, namely in education, social protection, and access to goods and services.

As 2010 is approaching and with it the end of the European Disability Action Plan 2003-2010, it is time to talk about the future and start a consultation process on strategies from 2011 on.

Programme: The issues at stake

- **Keynote address:** Mr Vladimir Špidla, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, will address the participants on "Acting locally for a society for all".

Other keynote speakers will include the President of the EDF.

There will be three thematic sessions covering the main issues: (1) mainstreaming of disability policies; (2) participation of stakeholders; and (3) the active role of the local level.

Session 1: Disability rights through mainstreaming at regional and local level: putting the UN Convention into practice

"Mainstreaming" may sound clear in theory, but it is worth presenting tools and existing approaches to illustrate how it can be implemented in practice. In the first session, examples will be given in the form of *Agenda 22*⁶, which is a strategy for drawing up disability policy plans. Based on UN standard rules, the strategy ensures that quality criteria are respected, organisations of disabled people are involved in the process, and the plan is put into action. Although the standard rules were adopted before the UN Convention and are consequently neither legally binding nor as far-reaching, *Agenda 22* remains a valuable methodological tool for disability policy planning.

⁴ http://www.mddsz.gov.si/fileadmin/mddsz.gov.si/pageuploads/dokumenti_pdf/ns_invalidi_sklepi_220508_en.pdf.

⁵ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2006:210:0025:0078:EN:PDF>.

⁶ <http://www.cfhe.org/UserFiles/File/fond-ue-accessib/Agenda22-.pdf>.

Further initiatives will be presented for implementing the UN Convention at local level through an integrated approach to disability and policy planning. The areas of particular interest are social services, education, employment, leisure and the accessibility of the built environment and transport.

In addition, examples will be given of what the real difficulties in daily life are from the perspective of those concerned, how they can be identified and addressed by the local authorities to improve the situation and how any solutions found can be mainstreamed.

Session 2: Involving persons with disabilities in all decisions affecting them

To ensure legislation is reasonable and effective, persons with disabilities must be involved in all policy-making affecting them. This session will present the form that such a cooperative decision-making process, involving local authorities and organisations of people with disabilities, could take in practice. First, the NGOs will report on the role they played in the UN Convention negotiations. Second, examples will be given of how organisations of people with disabilities can participate in social inclusion strategies and of the form that cooperation between such organisations and the local authorities can take. Ways of raising awareness on disability issues at local level and fostering a local civil society dialogue will be outlined.

Special focus will also be laid on the European Structural Funds, which must be fully accessible to persons with disabilities. The contribution of people with disabilities to the work of the monitoring committees at regional and local level under the European Reconstruction and Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF) will be described. The Structural Fund budgets are the EU's strongest financial instruments for ensuring positive developments in the field of disability.

Session 3: From EU to local community and from local community to EU

Session 3 will show what direct support the European Commission can provide to local actors, in addition to support for policy development, in order to achieve mainstreaming of disability issues in various policy areas.

Between 2004 and 2006 the European Commission funded various pilot projects with the aim of developing good practice on the mainstreaming of disability issues at local level. The results, strategies and experience gathered in the implementation of these projects, in particular an example on accessible tourism, will be presented

In addition, the session will cover ways of using the ESF and the ERDF under the European Cohesion Policy to support the modernisation of local service delivery accessible to all and ways of using the Funds to develop local projects for the social inclusion of people with disabilities.

The impact of EU transport regulations will be illustrated through recent disability-friendly local transport policies.

Best practice in utilising public procurement provisions on accessibility and the relevance for employment and disability will also be presented.

The session will also serve to kick off the consultation process on the new EU Disability Strategy for 2011-22.

Format and deliverables

The three thematic sessions will be organised in panels with presentations by the Commission, Member State disability experts, and people with disabilities themselves. The focus will be on models of good policy practice and practical examples of problems and solutions.

The panel sessions will be followed by full discussions in which the audience will be welcome to take an active part. These sessions will be facilitated by two moderators, who will invite the audience to ask questions and act as an umpire between the panel members and the audience. A rapporteur will draw up a set of points for action and recommendations to policy-makers at the conclusion of each session.

The Commission will publish the Conference proceedings on-line.

Contributions to the debate

With a view to an informed discussion, the Commission strongly encourages participants to prepare their comments in advance, drawing on the information in this presentation note, and to submit them **by 14 November 2008** so they can be forwarded to the other participants. Contributions should be sent to the following address:

European Commission,
Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities DG,
Unit G3 – Integration of people with disabilities

Attention: Mr Daniel Schmidt

E-mail address: empl-pwd-info@ec.europa.eu