



European
Commission

EUROPEAN DAY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

28 - 29 NOVEMBER 2019

ACCESS CITY AWARD 2020 **10** YEARS



CONFERENCE REPORT

#EDPD2019
#EUAccessCity

#EUDisability
#WeAreEUCitizens

Social Europe

#beinclusive



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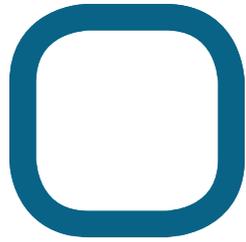
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EUROPEAN DAY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

28 - 29 NOVEMBER 2019



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#EUDPD2019 #EUDisability #EUAccessCity #WeAreEUCitizens

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EUROPEAN DAY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

28 - 29 NOVEMBER 2019

The **2019 European Day of Persons with Disabilities (EDPD)** was organised by the European Commission in partnership with the European Disability Forum (EDF), and with the support of Inclusion Europe and Autism Europe. It took place in Brussels on 28-29 November.

The EDPD is part of the EU's wider efforts to **raise awareness and tackle everyday challenges faced by Europeans with disabilities**. The 2019 edition posed several vital questions: Has the current European Disability Strategy, due to expire in 2020, achieved its goals? What can be done better in future policy to meet expectations in the disability area? What can we learn from colleagues outside the EU? How can we achieve Sports for All? Finally, what about the winners of this year's Access City Award?

The event brought together **voices from a range of backgrounds with different expertise and stories to share**. Policymakers, civil society representatives and equality advocates joined specialists and enthusiasts in sport to discuss **ways to improve the lives of persons with disabilities**.

This report answers the above questions while providing an account of the **main points and challenges highlighted by speakers and participants during the EDPD conference**.





NO ONE LEFT BEHIND

THE CONTEXT



The European Union wants to lead by example in the inclusion of persons with disabilities, with the European Pillar of Social Rights (Social Pillar) encapsulating what the EU is working to achieve. As Member States strive to implement the 20 principles of the Social Pillar, initiatives like the EDPD provide an important sounding board and ideas factory for concrete action on the ground – and in light of wider international commitments to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The outcomes of the conference feed into ongoing consultations shaping policies and strategies on disability and inclusion beyond 2020, and how EU programmes and funding instruments can be best targeted to achieve a fairer Europe for all.

As an umbrella organisation, EDF defends the interests of over 100 million persons with disabilities in Europe. It is a platform that brings together representative organisations of persons with disabilities and their families across Europe. Together with many other representative groups at EDPD, the Forum fights for a strong social and human rights-based Europe with active civil participation at its core.

All of these efforts are underpinned and supported by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship programme (European Commission DG Justice and Consumers, 2014-2020),

ensuring that the voices of the most marginalised people, including those with disabilities, are truly heard. Men, women and children with disabilities; people with intellectual or psycho-social disabilities; those with disabilities requiring intensive support; refugees with disabilities ...

Social inclusion, independent living, freedom of movement and social security coordination, digital accessibility and universal design, media accessibility, employment and education, exchanges and mobility programmes, gender equality, and equal opportunities in sport are among the many strategic issues under consideration.



Our vision is that persons with disabilities in Europe are fully included in society on an equal basis with others and that our human rights, as outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, are fully respected, protected and fulfilled.

European Disability Forum website

**No one gets
left behind!**

“

With an accessible environment, people with disabilities can concentrate on making sharp and critical remarks to help us to improve our policies, instead of concentrating on overcoming barriers.

Director-General Joost Korte



Day 1

28 NOVEMBER 2019

OPENING

Speakers

- **Joost Korte**, Director-General, DG EMPL, European Commission
- **Ioannis Vardakastanis**, President, European Disability Forum
- **Yrsa Nyman**, Ministerial Adviser, Ministry of Justice – Finnish Presidency of the Council of the EU

THE QUESTION 'Nothing about us, without us'...

What better way to set the tone of the European Day of Persons with Disabilities, than to remind everyone that consultation and good communication are the essence of agreements that withstand the test of time? The phrase *Nothing about us, without us* is a powerful, enduring symbol of this. It is the title of the European Disability Forum's 2018 manifesto and was echoed by several speakers including the European Commission's **Joost Korte** who opened the event on Thursday 28 November.

As Director-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, he reminded everyone that building a more inclusive Europe is a step-by-step process and events like the EDPD offer a unique chance to address important topics and shine a light on what still needs to be done.

He recounted several landmark achievements over the past decade, including how the EU was the first regional organisation to ratify the UNCRPD. Proclamation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, he continued, made disability a key principle in all EU Member States. Adoption of the European Accessibility Act this year means that the 100 million-plus people with disabilities can look forward to participating more fully in society and the labour market.

Meanwhile, the employment rate of people with disabilities grew from 46.4% in 2008 to 50.6% in



2017. And the rate of people with disabilities at risk of poverty or social exclusion decreased from 30.4% in 2011 to 28.7% in 2018. These are positive signs, he said, but clearly there is room for improvement.

This conference takes place at a crucial time, as a new Commission starts and the European Disability Strategy nears its end. It is a time to ask basic questions, he said. How successful was the Strategy, what do you expect, what can we learn from outside and how do we achieve 'sports for all'? "I don't have the answers, but I hope you will help with that," he challenged.

Ioannis Vardakastanis, President of the European Disability Forum put it another way: “Endings are also new beginnings.” He said it was important to help shape the European Agenda on disability rights, and called for new vigour to uphold and reinforce commitments to the UNCRPD. “The time to act on implementing the rights of persons with disabilities is now,” he said. The EU and Member States need to live up to their obligations; people with disabilities should be treated with dignity and as equals in society. “Any failure to do so would be a huge mistake for the EU, with regards to its legacy, its connection with citizens, and its legitimacy regarding its ability to act upon what it says,” he said.

commitment to measures combating discrimination on any ground listed in Article 21(1) of the Charter, including disability. Now, to intensify efforts and ensure equal opportunities for all, Member States need to strengthen the implementation of existing legislation, she urged.

*“Since the European Union and all its Member States have ratified the UNCRPD, we all have a common and clear goal, to build an equal, inclusive and accessible Europe **where no one is left behind**”.*
– Mrs Nyman concluded.

Equality, society’s glue

The Economy of Wellbeing has been a major theme of the Finnish Presidency of the Council of the EU, noted **Yrsa Nyman**, Ministerial Adviser to the Ministry of Justice. “We need to identify challenges hindering the full enjoyment of rights and be sensitive to the diversity in our societies [...] Equality is the glue that holds our societies together.”

In the *Council Conclusions on the Charter after 10 Years*, the Council of the European Union reiterated its

Looking ahead, Mr Korte called for more and better communication and awareness-raising efforts, pointing out the Commission’s own efforts to address discrimination at work. He announced a new Task Force on Equality and noted the significance of having a dedicated European Commissioner for equality under the new mandate, including equal treatment of persons with disabilities. Lastly, he laid the groundwork for delegates at the conference, connecting the theme **Sports for All** and the **Access City Award** to the wider EU goals.

The European Disability Strategy sought to harness the combined potential of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and to make full use of Europe 2020 and its instruments. EU institutions and Member States were called upon to work together under this Strategy to build a barrier-free Europe for all.

How did they do?



PANEL 1 · PREVIEW OF EUROPEAN DISABILITY STRATEGY EVALUATION

Speakers

- **Marco Migliosi**, Policy Officer, Disability and Inclusion unit, DG EMPL, European Commission
- **Katerina Mantouvalou**, Director, ICF, Consultancy in charge of the evaluation of European Disability Strategy 2010-2020

THE ANSWER

Really, how have we done so far?

What does the ongoing evaluation of the European Disability Strategy tell us? This question hung over the audience as **Marco Migliosi** took the floor in the first panel of the EDPD. Thankfully, he didn't keep people waiting too long for the answer as he quickly introduced the evaluation and its expected impact at EU and national level. So, has the Strategy lived up to its billing?

Yes and no. The situation has improved since 2010, but there is clear room for improvement in the design, delivery and monitoring of future actions, according to preliminary findings presented during the panel. The final report examining the effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence and added value of the Strategy, is not due before January 2020, but **Katerina Mantouvalou** of ICF, a consultancy in charge of the evaluation, provided a handy overview of what to expect.

Scorecard: steady progress, but can do better

The Strategy has contributed to a notable change in overall policy discourse towards a human-rights-based approach, she said, which has energised the UNCRPD and influenced key legislation in the field. But there remains scope for improvement in several key areas. National initiatives – and how they complement or clash with EU action – need close monitoring, but there is a lack of baseline data supporting this.

Greater mainstreaming is still a high priority. It may be achieved through dedicated focal points in the European Commission to monitor and mainstream the strategy, alongside a specific budget line for implementation. There also needs to be greater focus on what Mrs Mantouvalou called **design issues**: the need for greater involvement of disabled people and civil society, better alignment of the Strategy with the UN Convention, and ownership of disability specific matters to achieve greater mainstreaming of equality in law and policy.

On the **delivery** side – making things happen – the findings point to the need for stronger coordination between EU administrations and much more civil society involvement, especially in education and training. Lastly, on the subject of **monitoring and evaluation**, a clearer baseline position is considered key to facilitating future progress, with indicators systematically collected and more attention paid to complementarity between the EU and national developments. This means data from employment, education and poverty needs to be fed into the evaluation process.





European Disability Strategy (EDS) evaluation highlights

- 56% of respondents say the situation for people with disabilities has improved (31% disagree) and 52% think EDS contributed (24% disagree).
- Factors behind progress cited: political-legal impact of UNCRPD (23%), advocacy and NGO inputs (20%), EU funds (17%), EU legislation (15%), awareness-raising (13%).
- Factors hindering progress: poor understanding among policymakers of disability issues (28%), limited political will (24%), lack of financial resources (21%), low public awareness (17%).
- More than three-quarters agree the main action areas (social protection, health, participation, equality, education/training, accessibility, employment) at the start of EDS remain relevant today; half see the continued relevance of external action.
- The most relevant specific issues are accessibility to buildings (55%) and ageing and disability (51%), followed by children with disabilities and their families (49%).
- It was felt that EDS has strong internal coherence and with EU policy.
- Conclusion: EDS has contributed to change in overall policy discourse towards human-rights-based approach, energising the UNCRPD and influencing key legislation.
- Recommendation:
 - scope for improvement;
 - lack of baseline data (monitoring difficult);
 - need to assess national initiatives more closely (how they complement EU action);
 - greater mainstreaming through dedicated experts in EC and with own budget.
- Three focus areas proposed:
 - design (more involvement of disabled people and civil society);
 - delivery (better coordination between EU administrations, more civil society involvement especially education and training);
 - monitoring and evaluation (baselines and indicators including data from employment, education and poverty).

PANEL 2 · OUTSIDE PERSPECTIVES

Speakers

- **Emmanuelle Grange**, Head of the Disability and Inclusion unit, DG EMPL, European Commission (Chair)
- **Catalina Devandas-Aguilar**, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities
- **Ben Gauntlett**, Australia's Disability Discrimination Commissioner

VIDEO MESSAGE

Yazmine Laroche, Canadian Deputy Minister for Public Service Accessibility



THE INSPIRATION

Nothing less than a change in consciousness



This is how **Ben Gauntlett**, fresh off the plane from Australia, explained the transformation of his country's approach to disability, away from a charity model towards an inclusive market-led service model. A decade of work, some lessons learnt and always a work in progress is how he described the process. Together with **Yazmine Laroche** from Canada's Ministry of Public Service Accessibility, a valuable outsider's perspective was gained during Panel 2 of the conference.

Looking beyond the EU, **Emmanuelle Grange** recounted her recent fellowship in Australia and notably underlined the Government's ambitious deinstitutionalisation programme that took place already in the 1980s and 90s. Its National Disability Agreement 2010-2020 and Royal Commission on Violence against Persons with Disabilities could be inspiring for Europe and its Member States, not only in terms of how it works but also its far-reaching legal power.

Mr Gauntlett gave some historical context about Australia's approach to people with disabilities. It was dominated by a charity model providing block funding to service providers, which led to an institutional focus with very little individual choice and control. Care institutions were the norm, technology as a solution to improve access and public transport was underdeveloped. That changed when Australia ratified the UN Convention, he said, which led a political and cultural change in consciousness.

A landmark report, called 'Shut-out', highlighted the risk of political exclusion, and in 2009-10 all levels of government (Australia is a Federation) came together to formulate the National Disability Strategy. Technology, funding, managing expectations and focusing minds were all vitally important during the transition phases. Community attitudes and the need to get civil society onboard were critical. Accurate and comparable monitoring data in order to measure concrete progress was (and still is) key. As was integrating wider concerns such as human rights, education/training and employment, and a robust disability insurance scheme which in Australia's case covers 10% of the 4.5 million Australians with disabilities, including those with complex support needs.

He said the Strategy was an "empowering moment in politics" as it integrated six priorities across all government levels: personal and community support; health and wellbeing; economic security; inclusive and accessible communities; learning and skills, rights protection, justice; and legislation. Australia learned valuable lessons, too. The National Strategy works but it has faced data and implementation issues. As advice to Europe, he said it is important to engender a "culture and policy framework of 'we', not 'us' and 'them'."



A fair fight

Catalina Devandas-Aguilar spoke of the importance of fighting together for inclusion: "Social conquests are only reached where there are people fighting and starring in those conquests."



The confidence to act

Via video, **Yazmine Laroche** gave an account of her country's efforts to meet UNCRPD obligations and stressed the importance of engaging stakeholders and people with real experience, a process that culminated in the Accessible Canada Act.

"What's in the Act is important, of course, but I am also very proud of the way we got there: by engaging stakeholders and people with lived experience following the principle of *Nothing about us, without us*," she said.

The Act covers seven core areas through action plans to remove barriers and improve accessibility. And it applies to the federally-regulated sector which includes transportation, banking, telecommunications and broadcasting.

"We realised we had to look at our own policies, practices and processes – both as an employer and as a service provider – if we wanted to lead by example in building a barrier-free Canada," – Mrs Laroche explained.

A dedicated office/department, Public Service Accessibility, was set up in 2018 under the Act to implement the Accessibility Strategy for the Public Service of Canada.

Canada laid out a detailed measurement framework to assess progress in five key priority areas:

- 1) Improving recruitment, retention and promotion of persons with disabilities.
- 2) Enhancing the accessibility of the built environment.
- 3) Making information and communication technology usable by all.
- 4) Equipping public servants to design and deliver accessible programmes and services for all.
- 5) Building an accessibility-confident public service.

Rapid and major social and political change, she said, can disproportionately affect people with disabilities. Here, the UN Convention is a reminder that enjoying individual rights is closely linked to what is happening in the environment and communities; and together with the Sustainable Development Goals it shows a political commitment.

She spoke about the UN's own performance, as an international organisation employing thousands, in terms of accessibility. A baseline internal study revealed gaps in its mainstreaming effort, high-level leadership and understanding of the rights and needs of people with disabilities. Now, the UN has its own Disability Inclusion Strategy, which provides an operational framework for agencies, funds and programmes to ensure people with disabilities are factored into all development, human rights and humanitarian aid programming.

It includes a basis for reporting progress on all factors (procurement, hiring people, and in terms of policy and at the project level). The tool helps to measure progress and answers the question: How is UN money benefiting people with disabilities?

A vocal response from the floor explored the gender dimension in the UN's Disability Inclusion Strategy, the importance of accountability and follow-up during implementation of new measures, and disabilities as a barrier to mobility, such as through Erasmus. Ben Gauntlett answered a question about employer reactions to Australia's Strategy and how his country dealt with the tricky transition to a market-service model.

"Employers were not signatory to the Strategy, but they're realising disability is equivalent to other forms of 'diversity,'" he said. "It is a slow and difficult process of learning." He cited a study called 'Willing to work' which found that people with disabilities are often outstanding employees; loyal and rarely off work sick.

That narrative, he continued, is beginning to take hold more widely, which is important for awareness-raising efforts. In the long term, the whole "first and last mile" of inclusion must be considered; not just employing people with disabilities, but also making sure the workplace is fit for purpose (universal design; physical and digital), and that they can get to and from work smoothly (accessible transport), which is usually outside the employer's scope.

"If [Australia] can do it, it's possible for Member States to do it; it's just a question of political will, money, and capacity." – Mrs Grange said.

PANEL 3 · EXPECTATIONS ON THE EU FOR THE NEXT DECADE

THE FUTURE

Collective intelligence, concrete input

The purpose of Panel 3 was to explore the content, future policy changes and targets, instruments needed and current best practices to influence future disability policy, as well as concrete actions based on past experience and Member State differences.

It was a lively and practical session which helped to gather impressions of actions on the ground as a collective intelligence-gathering exercise. Recommendations, views and inspiration for forthcoming disability policy and strategy came from both panellists and delegates.



PART I – DEBATE WITH INSTITUTIONS AND INDEPENDENT MECHANISMS

Speakers

- **Inmaculada Placencia Porrero**, Senior Expert, Disability and Inclusion unit, DG EMPL, European Commission (Chair)

VIDEO MESSAGES

MEP Marianne Vind, MEP Katrin Langensiepen, MEP Rosa Estaras Ferragut

- **Ioannis Vardakastanis**, Member of the European Economic and Social Committee, Rapporteur on the Opinion SOC/616 “Shaping the EU agenda for disability rights 2020-2030”
- **Marta Hirsch-Ziembinska**, Head of Complaints and Inquiries Unit and the Principal Legal Adviser, European Ombudsman
- **Robert-Jan Uhl**, Policy analyst, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights
- **Maureen Piggot**, Treasurer, European Disability Forum

Inmaculada Placencia Porrero moderated this session. She explained that this debate was meant to collect feedback, input and ideas for shaping a possible future disability strategy. Participants presented their expectations and aspirations for EU disability policies. Representatives of various EU institutions gave their views on the future strategy and were followed by representatives of the disability movement. The audience also had the opportunity to interact directly with the panellists.

The speakers were asked to indicate what policies are working well and what can institutions do to improve them (and how to achieve it in practice)? Can better ways be found to tie the UN Convention into future EU disability policy?

A series of pre-recorded interviews with Members of the European Parliament (MEP) representing different parties kicked off the session. **MEP Marianne Vind** stressed that better inclusion of persons with disabilities in the labour market is a fundamental right under the UN Convention. In the EU, 47% of those with disabilities are employed, compared to 72% of people without disabilities; and only 16% with autism are employed. "This is a shockingly low number [and] even more concerning knowing that more people are diagnosed with autism now than ever before," she stressed.

Next up, **MEP Katrin Langensiepen** spoke about her own experience as a woman with a disability and its impact on family, work, and life in general. She said the EU has to put more money into strengthening projects to help with these aspects of life too, and mentioned the European Social Fund for this. A dedicated Commissioner for equality within the European Commission, she believed, will be a valued partner to the Parliament in its efforts to promote greater inclusion for persons with disabilities.

MEP Rosa Estaras Ferragut said the EU must combine obligations under the UN Convention with programmes and actions for education, employment, and inclusion and accessibility in all its forms. She called on Member States to better implement the instruments already available to achieve this in everything from urban transport and the built environment to making workplaces and design universally accessible. Progress has been made, she said, but more can be done, and future policy directions should correct that.

Panellist **Maureen Piggot** said that mainstreaming was a big topic under the Strategy, but questioned progress in that direction. The Australian and Canadian examples, she said, show that anything is possible, and that Europe can do it too. Education, training and employment are critical to combating poverty, she said. Self-reliance – providing the means for everyone to reach their potential – should not be underestimated. A whole new way of thinking may be needed to train and prepare professionals, service providers and civil servants in what is expected under the UNCRPD.

Strong and ambitious Disability Rights Agenda

Ioannis Vardakastanis said he had a firm belief that the EU has the capacity to prepare and implement a "strong and ambitious Disability Rights Agenda". He called for the presidents of the European Commission, Parliament and Council to draw up a new mandate (and meet regularly) as a show of force. One idea, he said, is to set up "focus points" in all EU institutions for dealing with disability mainstreaming issues, and for a strong monitoring mechanism (well-resourced in terms of staff and funds) to keep tabs on progress. An EU-level portal to monitor how well the laws are being implemented was also proposed.

His message is that civil society organisations must really take the emerging Disability Rights Agenda in hand, advocating and promoting its principles in capitals, Parliaments and the EU, so that politicians understand it is the will of citizens to be treated equally.

"It is the will of citizens to be treated equally."
– Ioannis Vardakastanis.

"Meetings like today are a good example of the importance of awareness-raising ... go home and multiply the knowledge gained," said **Marta Hirsch-Ziembinska**. Here, the ombudsman can play an important advocacy role. Relatively few complaints from people with disabilities are currently channelled through the service, she said, which suggests that it is probably not a well-known course of action.

Data collection and indicators to measure the Strategy's progress are very important, according to **Robert-Jan Uhl**, especially disaggregated statistics with sufficient detail to help different stakeholders implement and monitor concrete measures to improve accessibility and inclusion. He stated that the EU's Fundamental Rights Agency plans to include more diverse views in future surveys and he called for ideas to help with this, which many in the audience took up in their questions during the feedback session.

On enablers and barriers, the panellists thought the growing strength of disabled persons' organisations and corresponding demands from national and EU governments to meet targets in the next Strategy or policy cycle are a positive evolution. Concern was raised that momentum will need to be maintained for Europe's Disability Rights Agenda, as the risk of other topical issues (climate change, economic troubles, ageing populations, etc.) drowning it out remain high.

PART II – DEBATE WITH INSTITUTIONS AND INDEPENDENT MECHANISMS

Speakers

- **Claudia Marinetti**, Director, Mental Health Europe
- **Mark Wheatley**, Executive Director, European Union of the Deaf
- **Rodolfo Cattani**, President, European Blind Union
- **Milan Šveřepa**, Director, Inclusion Europe
- **Jim Crowe**, President, European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities
- **Rasmus Isaksson**, Board Member, International Federation for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus



This part of the panel explored the role of civil society in future disability policy and what NGOs can do better/differently to involve themselves in this. The areas where the EU is likely to bring the most added-value and any ideas for further mainstreaming of disability in wider EU policy were also explored.

In terms of content, **Claudia Marinetti** said the current Strategy covers the principles of full participation for persons with disability to improve their quality of life, but a stand-alone action area on autonomy is needed. She called for more practical ways to educate the judiciary and professionals on disability issues, and more focus on “invisible groups” such as refugees who face psycho-social difficulties often following traumatic experiences.

Mark Wheatley drilled down to the Strategy’s implementation and said there needs to be more cross-cutting links to all EU policy matters including education/training, free movement and coordinated social protection, health, and political participation. Accessibility, he added, means more than the physical

or built environment; it should expressly cover access to communication and knowledge for all. Digitisation, automation and artificial intelligence (AI) are increasingly important and yet there is only one person on the Parliament’s AI Committee representing people with disabilities.

What areas need more investment? First and foremost, Member States need to turn principle 17 of the Social Pillar into concrete action, said **Rodolfo Cattani**. Concentrating on pressing issues like access to employment, workplace standards and cross-border rights are key. Recipients of EU funding should be required to state clearly how their work impacts disability issues and meets current standards including transport and urban accessibility (e.g. new e-scooters and e-bikes obstruct footpaths). The right to vote and stand for elections should be more overt in future policy, he stressed: “There were 800,000 people not able to vote in European elections ... something that should be corrected.”



“No second-class citizens”

Too many people are excluded from political life, added **Milan Šveřepa**: “As Joost Korte said, there should be no second-class citizens, but there clearly are when people cannot vote in elections based on legal capacity.”

The right to make decisions like voting and to be protected from violence and abuse are central to well-being and living a full life. He cited a chilling statistic: six out of ten women with intellectual disabilities report having been abused in institutions, but also in families and communities. Institutionalisation is a form of violence in itself, he said, so any new Strategy needs awareness-raising and specific targets for closing them down. The function of families helping people with disabilities to live independent lives deserves more attention as well.

On the subject of specific instruments needed, **Jim Crowe** spoke about what can be done for the 10 million people engaged in staffing services to support people with disabilities. New or better tools and training to empower this workforce and improve the quality of service are needed. To fully embrace the UN Convention, he said, new EU instruments need to earmark services and the workforce carrying them out, including how they are impacted by freedom of movement issues (i.e. skilled staff leaving to higher paid jobs in richer Member States).

Drawing on their vast field experience, the panel offered several best practices to build on in the next strategy or policy cycle. **Rasmus Isaksson** said that more ‘universal design’ thinking and less short-term solutions are needed. People with disabilities are a diverse group, each with their own dreams, hopes and qualifications. Policies on everything from Passenger Rights, vehicle standards, accessible transport, and even how people with disabilities are affected by natural disasters should reflect this diversity. “People with disabilities should be part of solution not part of the problem,” he concluded. And for this, accurate data is essential.

Final take-home messages

- **Mark Wheatley**: People with disabilities and civil society need to be fully and meaningfully involved in drafting and evaluating any new Strategy in the spirit of *Nothing about us, without us*. “Support and work alongside us so it reaches [the] decision-makers!”
- **Rodolfo Cattani**: NGOs have practical knowledge and a clear view of what their members need. Civil society should be constructive; say clearly what it needs and give examples of good and bad practice how to do it, to guide policymaking. “Be collaborative, be practical ... and say what we want and how!”
- **Milan Šveřepa**: Authorities should lead by example to focus minds and bring disability and equality issues into the spotlight. There is scope for direct action in relation to employing people with disabilities in EU institutions. “We need to focus on people ‘left behind’, such as those with complex support needs!”
- **Claudia Marinetti**: The current Strategy did a lot for accessibility. Now, we need to look at ways to bring the disability agenda further forward within the UN Convention framework. “Look into invisible disabilities; if we don’t see it or understand it, they get left behind!”
- **Jim Crowe**: NGOs that organise cultural events, sports, etc. for the general population should be motivated to mainstream disability into their events. Services need to be planned and developed by and for the disabled people they are aimed at. Deinstitutionalisation will be heavily influenced by progress in this. “Co-production of services and support is very important!”
- **Sean Klein**, the event moderator, highlighted various issues raised during the debate: inclusion in the workplace; women with disabilities; deinstitutionalisation, the importance of awareness-raising and mainstreaming; digital accessibility, inter-institutional coordination mechanisms, the role of civil society; human rights violations; artificial intelligence and automation; mental health; migration and disability issues; and many more topics reflected throughout this report.



From the audience...

- Women with disabilities and issues affecting women (violence, work-life balance etc.) needs to be better addressed in reporting, surveys and policy.
- Early childhood and the rights of children to equal and inclusive education deserve greater attention.
- Automation, AI and other emerging technological developments will be important for 50 years to come, so disability actors should be consulted now to help shape inclusive policy.
- Erasmus+, cross-border mobility issues and young people should all be priorities in the next Strategy or policy cycle.
- There were several mentions of mental health issues, forced treatment, putting a stop to the medicalisation of disability, and legal rights in this context.
- Several options to explore co-production both at the project and programme level; and co-creation concepts were even suggested for future EDPD conferences.
- A delegate felt that the day's debate reflected two core ideas – rights and responsibility – and that the focus had been more on 'rights' and not enough on the 'responsibility' to oneself as a person with a disability.
- An Erasmus student said NGOs need to be clear on what inclusion means to them so they can programme their actions better; another stressed the essential role of assistants in achieving mobility for someone with a disability (and it was mentioned that host countries have a dedicated budget for this so they can't claim it is the sending organisation's responsibility).
- On training and quality issues for support services, one delegate said wider efforts to mainstream special needs in public services and training/education should reinforce this: "We can't be the only experts in this; it must be more mainstream and the EU can do something about this."
- There were several mentions of the important role of assistance providers and quality services, including dogs as companions, guides and so on ("Make 2030 the decade of the dog!").
- And several references were made to the diversity of disabilities and, in particular, mental health problems and the different types of support people need.



The European Commission's #BeInclusive EU Sport Awards recognise organisations using the power of sport to increase social inclusion for disadvantaged groups, including those with disabilities.

Winners of the 2019 Prize were:

- Ginástica com Todos Associação de Ginástica do Algarve (PT)
- Ich will da rauf! (DE) (Rocking Inclusion!)
- Job Goals, Kicken ohne Grenzen (DE) (Education through Football)



**#BEINCLUSIVE
EU SPORT
AWARDS**

Day 2

29 NOVEMBER 2019

PANEL 4 · HOW TO ACHIEVE SPORTS FOR ALL

Speakers

- **David Lega**, MEP and Paralympic Champion
- **Antoaneta Angelova-Krasteva**, Director for Innovation, International Cooperation and Sport, DG EAC, European Commission
- **Anne d'Ieteren**, President of the Belgian Paralympic Committee
- **Pietro Cirrincione**, Autism Europe Vice-President and President of Romulea Autistic Football Club, Rome

THE DRIVE

The joy of participating

For some, simply participating is a victory in itself. The act of getting out there (in the community, in elections, in daily activities) should never be taken for granted. Sport is a universal language for promoting solidarity, respecting values and creating a sense of belonging. And it should be facilitated, “not forced”, according to **Antoaneta Angelova-Krasteva**. Removing remaining barriers to fuller inclusion in sport for all is a priority.

With their unique experience, the panellists discussed how this can be achieved and the audience provided some valuable food for thought. EU programmes firmly address many of the barriers, Mrs Angelova-Krasteva continued, by raising awareness, boosting infrastructure and sporting facilities, supporting volunteers/trainers/coaches, and much more. Role models and their inspiring stories of personal development and achievement are important as well.

With a seven-year budget of almost EUR 266 million, the Erasmus+ programme focuses on grassroots sport and is already funding sport projects supporting inclusive societies. Social inclusion is a priority of the Work Programme, she said, and since 2014, some 228 projects have been funded in this area. For example, the #BeInclusive EU Sport Awards, launched in 2017, have proven to be a valuable tool for recognising sporting organisations working with ethnic minorities, refugees, people with disabilities, youth groups at risk, or any other group that faces challenging social circumstances. Several videos were shown of this year's prize-winners



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David Lega, MEP

in action, from inclusive gymnastics and judo clubs in Portugal and Croatia respectively, to cooperative climbing groups in Germany.

*“There is a political commitment from the Commission to make the future Erasmus programme even more accessible and inclusive,”
– confirmed Mrs Angelova-Krasteva.*

Four things needed for confidence

Paralympian and now MEP David Lega spoke of every person's need to be connected to others, to feel a part of something bigger than themselves, and sport offers that. He told his story, how he was given little chance of ever being mobile, let alone becoming a champion swimmer.

Engaging in sports means being able to focus on something other than your disability, he said. It is not about winning medals, but constantly developing yourself and getting better every day. "We need to focus on what we can do with our disability, not what we cannot do due to our disability. See the difference?" he said. His biggest achievement as a swimmer was not to win the World Cup, but to learn how to swim.

Sport taught him many lessons, including that it is not about beating others in the race, but bettering himself. "I just wanted to beat my best times!" Having a family and coach that believed in him was important. He said all children need love, encouragement and support, but also demands on them to keep striving. Sport is not the single most important thing, but part of a broader identity-forming experience.

Anne d'Ieteren, spoke about the Belgian and wider Paralympic movement as a vehicle for athletes to fulfil their potential. The mission goes beyond sports results, it acts as a source of inspiration and marks an evolution in society, how people with disabilities are seen. "Sport has an amazing capacity to be vector of change," she said.

The Games raise awareness and shows people with disabilities in a new light. After the Tokyo Olympics, 66% of Belgians said watching the Paralympic athletes changed their perspective on disability, 78% thought the combination of sport and disability promotes integration and equality.

To show the power of sport to transform lives, **Pietro Cirrincione** told a moving story of the Romulea Autistic Football Club in Italy, its ambitious programme promoting inclusive sport and the difference it makes to the players but also to the wider community both in and outside the football establishment. An uplifting video showed players training and playing, with testimonies on why the club is so important to them and to team spirit on and off the pitch.

Autism is difficult to categorise and leaves people on the spectrum in a grey zone in terms of disability. They struggle to fit into regular sporting clubs but may not qualify or wish to be involved in 'special' teams. The Romulea neuro-diverse model fills the gap. It promotes social skills, psychosocial wellbeing, responsibility, inclusion, self-determination, self-advocacy and autonomy. Importantly for many of the players, the level of competition is quite high. Future plans include a youth autism team and one day to compete in an official mainstream championship under the Italian Football Federation.





From the audience...

- Another arena for promoting equality is the Deaf Olympics, one delegate said, which was started in 1924 and held its most recent Games (2017) in Turkey that were attended by 2873 athletes from 86 nations. The inaugural Winter Deaf Olympics starts in Italy on 12 December. Mrs Angelova-Krasteva promised to explore the scope for incorporating the Deaf Olympics in EU programming, saying that, in principal, support is aimed at all disability-related sporting events.
- A Portuguese delegate with a disability gave a personal account of what the session and Mr Lega's story meant to him, concluding that it is "time to think outside the box". Paralympic athletes are inspiring, yes, but not everyone with a disability can perform at that level, Mr Lega responded. The measure of success for each person is unique; it could be to get a job or live without pain, not win a competition.
- Sport can achieve so much but it is important that role models are found in all of life's situations; it was also pointed out that competing in sports when you are on the spectrum and/or have a behavioural disorder is difficult.
- A physical education teacher asked Mr Lega what tools he used to break the cycle of self-pity and poor confidence. The reply: "Today, we focus maybe too much on what could happen rather than what each individual can do. Yes, we need the rights but with ... responsibilities, too. Everything is a balance, with or without disability."
- A delegate pointed out that elite sport gets a lot of attention: What about more investment in playgrounds and local sports, for example, to get people with disabilities more involved from the start?
- All panellists agreed on this point. The Belgian Olympic Federation and European Commission both have grassroots programmes, with the European-level investment focused on fostering good practice. Mr Lega said many elite disabled athletes have their own sponsors: "It should be about developing life, not about medals!"



The universal popularity of sport and its physical, social and economic development benefits make it an ideal tool for fostering the inclusion and well-being of persons with disabilities.

United Nations

CONCLUSIONS

Speakers

- **Marija Pletikosa**, State Secretary, Ministry of Demography, Family, Youth and Social Policy – Croatian Presidency of the Council of the EU
- **Emmanuelle Grange**, Head of Disability and Inclusion unit, European Commission (in place of **Katarina Ivankovic-Knezevic**, Director for Social Affairs, European Commission)
- **Ana Pelaez**, Vice-President, European Disability Forum



The EDPD not only achieved its goal of gathering feedback on the concluding European Disability Strategy, it also incited the wider community of stakeholders who have worked so hard for the past ten years to make a difference. Intense, thoughtful, honest exchanges delivered fresh ideas that will feed the European Commission’s work over the coming weeks and months.

In her wrap up, **Emmanuelle Grange** stressed that while the Strategy had proven to be useful, there is room to do more and better in the future. “That’s the key message that I will bring back to my office and hierarchy,” she said, stating that it will inform the final evaluation and, ultimately, future policy concerning disability and inclusion.

The panel on Sports for All, she continued, really put disability in a different light; as a source of hope and progress, not only of social inclusion and daily struggle. “We had proof of the incredible innovation, inventiveness, creativity, commitment and willpower in this area, which can change the life of everyone.”

She said the Commission wants to channel this spirit and mindset in the “marathon” work of charting future disability policy over the coming weeks and months.





Yes, we can

Marija Pletikosa echoed the can-do spirit of the event. Information from this event and from EU-wide public consultations helps to chart the future direction, she said: “Have we done a lot? Yes, we have. Do we have to strive for more? There is no doubt. Each of us can and will.”

She spoke about her country’s own efforts in adopting national strategies for the equalisation of rights for people with disabilities and priorities under the incoming Presidency of the Council of the EU, to build what it calls “a strong Europe in a world of challenges” – a Europe that develops, connects, protects and has influence – and how this feeds into the topic of equality for all.

Croatia will hold a conference in May 2020 on ‘Disability Assessment and Financing of Representative Organisations of Persons with Disabilities’. It will help drive the policy debate around implementation of the UN Convention, and host high-level meetings dealing with demographic challenges, women in the labour market and integrated approaches to children at risk, among other initiatives to influence disability and inclusion initiatives.

In times of change

Now is a time of change in the European Union, said **Ana Pelaez**, which brings uncertainty but also many possibilities. This year’s EDPD represented a “unique opportunity to come together to make our voices heard”, she said, and to make sure that the EU shows far greater ambition and is bolder when it comes to upholding the rights of people with disabilities.

A lot has changed in the past decade since the first EU Disability Strategy was adopted. A stronger base now exists to hold the EU and Member States accountable for their actions (and inaction), when it comes to



As persons with disabilities we are often expected to wait for things to get better, and to experience true equality, but we are tired of waiting.

Ana Pelaez, MEP

disability and rights, she said: “They have shown a lot of commitment to upholding the rights of persons with disabilities, now we within the disability movement must not rest until the EU and Member States have turned these promises into actions ... real implementation.”

Future activities at the EU and national level should take into account those who are most at risk, she said, including people with multiple disabilities or high support needs, or those facing multiple discrimination, such as women with disabilities, people living in care, people forced into treatment and all people whose rights are being withheld, to name but a few.

THE PRIZE

Access City Award, ten years and going strong



The three winners of the tenth edition of the Access City Award were announced by Commissioner Marianne Thyssen during the closing sessions of the EDPD. For the first time this year, a financial prize accompanied the honour of being crowned the most accessible European cities in 2020.

- **First prize** (€150,000 and trophy) went to the Polish capital **Warsaw** in recognition of its integrated measures and inclusive approach to accessibility and overall improvement in a short space of time. It is the first time a central European city has won the prize first.
- **Second prize** (€120,000 and trophy) went to **Castelló de la Plana** in Spain, which has made progress across a wide spectrum of city life with a sustainable approach towards accessibility.
- **Third prize** (€80,000 and trophy) went to **Skellefteå** in Sweden for its comprehensive approach to overcoming accessibility challenges. This city is an example for public transportation, the accessibility of its cultural events and for connecting with its citizens.

Three cities also received special mentions and a trophy to mark their achievements tackling a range of accessibility challenges. **Évreux** (France) was recognised for its effort to extend accessibility paradigms to 'hidden disabilities'. **Chania** (Crete) was acknowledged for its use of smart systems to boost accessible parking and prevent fraud, and **Tartu** (Estonia) for its grassroots approach to engaging citizens and promoting accessibility also earned a special mention.



THE FAREWELL

What better way to end a conference... and a great career!

"It is my very last working day as Commissioner and it is the very last day of my full-time working life, and I could think of no better way to end my mandate than being here, at the Access City Awards," began Commissioner Marianne Thyssen at the Award Ceremony, in the closing hours of EPDP. "In the past five years, I think we have gotten to know each other. I admire your passion, your determination, and your ability to get things done."

The Commissioner went on to outline what has been achieved to put 'social' back into the heart of Europe, and what remains to be done to fully implement the UN Convention. And credit was given where it is due to the Access City Award for raising awareness among Europeans of this important field. A total of 62 cities have already been honoured with an Award during its ten years, she said: "This is thanks to you ... It's your activism that makes cities move forward."



With the Access City Award, winning cities can be an inspiration for other EU cities and beyond that encounter similar challenges. Warsaw, winner of the 10th edition, is a model for others, showing that a lot can be done in a very short amount of time and that commitment can be key to success.

Commissioner Marianne Thyssen

Getting the message out

Raising awareness is a critical part of what the European Commission and European Disability Forum want to achieve with the European Day of Persons with Disabilities. A flagship in both organisations' annual calendar, it is a chance to **underline the challenges, herald the achievements and connect policy with actions** on the ground throughout Europe.

Delegates at the conference were encouraged to share their ideas and further discuss all topics on the agenda during the two-day event via social media and through dedicated channels: #EDPD2019 #EUDisability, #EUAccessCity and #WeAreEUCitizens



CONTACT INFORMATION

European Commission correspondents

Thomas Segretain thomas.segretain@ec.europa.eu

Emilia Mellone emilia.mellone@ec.europa.eu

Catherine Koeckx catherine.koeckx@ec.europa.eu

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion
Directorate “Social Affairs”

Unit EMPL.C3 “Disability & Inclusion”

1049 Brussels Belgium
E-Mail: EMPL-EDPD-ACA@ec.europa.eu



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