

Evaluation of the European Disability Strategy 2010 - 2020 ESIP response to the public consultation

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The “European Disability Strategy 2010 – 2020: A Renewed Commitment to a Barrier-Free Europe” (EU Strategy) intends to implement the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) at European level. Non-discrimination, full and effective participation and inclusion in society, respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities and respect for the right of children with disabilities to preserve their identities are some of the guiding principles of the UN CRPD.

To implement the UN CRPD at European level, the EU Strategy identified eight main areas for action: Accessibility, Participation, Equality, Employment, Education and Training, Social Protection, Health and External Action. However, taking into account some important initiatives launched and adopted following the implementation of the EU Strategy and despite the recognition of the main areas of action, **people with disabilities are still facing discrimination and disadvantages resulting in inferior education, hampering their access to the open labour market and leading to poverty.**

ESIP considers **access to early childhood education and care (ECEC) of high quality**, which is not specifically addressed in the EU Strategy, **essential to support children with disabilities, to ensure their early inclusion into society, to foster their future employability and thus their autonomy.** ECEC would help families which are often confronted with an “erratic and challenging journey” looking for support and information. ECEC could contribute to the work life balance of parents and to improve the life quality of the families: parents and siblings. The efficient inclusion of disabled children in ECEC calls for flexibility of attendance modalities for children with disabilities at childcare and pre-school facilities. The cooperation of all relevant internal and external actors such as medical professionals in ECEC is also vital in this regard.

Moreover, participation of disabled children in ECEC creates familiarity in everyday contact supporting the respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity.

A sound education as well as familiarity in contacts could facilitate the integration of persons with disabilities in the open labour market and reduce inhibitions. The right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others, including the right of the opportunity to gain a reasonable living by work freely chosen in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible, as enshrined in Article 27 of the UN CRPD,

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is still far from being reality. Persons with disabilities are predominantly still excluded from meaningful jobs and the open labour market enabling them to gain a salary allowing economic independence and participation in society.

ESIP considers **the implementation of the right to work, including for those who acquire a disability during the course of employment**, of utmost importance to **enable persons with disabilities to attain maximum of independence as well as a full inclusion and participation in societal life**.

Concerning the next EU Strategy for persons with disabilities, ESIP therefore recommends putting more emphasis on these aspects and stresses in particular:

- ECEC must be **accessible, affordable and of quality**;
- A **culture of equality and respect of diversity** must be **enshrined in the ECEC curriculum** as well as in the work environment, including equal remuneration for work of equal value;
- **ECEC must be open for all children**, especially for disabled children whom may be recognised a priority access right; dedicated funds must be granted for ECEC receiving disabled children;
- Prices must be adapted, and flexible hours of enrolment must be recognised for families with disabled children;
- **Specific training must be provided for caregivers in ECEC with disabled children** and collaboration with external experts such as medical professionals should be organised;
- Families should be able to participate within the ECEC in order to share their expertise and experience;
- Networking and cooperation of all relevant internal and external actors in ECEC as a key requirement for an efficient inclusion of disabled children must be encouraged;
- **Smooth transition between ECEC and both school system and job market** (especially first employment) must be ensured;
- The implementation of right to work, including for those who acquire a disability during their work, as enshrined in the UN CRPD must be supported;
- Discrimination based on disability related to employment, including recruitment, career advancement and safe and healthy working conditions must be prohibited;
- **Promotion of employment opportunities and career advancement for persons with disabilities in the open labour market**, including assistance in finding, obtaining, maintaining and returning to employment. Persons with disabilities must be enabled to have effective access to vocational guidance, placement support and vocational training;
- **Promotion of vocational and professional rehabilitation**, job retention and return-to-work programmes for persons with disabilities.



“Digital inclusion” is a key element to ensure that everybody can contribute to and benefit from the digital economy and society. While digitalisation of health care and social sectors can ensure better access and delivery of services, many of those people who could benefit most from digital services are the most likely to be excluded. Therefore, ESIP recommends tackling digital exclusion of people with disabilities and to ensure as a fundamental horizontal principle the “digital inclusion” of people with disabilities within all relevant policies and programs.

Finally, the public consultation by the European Commission led to **noticing a lack of strong evidence regarding the link between the implementation of the EU Strategy and the improvement of the lives of persons with disabilities.** The correlation between initiatives taken within the EU Disability Strategy and possible outcomes cannot be established since statistical data is missing. **More relevant statistical data and a better reporting and assessment of results** of implemented initiatives is needed to allow a sound and objective evaluation of the EU Strategy.

About the European Social Insurance Platform (ESIP)

The *European Social Insurance Platform (ESIP)* represents over **50 national statutory social insurance organisations** in **17 EU Member States and Switzerland**, active in the field of health insurance, pensions, occupational disease and accident insurance, disability and rehabilitation, family benefits and unemployment insurance. The aims of ESIP and its members are to preserve high profile social security for Europe, to reinforce solidarity-based social insurance systems and to maintain European social protection quality. ESIP builds strategic alliances for developing common positions to influence the European debate and is a consultation forum for the European institutions and other multinational bodies active in the field of social security.

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