

January 2010

Policy news



Successful dialogue between MEPS and NGOs on employment for people with disabilities

On Tuesday, 26 January 2010, EASPD in cooperation with BAG: WfbM invited Members of the European Parliament to a dialogue about employment for people with disabilities. Around 15 MEPs accepted the invitation and appeared in person to follow the discussion.

The central issue of the conference was the labor market situation of disabled people within the European Union. Many MEPs talked about the current situation in their countries and mentioned that numerous “sheltered workshop” employees had to be dismissed during the financial crisis.

Axel Willenberg, Board member of BAG:WfbM was not able to join on short notice, therefore, his co-worker Thomas Umsonst took over the opportunity to talk about the legislation on workshop policy: in Germany no workshop employee can be released. He also set a focus on the important role of workshops as being part of professional rehabilitation and participation in the working life and alluded to the importance of employment for workshop participants.

The MEP hostesses were Jean Lambert from Great Britain and Birgit Sippel from Germany. Jean Lambert concentrated on

the urgent need that all people involved in this field have to cooperate on a European basis. Furthermore, she regretted the fact that the employment rate of people with profound disabilities is not sufficient and accentuated the necessity of developing new approaches.

Franz Wolfmayr, President of EASPD, adverted to the European year for combating poverty and social exclusion and highlightend that people with disabilities belong to the poorest of society. Disabled people and their families are confronted with high maintenance costs to secure their existence. Adequate paid employment is the only solution to this issue. Furthermore, the advantages of social security are clear in his mind.

The European Commission was also represented by Inmaculada Placencia (Deputy Head of Unit for Integration of people with disabilities within the Directorate General for Employment Social Affairs and Equal opportunities) who said that the EU Commission is currently developing a new strategy for people with disabilities and that her department is also working on the ratification of the UN-Convention.

Numerous organisations and service providers for people with disabilities throughout Europe, among which Belgium, Austria, Italy, France, Portugal, Greece, Ireland, Germany and Romania were present as well. During the discussion MEPs were explaining their efforts at the EU-Commission to advance the transition to a general labour market, to develop

alternatives and to reassess special actions, since the costs of securing one's existence are high. The issue of costs was brought up various times, since also the employment of people with disabilities is cost-intensive because support programmes and promotions for organisations which employ disabled people have to be financed.



European year to combat poverty launched in Madrid

On 21 January 2010, the European Commission and Spanish EU Presidency launched the 2010 European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion under the slogan 'Stop Poverty Now!' at an event in Madrid.

Special 'European Years' focusing on specific themes have been held since 1983. Their main purpose is to increase public awareness and stimulate political debate across the EU on a given topic.

Recent EU statistics indicate that 17% of people across the EU (almost 80 million Europeans) currently live below the poverty threshold. This alarming fact resonates strongly with European citizens, a recent Eurobarometer survey on attitudes to poverty revealed.

In fact, the decision to make 2010 the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion was taken before the economic downturn.

Nevertheless, "combating poverty and social exclusion is an integral part of getting out of the crisis," argued European Commission President José Manuel Barroso. "It is too often the vulnerable in

society who end up being hardest hit by the impacts of a recession," he said.

Barroso went on claiming that the fight against poverty would continue beyond its year in the spotlight, and would in fact be incorporated into the EU's long-term thinking.

"The European Year 2010 should act as a catalyst to raise awareness and build momentum for a more inclusive society which is part and parcel of the EU's future 2020 strategy that I have proposed," he argued.

Vladimír Špidla, outgoing commissioner for employment, social affairs and equal opportunities, pointed out that "one in six people in Europe face a daily struggle to make ends meet, but poverty can also affect the rest of us – and our societies as a whole".

He went on to note that "while most of the tools for tackling poverty are at national level, three-quarters of Europeans also expect the EU to help".

"The European Year puts this issue at the top of the agenda so that Europe as a whole can join forces to fight poverty and social exclusion," he concluded.



International Federation for Spina Bifida at the European Parliament

The event “Act against neural tube defects in Europe now!” co-organized by the International Federation for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus and Bayer Schering Pharma and hosted by MEPs Dr. Antoniya Parvanova, Ms. Edite Estrela and Ms. Ria Oomen-Ruijten was successfully held in the EP on January the 27th 2010.

A final report with results from a research conducted through all Europe showed that the use of Folic Acid can help to prevent

Spina Bifida but as to now the number of neural tube defects hasn't decreased. This is mainly due to lack of information to women planning their pregnancies and actions against this are highly expected to be taken from the European Parliament.

For more information see:

http://www.ifglobal.org/images/stories/act_against_europes_most_common_birth_defects_report.pdf



Revealing public attitudes to discrimination and equality

A Europe-wide survey has revealed that people believe discrimination in relation to age and disability is on the increase. Respondents also felt that the recent recession may lead to more discrimination in the jobs market.

The European Commission runs the ‘For Diversity - Against Discrimination’ campaign, which aims to raise awareness about equality issues across Europe.

In autumn 2009 the campaign ran Diversity Days in Cyprus, Luxembourg, Portugal and Sweden. These were designed to help the general public explore equality and diversity issues while providing an insight into anti-discrimination laws and how they protect EU citizens.

The campaign also runs an annual journalism award which honours online and print journalists from the EU who have helped to improve public understanding of diversity and discrimination issues.

Between 2004 and 2008, the campaign toured European towns and cities in a large truck to promote the fight against discrimination. The truck team also visited music, youth and film festivals, sporting events and employment fairs to spread the diversity message.

The Eurobarometer survey examined attitudes towards discrimination throughout the EU in 2009. About one in six people claim to have suffered some form of discrimination or harassment in the past year because of their gender, disability, ethnic origin, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief. As in 2008 – when a similar survey was carried out – age was found to be the most common reason for people to report discrimination, with 6% of respondents saying it was an issue for them.

There has been a sharp rise in perceived discrimination based on age and disability. In 2009, 58% of respondents said that age discrimination is widespread, compared to

42% in 2008. For disability the figure is 53%, up from 45% last year.

Europeans seem to be worried that the economic downturn may, in some instances, exacerbate inequality. For example, 64% of respondents believe that the recession could result in more age discrimination in the jobs market. Ethnic origin (57%) and disability (56%) were also flagged-up as key areas where discrimination may increase.

At times like these, anti-discrimination policies should be deployed to protect vulnerable groups in society.

However, 49% of Europeans fear that their countries might make policies and budgets

aimed at promoting equality and diversity less of a priority because of the recession. Only about a third of people thought otherwise.

Policy makers certainly appear to have their work cut out to raise awareness about anti-discrimination legislation. As in 2008, only about one-third of those surveyed say that they know their rights should they fall victim to discrimination or harassment.

The public opinion is divided as to whether EU Member States are making enough effort to combat all forms of discrimination. While 49% think enough is being done, 44% think the opposite.

EASPD news



The ImPaCT in Europe web site is now online!

ImPaCT in Europe, a networking project in the field of ICT co-ordinated by EASPD, has a brand new web site: www.impact-in-europe.eu. The site will serve as repository of all project-related information and also as a knowledge centre on PCT in Europe. It will also feature a user Forum, so we encourage all members and friends of EASPD to make use of it and share their experiences on the use of person centred technology, post questions and join in discussions.

We would also like to remind everyone that the survey on ICT and Assistive Technology is still open and accessible both from the EASPD and ImPaCT web sites. We encourage all members to complete it and ask their contacts/networks to do the same, so as to help us to collect as much data on this topic as possible.

<http://easpd.hft.org.uk>



SAVE THE DATE: 3-4 June 2010 Conference on “What about me – Including the most excluded- Improving the quality of life of people with high dependency needs”

The UN Convention on the Rights of persons with Disabilities promotes, protects and ensures the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities and promotes respect for their inherent dignity. People with disabilities are persons with rights, and they should be capable of claiming these and making decisions for their lives. Full and effective participation and inclusion in society is recognized in the Convention. We are committed to the values of self-determination, empowerment, active inclusion, equal opportunities, lifelong learning and freedom of choice. The UN Convention and all these values should be real also for persons with high support

needs. The conference speakers from across Europe and beyond will explore ways to promote these principle values and to make the UN Convention real in the lives of persons with high support needs.

In the conference we are approaching this through three main themes:

- Communication and interaction
- Active support
- Citizenship and inclusion

The goals of the conference are:

- to find out ways to promote the core values of the UN Convention
- implementation of the UN Convention for persons with high support needs

- to discuss, share and learn from each other about best practices
- establishing a network
- Declaration and Action Plan

Who should attend?

- Professionals, service providers
- People with disabilities and their families
- Researcher, educators
- Politicians

Organizers: EASPD, NVC, Service Foundation for Persons with Intellectual Disability, FAIDD, Finnish Network on Intellectual Disability

Conference venue: Scandic Continental, Helsinki, Finland

Hotel: information will be available on www.easpd.eu in due time

Registration: information will be available on www.easpd.eu in due time

EASPD activities: Saturday 5th June 2010
Conference languages: English-French-Finnish



Presentation of our new EVS volunteer Makrina Dimou

Hello, my name is Makrina Dimou. I come from Greece and live in Thessaloniki where I'm a volunteer in an organisation for people with disabilities, which is called IEA. I came to Brussels with an EVS project. I'm currently finishing a degree in Physical Education and physiotherapy for persons with disabilities. Brussels is a very interesting city and I was very enthusiastic about coming here. Brussels is the city

where the European Parliament is located. So, I hope to get more information about the topics such as European policies concerning the disability sector which is of great interest to me. The EASPD is an organization that cares for the improvement of the rights of people with disabilities. That's why I came to Brussels and to EASPD.