



Latvian Presidency: High Level meeting on Disability, 11-12/05/2015

Executive summary

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1. Description of the action

The Latvian Presidency to the Council of European Union hosted the High Level Meeting consisting of two parts: Ministerial Meeting and conference, taking place on 11 – 12 May, 2015, in Riga Latvia.

The objective of the High Level Meeting was to identify progress and challenges after five years of ratification of the UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities in European Union.

The objective of the Ministerial Meeting was to identify progress and challenges still ahead for the Member States in order to move towards a barrier-free Europe, to identify which EU action complementing national efforts has been successful or needs to be further developed.

The objective of the Conference was to evaluate measures and different practices that have been implemented in Member states to ensure that the disability policy is shifted from passive medical to human rights model.

High Level Meeting on Disability addressed disability policy issues from different angles. Taking into account that children are the first ones to benefit from the paradigm's shift besides the general evaluation of the situation the issues regarding children with disabilities, their education and career opportunities, were the key aspects of the conference. Thus the main focus during the event was on inclusive education and employment. Employment is fundament for social inclusion and economic independence. Enjoying equal rights, inclusive education and inclusive employment can create better opportunities and choices, and lead to full and equal participation in society and its economic, social and cultural life.

The event started with a meeting of representatives from the EU Member States' governments during which the participants informed about the latest developments and national measures implemented in the field of disability policy to implement the CRPD and with a particular focus on inclusive education. Achievements and further challenges were discussed together with Human Rights Commissioner, European Commission and European Disability Forum.

After the meeting, Latvian Minister for Welfare Uldis Augulis opened the conference entitled "From Inclusive Education to Inclusive Employment for Persons with Disability". The participants of the conference were also addressed by Mārīte Seile, the Latvian Minister for Education and Science, Maria-Luisa Cabral, the representative of the European Commission Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Nils Muižnieks, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Yannis Vardakastanis, the President of the European Disability Forum and other distinguished guests.

¹ REGULATION (EU) No 1381/2013



Conference did have two Panel discussions “Towards disability policies based on human rights model” and “How to overcome barriers for successful employment?”, and two Work sessions on Rights of children with disabilities with specific discussions in smaller groups on following themes “From inclusive education to employment” and “Inclusive education – doing away with barriers”. Each part of the conference included presentations from the governmental and Member states practice, and distinguished guests representing the research and civil society perspective.

Ministerial Meeting comprised 36 participants with high level delegates from 17 Member states (ministers, vice-ministers, advisors to the minister, and parliamentary secretaries), COE, European Commission DG EMPL and EDF.

The Conference comprised 159 delegates from 28 Member states, COE, European Parliament, European Commission, ILO, UN Special Rapporteur, FRA, Eurofound, EDF, EASPD, EADSNE, ANED, Eurocities, EESC, and other well known civil society organisations with expertise in disability issues, etc.

Conference was held in four languages – Latvian, English, French and German. Additional options were provided : text screen translation in English, sign language interpretation in Latvian, individual sign language interpreters (in assistants capacity) for delegates from EU Memberstates.

Conference was live streamed on internet with 680 and 541 views on Conference days.

All materials are made available on the Ministry of Welfare homepage: <http://www.lm.gov.lv/news/id/6491>

2. Conclusions:

Main points for further actions underlined in Member states interventions during the Ministerial Meeting were as follows:

- Education is most important to have better career chances during lifetime;
- Integration into employment is the objective for full inclusion of persons with disabilities;
- Further development is only possible through cooperation with civil society.

Accordingly Member states recognized that further efforts need to be put into these mentioned areas.

During the Conference sessions different problems from the persons with disability perspective were addressed: unemployment patterns for persons with disabilities, career opportunities, barriers in education, lack of inclusive and appropriate support measures and services both as regards education, career guidance and employment. Discussions led following conclusions:

- Vocational education and support for students with disabilities must be ensured through support services and other measures;
- Vocational rehabilitation as one of the preconditions to be able to adapt into new workplace;
- Youth guaranty can be used as an instrument;
- European Structural funds can be used as an instrument;
- Member states could set specific targets as regards people with disabilities at the national level;
- Big cities are not friendly for people with disabilities, but much can be done at local level through responsible policy;



- Large institutions are difficult to maintain and often are in a very bad condition, not needed any more;
- Teachers are not well prepared for the work with pupils with disabilities and need awarenessraising;
- Support from the European Commission is vital to push the issues forward;
- Awareness raising is needed in the families with disabled children too;
- Etc.

In addition to being an arena for dialogue and information sharing, the Ministerial Meeting and the Conference provided an opportunity to jointly develop an outcome document – the *Presidency conclusions on disability* on changing approach to disability, thus contributing to the implementation of the EU Disability Strategy (2010-2020).

3. Policy follow-up

The Conference brought together governmental representatives, civil society, academics, and international organisations. This broad representation during the discussions of the High Level Meeting provided a new impetus for the strengthening of the commitment to ensure equal rights for persons with disabilities. Member states together with persons with disabilities representatives have a common vision about the main emphasis in the implementation of the European Disability Strategy for the next five years.

The Latvian presidency presented *Presidency conclusions on disability* that were drafted and agreed among Member states at the end of the conference. They highlighted the need for Member States and the EU to work further to ensure the rights and freedoms of all persons with disabilities by fully implementing the principles defined in the UN Convention and placing a special emphasis on children with disability.

The document states that following areas of intervention play an important role: the improvement of support mechanisms; integration of children and youth with disabilities in the society; provision of accessible education and suitable employment during the lifetime; development of assistive technologies (technical aids); efficient use of EU Structural Funds for improving the quality of life for persons with disabilities; and the strengthening of cooperation between the governmental and non-governmental sectors in order to represent and implement the interests of persons with disabilities.

The information contained in this publication does not necessarily reflect the official position of the European Commission.