



**DISABILITY
SUPPORT SERVICES
IN THE EU:
A REALITY CHECK**

**EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF SERVICE
PROVIDERS FOR PERSONS WITH
DISABILITIES**

REPORT ON THE EUROPEAN SEMESTER 2019

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Introduction

The European Semester process starting in November 2019 and ending in June 2020 will be only the second one including Greece in its process – instead of a separate review process – as well as the first Semester after the publication of Annex D in the Country Reports 2019, putting forward the investment needs in the EU. This approach gives us a new momentum to bring together the necessities of the financial stability of the EU and the commitments taken by the EU in 2017 with the adoption of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

This year, the EASPD report on the European Semester presents key issues of social service providers in **eight different countries** across the European Union: **Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Greece, Latvia, Romania and Spain**. In each of these countries, grassroots organisations have come together to discuss the main concerns and put forward the priorities for the delivery of high quality and individualised support services. The themes of this report therefore range through a diversity of stages in the lifecycle, from early childhood intervention to employment and long-term care. The assessments and recommendations in each country take into consideration the progress made in the implementation of the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

In November 2018, as part of the European Semester process, the Annual Growth Survey stated: “To reinforce the social dimension of the Union and foster upward convergence towards better living and working conditions, it is **necessary to turn the principles proclaimed in the European Pillar of Social Rights into action, at both European and national levels.**” EASPD particularly welcomes this statement and the references to the Pillar throughout the 2018 Country Reports.

The European Pillar of Social Rights is a compass for how social rights can be effectively delivered for citizens and is built upon 20 key Principles¹ included in 3 Chapters: “Equal opportunities and access to the labour market”, “Fair working conditions” and “Social protection and inclusion”. Each country pages highlight the most pressing issues for service providers organisations, below is a summary of these priorities as well as the Pillar principles linked to them:

¹ Find in the Annex the detailed list of the European Pillar of Social Rights Principles.

<i>Country</i>	<i>Main priorities</i>	<i>European Pillar of Social Rights Principles</i>
Austria	Unemployment, Fragmentation	3, 4, 17
Belgium	Supported employment, Benefit trap, Price of love	3, 5, 12, 17
Bulgaria	Unemployment, Human Resources, Early Childhood Intervention, Social economy	3, 11, 14, 17
France	Unemployment, Care, Housing	3, 16, 17, 19
Greece	Long-term unemployment	3, 4, 5, 17
Latvia	Deinstitutionalisation, Long term care, Quality of services	3, 17, 18, 20
Romania	Unemployment, Funding	3, 4, 5, 14, 17
Spain	Unemployment, Quality of services, Education	11, 12, 17, 18, 20

List of abbreviations

CR: Country Report

CSO: Civil Society Organisation

CSR: Country Specific Recommendations

DPO: Disabled Persons' Organisations

EASPD: European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities

ECI: Early Childhood Intervention

EPSR: European Pillar of Social Rights

ES: European Semester

EU: European Union

UNCRPD: United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Country specific information and recommendations

Austria: The employment rate is on the rise but not for persons with disabilities

Main topics: Unemployment, Fragmentation

Pillar principles: 3, 4, 17

Context

The 2019 Country Report on Austria states that the “*employment rate reached 76.2 % in Q3 of 2018, thus reaching the Europe 2020 target. Given the current trend in the Austrian employment rate, the country is on track to meet the national target of 77-78 % by 2020*”. Despite this positive result, persons with disabilities are left out of this trend and their employment rate is far from reaching such goals. The National Disability Report 2016² shows that only 55,9% of persons with disabilities are employed and/or looking for employment, a difference of 21 percentage points³. Besides, the unemployment rate of persons with disabilities is as high as ever recorded since Austria started collecting data: between 2007 and 2017 the unemployment rate of persons with disabilities increased by 139,22% (7 504 persons more) and by 140,65% for persons with health issues (54 153 persons more)⁴.

Challenges

Unemployment

A first dire issue in Austria is that persons with disabilities in Austria are excluded from work if their working capacity is assessed as being less than 50%. In this case, they are classified as “unable to work” and put in the category of the “inactive”. This discriminatory and non-Human Rights compliant practice is also not in line with the European Antidiscrimination Directive 2000/78/EC. Moreover, being labelled as “inactive”, this group is not included in the unemployment statistics.

Besides, since the general employment rate is increasing in Austria, the State decided to reduce the measures and the budgets for the Active Labour Market Policy. Under this strategy, many successful measures were developed, especially for the support provided to persons with higher support needs to find employment. This was notably successful in social economy

² [Bericht der Bundesregierung über die Lage von Menschen mit Behinderungen 2016.](#)

³ [Diepresse, Behindertenanwalt an Hartinger-Klein: "Mit Geld passiert nichts", 31.07.2018.](#)

⁴ [Arbeitsmarktservice, Arbeitsmarktlage, page 15, 2017.](#)

enterprises. However, cuts for 2019 and even higher ones planned for 2020, are leading to a creaming process: less places, less training and less support time is available for persons with disabilities and persons with higher support needs are not eligible for such measures anymore. At the same time, a new selection tool has been developed for the Austrian public employment service which puts people with disabilities at risk of being eligible from now on for only financial and passive support instead of vocational qualification and active support. From this context, it seems quite likely that the rate of persons with disabilities in long-term unemployment will continue to rise.

The situation of women with disabilities on unemployment is even more worrying. Their employment rate is lower than that of men with disabilities and women without disabilities which puts them at higher risks of segregation and poverty⁵. In addition, the prejudices internalised led an important part of women with disabilities to never seek employment, which also excludes them from any national statistic on unemployment.

Fragmentation

In Austria the political and administrative responsibilities for persons with disabilities and their inclusion in the labour market are divided on the territory with no strategic coordination. The Federal level is responsible for the measures for persons categorised as “able to work” and the Regional level is responsible for persons categorised as “unable or unfit to work” and therefore in the “inactive” category. Although the supported employment system in Austria is quite well developed, the group the Regional level is responsible for struggles to get access to the services because of the fragmentation of responsibilities between the administrative levels and their own categorisation as “inactive”. Indeed, this fragmentation of administrative responsibilities is another aggravating factor and explaining the unemployment rates of persons with disabilities in Austria.

What are the solutions?

In 2019, national Disabled Persons Organisations (DPOs) and support providers, came together to develop a coordinated and comprehensive strategy and recommendations for the next National Plan 2021-2030 for the implementation of the UNCRPD⁶. This strategy includes measures for all important phases of life from education and rehabilitation to employment and living in the community. Notably, it states that the new limits introduced on the Austrian Active Labour Market Policy should be revised because they will lead to more unemployment of persons with disabilities, therefore lower quality of life and much higher lifelong costs⁷. The

⁵ [Ministry of Social Affairs, Report of the Federal Government on Persons with Disabilities in Austria, 2016, p. 26-28.](#)

⁶ Cooperation of national umbrella networks coordinated by the Austrian Disability Council, *Strategic proposals for an inclusive labour market in Austria*, 2019.

⁷ [OECD, Sickness, disability and work. Breaking the barriers, 2010.](#)

Austrian Active Labour Market Policy includes three types of measures: employment, qualification and active support⁸. All three types need to be permanently available to persons with disabilities until their employment rate is at the same level as the one of persons without disabilities.

Besides, the strategic coordination between Federal and Regional governments should be re-examined within the frame of the next National Action Plan 2021-2030. A clear responsibility should be given to the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs and to ensure that the Plan is followed: the Parliament should start an annual monitoring mechanism. As one of the biggest issues is the legal barrier for persons with disabilities to get employed, a public study should examine the relevant process on how removing this barrier without jeopardising persons with disabilities' quality of life. Lastly, the need to bridge the gender pay gap in Austria, the group of women with disabilities needs to be identified as a priority in the Austrian labour market policies, with appropriate support measures starting from education.

⁸ [Bundesministerium für Arbeit, Soziales und Konsumentenschutz, *Aktive Arbeitsmarktpolitik in Österreich 1994-2013*, Wien, 2013.](#)

Belgium (Flanders): To tackle poverty level of persons with disabilities, Belgium needs a reform on the adequacy between allowances and worked hours

Main topics: Supported employment, Benefit trap, Price of love

Pillar principles: 3, 5, 12, 17

Context

In the Country Report 2018 on Belgium, the rate of employment of persons with disabilities is estimated to be 40,5% but this data is conflicting with the Belgian office of statistics' which states that only 23% of persons with disabilities have a job⁹. This is due to the calculation excluding persons with disabilities who are labelled as “unfit to work” and therefore put in the group of the “inactive” although many would wish to work and are still very much active. In addition, studies from service providers in Flanders have found that only half of those in employment have a work environment adapted to their accessibility or support needs. At the end of March 2019, Flanders comprised 183 828 unemployed job seekers, 17,4% of whom are known as “occupationally disabled” by the public employment service¹⁰. With this status they're not able to earn their own income through labour. This has important effects on the poverty rate of persons with disabilities in Belgium and, in 2017, 22% of persons with disabilities were considered at risk of poverty¹¹. In light of this, the current legislation is still a barrier to their employment and their full access to disability benefits.

Challenges

In Flanders, supported employment has been providing persons with disabilities with the possibility to enter the open labour market even when full-fledged employment is not yet possible for them because of an impairment. Professional activities provided under the supported employment scheme are tailor-made to correspond better to the support needs of the worker and have proved to be very valuable to the employers. However, a Decree from 1987¹² which is still in place blocks in many cases the possibility to pay the persons with support needs. Indeed, the *Royal Decree on Income Substitution Allowance and the Integration Allowance* created a correlated negative effect of the salary on the disability benefits, which often prevents employers from rewarding evenly the work provided. This

⁹ [Statbel, 23% of people with disabilities have a job, 29 November 2018.](#)

¹⁰ Being “occupationally disabled” is a term understood by the Belgian public employment service as a person who is unable to perform the functions required to complete a job satisfactorily because of an occupational disease or an occupational accident.

¹¹ [Statbel, Statistics on Income and Living Conditions EU-SILC 2017.](#)

¹² Royal Decree on income substitution allowance and the integration allowance, 1987, full text in [Dutch](#), in [French](#).

regulation is affecting in Flanders the 2 500 persons with disabilities working in the supported employment scheme¹³.

Of those persons with disabilities working under the supported employment scheme, 68% receive an Income Replacement Allowance¹⁴ which is granted by the public authorities when the work capacity is assessed to be limited at least by one third. This benefit is of a maximum of 607,21€ per month (whereas the minimum wage in Belgium is around 1500€). This benefit is influenced negatively by the hours worked. When a person with disabilities earning disability benefits finds a job, the benefits will be revised on basis of the total income which increases steadily with the number of hours worked. However, when the person reaches a work time of 60 hours a month (i.e. 2 days a week), any additional hour worked, and euro earned, is fully deducted from the disability benefits. This leads to a situation where working 4 days a week means losing money, impacting the quality of life and the will to follow a career path.

Another factor is worsening the situation as the taxable income and therefore the access to the “Integration Allowance” (i.e. part of the disability benefit to help with the expenses linked to access to services or care) and the “Replacement Allowance” (i.e. if the impairment hinders the possibilities for the persons with disabilities to work) from a household is examined on the basis of the income generated in the previous two years. This means that if the household’s income changes, the allowances will only be adjusted two years later. This situation can put the person with disabilities at risk of poverty and exclusion if their situation or their household’s situation changes.

In addition, if the person with disabilities lives with a keen or partner with a salary, the disability benefit will be re-evaluated based on the whole household salary. This indexation that creates dependence on the household members is also known as the “*price of love*”. The Belgian government started improving the system and, from August 2018 onwards, the household income threshold is being revised, and more persons will be able to get the allowances¹⁵. However, the “*price of love*” remains in place which puts persons with disabilities in a situation of dependence and risk of poverty.

What are the solutions?

If Belgium wants to implement an active and inclusive labour and care policy, persons with disabilities must be rewarded for their work-related activities. Not only to reach the main goal of work: earning a living but also to positively impact their perception of work. To implement that, there is a dire need to revise the Royal Decree of 1987 which has not been sufficiently

¹³ This data is extracted from a survey conducted by one of the regional service providers MPI Oosterlo VZW.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ [Public Federal Service of Social Security, *Adaptation of the price of love: which files will be reviewed ?*, 10 September 2018.](#)

adapted, inter alia, to the article 27 of the UNCRPD. Concerning the replacement allowance and its two exemption rates: one based on the household income and one based on the salary of the person with disabilities, should be replaced with a single and fairer exemption percentage. From creating a more rewarding activity, it would create more incentives to work, more transparency and simplicity in the regulations, and help to harmonize with the social assistance systems.

Besides, regardless of the income and family situation, the Integration Allowance should be given in its entirety to person with disabilities and therefore only be linked to the severity of the disability. The benefit system should also be made more flexible in case of a relapse of a medical or social state of the individual.

For more than 20 years, more than 2 500 workers in the supported employment scheme in Flanders have shown that inclusion in the open labour market is reachable. Apart from that, an “incentive premium” per worked hours to a worker in the supported employment scheme could give an even bigger push to an inclusive labour market. From informal surveys conducted by MPI Oosterlo VZW there is already evidence that employers, mainly from the profit sector, are already prepared and willing to provide some form of compensation to the workers.

Bulgaria: Authorities should focus on the untapped potential of service provision for employment growth

Main topics: Unemployment, Human Resources, Early Childhood Intervention, Social economy

Pillar principles: 3, 11, 14, 17

Context

According to official data¹⁶, from the 445 000 unemployed persons with disabilities in Bulgaria, between 120 000 and 200 000 could be employed rapidly¹⁷. Meanwhile the 2019 Country Report states that in 2017 39% of the population was at risk of poverty or social exclusion and that the rate was much higher for people with disabilities. Although Bulgaria is currently in a context of labour force shortages, persons with disabilities indeed still struggle to find employment and a lot of them remain in a risk of poverty. As laid in Annex D, investments should aim at increasing access to employment by improving “the design of and participation in active labour market policies with a focus on individualised and integrated support”. Unfortunately, legal barriers still exist for such policies to be effective for persons with disabilities: namely not enough incentives for employers to hire them, restrictive regulations and staffing issues of social services.

Challenges

Unemployment

In Bulgaria, employers are not hiring persons with disabilities in part because of the existing social protection measures¹⁸ and the lack of State financial support for employers hiring persons with disabilities¹⁹. Since January 2019 a new Disability Act requires every enterprise exceeding 50 employees to employ at least 2% of persons with disabilities in their workforce. Although this new law could have led to give jobs to potentially 100 000 persons, cheaper and quicker actions were made possible for the employers not to abide by this quota. One of the disincentives is the low level of the monthly compensatory fee asked to employers when the quota is not met: only 30% of the minimum wage for each place not taken by a person with

¹⁶ [NSI, *Employment of People with Permanent Health Problems and Difficulties in Performing Daily Activities, 2011, page 3.*](#)

¹⁷ [Velev, V., *Labour Market: Demography, Labour Migration, Education, Internal Reserves, 2019. Presentation of the Association of Industrial Capital of 14th March 2019, Sofia.*](#)

¹⁸ For instance, the Article 333 (1) of the Bulgarian Labour Code provides protection measures against the dismissal of persons with disabilities. The fact that they are more protected against dismissals is seen by some employers as a disincentive to hire them.

¹⁹ In addition, employers are not “compensated” for employing a person with disabilities like in other countries, for instance with a tax reduction.

disabilities. This option will in general be preferred as it is cheaper than paying a person and providing support.

Social economy

Although the current Bulgarian legislation positively supports specialised enterprises for persons with disabilities, only 3 000 persons are employed by them in total²⁰. In addition to that model, social economy provides a diversity of activities and plays a key role in the inclusion of people with disabilities, as stated by a recent report of EASPD and the European Platform for Rehabilitation²¹. However, the “Act on Social and Solidarity-based Enterprises” adopted by the Bulgarian Parliament in October 2018 restricts the development of social entrepreneurship. Indeed, numerous activities which have entrepreneurial aspects cannot be legally performed within this framework, including necessary activities to foster sustainable economic and social impact (e.g. selling products).

Human resources

The social services sector employs between 30 000 and 40 000 persons in Bulgaria, but a deficit in attraction and retention is growing due to the low wages, the lack of workplace training and the lack of supervision. According to a study conducted by NASO²², from 2015 to 2017 the average wage of a social worker dropped from 514€ to 291€ per month. Besides, in the last three years, the salaries of managers rose by only 51€ and the salaries of social sector specialists (e.g. speech therapists, psychologists...etc.) rose by only 28€. This lack of salary increments and the proximity of the wages to the Bulgarian minimum wage which is the lowest in the EU creates important staffing issues. 41% of social service managers who responded to the study of NASO stated that they have difficulties to recruit social workers. On the other hand, training opportunities are lacking: 84% of the social worker specialists surveyed stated that they did not receive any training in the last three years. This situation is worrying for the sustainability and quality of the services delivered and therefore for the users as well.

Early Childhood Intervention

In Bulgaria, another pressing topic is Early Childhood Intervention (ECI). In 2018, 50 Bulgarian NGOs established an Alliance for Early Childhood Development (ECD) to work on the topic of ECI and ECD. They developed in collaboration with the Ministries of Education, Healthcare and Social Policy a “National Strategy for the Child 2019-2030”. However, this paper was put on

²⁰ [UNICEF, *Social Entrepreneurship as an Opportunity for Discouraged Young People?*, Sofia, 2016, p. 15.](#)

²¹ [Tursa, A., Giedraitytė, I., Paulauskaitė, E., Pranskūnas, M., EASPD & EPR report - Study on employment models within the social economy and their role in including persons with disabilities into the labour market and society, 2018.](#)

²² Study conducted by [NASO](#) in June 2017, 425 social service specialists and 125 social service managers were surveyed. The trends of this data are still valid for 2019. The study is available on demand.

hold and its future is uncertain. An overall ECI strategy and a funding planification are crucially needed: 66 specialised services opened between 2014 and 2015 but many were forced to close due to lack of funding and human resources. The services which remain open need a clear and comprehensive National Strategy on the delivery of the ECI services throughout the territory.

What are the solutions?

Unemployment

One of the sustainable measures to foster employment of persons with disabilities would be the revision or the suppression of the alternative measures to the employment quota of persons with disabilities. In addition, supported employment should be developed hand in hand with social service providers and businesses and enforced by creating a comprehensive policy in the Act on Social Services, the Act on People with Disabilities, as well as in different programmes and strategies aimed at employment promotion. The Bulgarian State has shown its willingness to promote supported employment in several action plans but no practical measures were taken to this day. The structure of supported employment services could follow the education support scheme in Bulgaria where dedicated Centres for Inclusive Education have been established. Those centres proved to be successful in providing a more functional and stable service, also getting a better access to funding²³.

Social economy

Social services should be included in the Bulgarian framework on social economy so that they can contribute with their professional experience about the employment of persons with disabilities. New initiatives and activities in this sector, like selling goods or services, should be regulated and legally recognised. The promising practices in the social economy in Bulgaria should be taken into account in the law in order to fully allow the achievement of quality outcomes.

Human resources

Training and supervision in the social work could be improved through the adoption of two normative documents: a Regulation on the Quality of Social Services and a Regulation on Funding of Social Services, which are under discussion as per September 2019. The Austrian policy-makers should make sure to introduce minimum standards for the wages of social workers. They should at least attain the level of salaries in the secondary education to avoid retention issues: many are leaving their jobs to work in secondary education because of the

²³ The evaluation of the supported employment policies made are based on the solid expertise of National Alliance for Social Responsibility (NASO) representing the largest number of social service providers in Bulgaria.

better wages. Enhancing their salary would also allow to hire newly and well-trained social service specialists, therefore guaranteeing higher quality of services.

Early Childhood Intervention

Concerning Early Childhood Intervention (ECI), there is to this day no legal regulation in Bulgaria. The planning of the ECI services should be based on good practice models. To provide the best services possible, a systematic collection of statistics of children with chronic illnesses and disabilities is necessary, as well as the setup of a methodology promoting ECI services and the further development of the Health and Counselling Centres for Maternal and Child Health. The work on the “National Strategy for the Child”, developed with the joint efforts of the Ministries of Social Policy, Healthcare and Education, should be resumed and should include the universal screening of all children and identification of appropriate support measures. The profession of “Early Interventionist” should be developed with dedicated post-graduate University programmes and official regulation. Finally, sustainable services that are not project-based and not funded externally should be put in place whilst making sure that rural areas are not left behind.

France: Strongly criticised by the UNCRPD Special Rapporteur, France needs to adapt its disability policies

Main topics: Unemployment, Care, Housing

Pillar principles: 3, 16, 17, 19

Context

In January 2019, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities issued a forceful report on France²⁴ pointing out the insufficient implementation of the principles of the UNCRPD and the overall lack of inclusion of persons with disabilities in the French society. Prior to this report, the French government had started major reforms having impacts on the lives of people with disabilities, including a strategy to transform the services offer. This strategy aims at more inclusion of persons with disabilities and to offer more flexible support options, requiring for instance a decentralisation of services and the revision of the administrative structures. These reforms, including recently on ageing and inclusive education, are generally moving in the direction of the Human Rights principles in terms of objectives. However, they also generate concerns, particularly on their impact on the quality and availability of support services for people with disabilities. The insufficient support offer, the absence of financial investment to carry out the changes and the insufficient measures taken by the State to transform regular services to make them inclusive (e.g. schools) are creating doubts as per the achievability of the goals the French government is setting.

Challenges

Unemployment

In 2018 nearly 515 000 persons with disabilities were unemployed in France. Indeed, despite improvements, the labour market is not inclusive enough and as the 2019 Country Report states "the integration of the most vulnerable workers into the labour market remains a challenge". Since the 1987 Law²⁵, French companies with at least 20 employees must employ at least 6% of persons with disabilities within their staff. However, the implementation did not follow and only 3,4% of private sector jobs are occupied by workers with disabilities, many enterprises preferring instead to pay the tax to the public administration. To try to remedy to this situation, a new law titled *the Liberty to choose one's professional future*²⁶ was adopted in September 2018 aiming at making the French labour market more inclusive. However, the

²⁴ Following a 10 days Country Visit, from the 3 to 13 October 2017, the report was issued in January 2019. [Rapport de la Rapporteuse spéciale sur les droits des personnes handicapées, Assemblée Générale, Visite en France, 8 janvier 2019, A/HRC/40/54/Add.1.](#)

²⁵ Loi n° 87-517 du 10 juillet 1987 en faveur de l'emploi des travailleurs handicapés.

²⁶ Loi n° 2018-771 du 5 septembre 2018 pour la liberté de choisir son avenir professionnel.

way the quota system is linked to sheltered workshops has been greatly modified by this law and this could have a negative impact on the overall employment rate of persons with disabilities. The previous law of 1987 allowed enterprises to prove that they abide to the quota system by having subcontracted the work of enterprises employing persons with disabilities. It was justified as a type of “indirect employment”. However, the new 2018 Law has abolished this practice: no enterprise will be able to escape the quota system or the punitive tax by subcontracting some activities. Hence, it can be predicted that sheltered workshops will get less and less contracts. As supported work in the open labour market is still underdeveloped in France, an excessively sudden change could have a negative effect on the employment rate of persons with disabilities.

Access to care

The 2019 Country Report states that "overall, access to healthcare is good". While this cannot be denied for the French general population, a dire lack of access to healthcare services for persons with disabilities should be underlined, due inter alia by the lack of accessibility. A study commissioned by French Parliamentarians have concluded in July 2018²⁷ that there is a lack of collective accountability and mobilisation for the access to healthcare for persons with disabilities, contrasting greatly with the efforts made by grassroots services. This report underlines the necessity of creating a national strategy on access to health services for persons with disabilities.

Housing

The “Evolution du Logement, de l'Aménagement et du Numérique” law passed on the 23rd of November 2018, better known under its acronym "ELAN"²⁸ is going against the current trends by reducing greatly the amount of accessible buildings newly constructed. This is going against the increasing demand for accessible housing linked to the general ageing of the population. The ELAN law has amended the French “Construction and Housing Code” which previously demanded that 100% of new housing units should be accessible to persons with disabilities. Now, only "20% of new housing units must be accessible to persons with disabilities while other units must be scalable [*évolutifs*]”. A “scalable” building must be accessible with a “simple refurbishment work”, however those are in practice usually costly. Even if this provision was found to be in conformity with the French Constitution, it was criticised by many key actors including the National Advisory Council of Persons with Disabilities (CNCPH), the French Ombudsman and the Council of Europe. On the 5th of March 2019, while noting progress in other areas the Secretary General of the National Consultative Commission on

²⁷[Philippe Denormandie and Marianne Cornu-Pauchet, *L'accès aux droits et aux soins des personnes en situation de handicap et des personnes en situation de précarité*, juillet 2018.](#)

²⁸ Loi n° 2018-1021 du 23 novembre 2018 portant sur l'Evolution du Logement, de l'Aménagement et du Numérique (ELAN).

Human Rights described the ELAN law's provision as "a serious setback for persons with disabilities' right to choose their place of residence".

What are the solutions?

The 2019 Country Report notes that there is a need for France to invest more in its employment, inclusion and equal opportunities policies. Annex D notes that "social inclusion remains problematic" and the need "to improve equality of access in a timely manner to quality, sustainable and affordable services" only partially reflects the need for investment in France.

Apart from this mention on the lack of investment on social issues in the country, the Country Report barely mentions the group of persons with disability. In view of the precarious and worrying situation of persons with disabilities in France well noted by the UN Special Rapporteur²⁹, it is desirable that the issues of this group should be explicitly addressed by the European semester process. Indeed, a major investment plan to innovate and improve support services is particularly necessary in the context of the transformation of the offer to aim for more individualised and inclusive support.

A positive action that could be further promoted by the French State is the one of the Union of Employers in the Social and Solidarity Economy (UDES) which signed a sectorial agreement on the employment of people with disabilities³⁰. This agreement includes ten action points to be followed by French Social Economy enterprises in order to promote the employment of persons with disabilities.

²⁹ [Rapport de la Rapporteuse spéciale sur les droits des personnes handicapées, Assemblée Générale, Visite en France, 8 janvier 2019, A/HRC/40/54/Add.1.](#)

³⁰ [UDES, Accord du 9 janvier relatif à l'emploi des personnes en situation de handicap dans l'ESS, 9 janvier 2019.](#)

Greece: Strong reforms are needed to foster the employment of persons with disabilities

Main topic: Long-term unemployment, Social economy enterprises

Pillar principles: 3, 4, 5, 17

Context

Youth unemployment and long-term unemployment are still serious issues in Greece. The policies and legislation adopted to enhance this concerning situation are leaving behind persons with disabilities. According to the National Confederation of Disabled People (NCDP), in 2018, 60% of persons with severe disabilities between 25 and 29 years old were unemployed. At the same time, nearly 9 out of 10 of young adults between 20 and 24 years old with severe disabilities have no work experience. The most disadvantaged groups is the one of women with severe disabilities, as they fall short of the employment index by 25.3 percentage points.

Challenges

According to the law 2643/1998 and its article 1, any private enterprise employing more than 50 persons is obliged to recruit a quota of minimum 8% of persons with disabilities. Only businesses showing a negative result in their balance sheets in the two previous financial years can avoid this obligation, however, the penalties for those who do not comply with the regulation are not implemented. Consequently, persons with disabilities rather seek employment in the public sector although positions are scarce. For its part, the public employment service, the OAED, proposes solutions to persons with disabilities that are aimed at the long-term unemployed but are only short-termed. In addition, programs designed for vulnerable groups are not attractive to employers due in part to OAED's lengthy bureaucratic procedures.

Beside those challenges, a step forward regarding the employment of persons with disabilities was taken in December 2017 with the adoption of Law 4488/2017. Its article 23 guarantees that persons with disabilities must not lose their benefits if they find an employment or receive a pension. Yet again, the implementation is not being met as expected: not all national agencies and civil servants are informed of this reform and are therefore not complying with the measure. As a result, many persons with disabilities still prefer to rely only on the benefits and not seek employment due to the fear of losing their benefits.

For their part, Greek social economy enterprises could absorb a substantial percentage of unemployed persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups, as they show they have already a positive attitude in hiring persons with disabilities. As such those enterprises can be funded under certain terms and conditions (e.g. viable business plans, feasibility studies, etc.) and those funds must, by law, take into consideration the need to hire employees who can support persons with disabilities.

There are examples of organisations trying to upscale their sheltered workshops to social enterprises to be able to officially employ the persons with disabilities. However, the lack of an enabling legal framework as well as the lack of business skills represent an obstacle to the sustainability of the social enterprise. The public sector tries to bridge this gap by outsourcing specific services to social enterprises, but this system also has limits as problems of delay in payments from the administration have emerged.

Inadequate legal frameworks are still a problem which is hindering the evolution of services. Vocational Training Centres, which offer services on training and rehabilitation for persons with disabilities, mainly through their sheltered workshops, have no legislative framework and do not own nor generate funds to pay the people working in these workshops. When individuals with disabilities do not find a job after having completed their vocational training, these centres act as day care centres, a function that does not promote their skills and independence.

In the broader sense, any policy reform done by the Greek State until now has met challenges related to the administrative capacity of the public bodies responsible for the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the active policies for employment. There is a pressing need to strengthen social dialogue at national and European level when designing and evaluating the active policies on employment³¹.

What are the solutions?

The experience of service providers for persons with disabilities in Greece confirms the urgent need for the Greek State to develop and implement a comprehensive national strategy for the employment of persons with disabilities. The strategic objectives for policy reform should include:

1. Creating new jobs, boosting entrepreneurship and social economy.
2. Supporting the reintegration into the labour market of the unemployed giving priority to groups that are at risk of exclusion.

³¹ [Greek Ministry of Labour, Social Insurance and Social Solidarity, *Strategic Framework for the Reform of Active Employment Policies, 2018.*](#)

3. Concrete tools against discrimination and for equal opportunities in employment.
4. Modernisation of the public employment services.

The Greek National Confederation of Disabled Persons recommends that positive measures for employment of persons with disabilities should be developed: notably accessibility of the workplaces and alternative forms of work (e.g. through supported employment schemes, Individual Placement & Support approaches, etc). As a report from the Greek Ministry of Labour, Social Insurance and Social Solidarity³² shows, to solve the unemployment issue, a series of continuous available and relevant elements of active employment policies are necessary.

Reforms should also focus on supporting the unemployed through training programs that upgrade their skills and qualify them so that they can enter/re-enter the labour market. This is particularly important for all unemployed people and especially for people with low skills, but also for people who need to acquire new skills when the sectors in which they are employed are not dynamic and their employment is not possible.

The Greek State should collaborate with service providers and persons with disabilities to assess the situation, upscale good practices and develop innovative practices. A more thorough following of the implementation of the current legislation at local level is also needed.

³² *Ibid.*

Latvia: The deinstitutionalisation process calls for a new and reviewed impulse

Main topics: Deinstitutionalisation, Long term care, Quality of services

Pillar principles: 3, 17, 18, 20

Context

According to Eurostat, the rate of persons with disabilities at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Latvia is one of the highest in the EU (42.5% vs 30.1% in the EU). Latvia still has a high number of individuals placed in institutional settings and, although the number of residents has decreased from 5 319 in 2018 to 5 010 in 2019³³, there are still persons in waiting lists and the State has increased funding for institutional settings by 15,30%³⁴. On the other hand, alternatives to those services are scarce: in Latvia community-based services are still very underdeveloped. This is one of the factors making Latvia's performance on the indicators of the European Pillar of Social Rights low on social inclusion.

Challenges

European structural funds

The main document in the hands of the Latvian State to implement deinstitutionalisation with the support of the European Structural and Investment Funds is the mid-term planning document called "Guidelines for social service development for the period 2014-2020". However, the transition from institutions to community-based care in Latvia seems to be seen by the authorities as an EU-funded project rather than a process leading to the closure of outdated and segregating services. Also, the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has expressed the same concerns in the Concluding Observations on Latvia, pointing out the "absence of a strategy to ensure the continuity of deinstitutionalisation after the termination of support from the European Structural funds"³⁵. On the other hand, as of today, there is no quality assurance system in place for community-based care services. New services developed with the European Regional Development Funds are being created by representatives of municipalities that do not have enough training and understanding on how to ensure their quality. This is due in part of a dire lack of methodological support from the Ministry of Welfare. Consequently, there is a high risk that the culture of closed institutional centres will be transferred in those new services.

³³ Numbers provided by the Latvian Ministry of Welfare

³⁴ [Latvian Republic, Commission for Social and Labour Affairs, Budget of the Ministry of Welfare 2019 - Priority Measures 2019-2020, March 2019.](#)

³⁵ [UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Concluding observations on the initial report of Latvia, October 2017, page 7, CRPD/C/LVA/CO/1.](#)

Fragmentation

Adding to the lack of planning, the current development of community-based services is very fragmented and under evaluated. Regional deinstitutionalization plans have been assessed without consulting all the key actors. As a result, the funding planned is too low: in Riga Planning Region³⁶ only 50% of the necessary assisted living services are planned to be developed. Moreover, although the Planning Region is taking part in the deinstitutionalisation project, the capital Riga is not³⁷ whilst 32% of the Latvian population lives in Riga. Besides those challenges, the funding responsibilities for care services are divided between State and municipalities in a paradoxical way that creates counterproductive situations in the deinstitutionalisation process. The Latvian State finances institutional care while the municipalities finance community-based care. This responsibility-sharing led to a situation where municipalities are more interested in placing people with disabilities in State-financed institutions which are already present, rather than develop and finance new community-based services.

Employment

In the new Regional Deinstitutionalisation Plans day-care centres for persons with intellectual disabilities are planned to be developed. These centres focus on occupational type of activities rather than on the necessary development of employment skills to be included in the labour market. The Regional Plans therefore counteract their first aim: creating community-based services that foster inclusion and independence of individuals in society. The transition process of youth with disabilities from education to employment is also a challenge. No transition programs are in place in special education systems and supported employment schemes are not developed. As result, youth with disabilities have remarkable difficulties to enter in labour market.

“Transinstitutionalisation”

A part of the deinstitutionalisation wave in Latvia “reorganisation plans” for three long term care institutions are ongoing, but these are not followed up in the practice. As the closing process advances, persons with disabilities are being moved to other institutions. This “transinstitutionalisation” is still ongoing, although, in 2017, the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities asked the State to stop this process³⁸.

³⁶ Latvia is divided in 5 « Planning Regions » (« *Latvijas plānošanas reģioni* ») with specific competences in the State.

³⁷ Although one of the Planning Region is called « Riga Planning Region », the capital Riga itself is considered as a different entity.

³⁸ *Ibid*, page 7.

Persons with severe disabilities

Persons with severe disabilities are left behind from the positive improvements of the deinstitutionalisation wave. According to the Law on Social Services and Social Assistance³⁹, long term care in institutional settings is an option for persons with severe care needs if appropriate community-based services are not enough. The remaining suitable alternative is the one and only group home available for people with severe disabilities in the whole country. However, this group home located in Riga is not accepting, inter alia, people with autism spectrum disorders and the only remaining option for them are institutional settings. In front of those issues, no State grants for development of community-based services for this vulnerable group exist or are planned.

What are the solutions?

To solve most of the issues mentioned, an effective measure could be the adoption of a national strategy to ensure the continuity of the deinstitutionalisation process after the end of the European Structural Funds support.

This strategy should incentivise change in the practice with clear targets. For a full implementation of the UNCRPD and to leave no one behind in this process, there should be a clear focus on the development of community-based services for people with severe disabilities. A new impulse should be given by the review of the financing streams of community-based services and the development of support systems for persons with severe disabilities. This quality concern should be at the heart of the deinstitutionalisation plans implementation, developed with systemic approaches based on good-practices and with adequate support for implementing actors, including public authorities. Even if the law on Social Services and Social Assistance of 2003 has been amended several times, it still does not ensure the rights of persons with high support needs to be included in society. Rather than adding new amendments to this law, a new legislation should be developed to enable full participation of individuals currently excluded.

³⁹ Latvian Law on Social Services and Social Assistance, Article 28, 2002-10-31, ([URL to the ILO database](#))

Romania: Conflicting effects for the reform for the employment of persons with disabilities

Main topics: Unemployment, Funding

Pillar principles: 3, 4, 5, 14, 17

Context

In December 2018, Romania comprised more than 800000 people with disabilities including 417558 persons aged between 18 and 65 years, of which only 30271 were employed⁴⁰, equal to around 7% of persons with disabilities at working age who are employed compared to the EU average of 48.1%⁴¹. Due to its workforce migration to other European countries, Romania is now in a pressing workforce crisis. It is estimated that the country will soon need approximately a million workers. 44% of surveyed employers state that this situation has already affected up to 10% of their company's annual profit⁴².

Consequently, inclusion of people with disabilities on the labour market is not only a human right, but also a necessity for the Romanian economy to thrive. It is worth mentioning that the Romanian labour market is very unfavourable to persons with disabilities and sheltered workshops are today the main entry point in employment for persons with disabilities. In 2017 the Emergency Ordinance 60/2017 was passed without consulting with civil society organisation and it was estimated that around 2000 persons with disabilities would be losing their professional activity because of it⁴³. Two years after its adoption and after only 23 days left for the services to adapt their practice, the results witnessed are worse than expected.

Challenges

Romanian enterprises with more than 50 employees must hire at least 4% of persons with disabilities. With the Emergency Ordinance of 2017, companies have no more the option to fulfil the quota by buying products made in sheltered workshops. The only remaining options are since then to either abide by the quota rules or pay a penalty. Consequently, sheltered units which were in their overwhelming majority funded through the purchase orders from enterprises had to stop their activities some months after the promulgation of the Ordinance.

⁴⁰ National Authority for People with Disabilities, *Statistical report for the fourth quarter of 2018*.

⁴¹ Although this number is believed to be much lower (around 30%) given that many countries eliminate from their calculation some persons with disabilities who are according to their assessments "unfit" or "unable" to work, therefore classified as "inactive".

⁴² On 383 employers who responded to the survey. [Survey conducted by BestJobs and disseminated in the online newspaper MediaFax](#).

⁴³ [EASPD press release Romanian government neglects persons with disabilities' employment rights to meet EU fiscal obligations, 29 August 2017, Brussels](#).

Without planning or funding from the State to support – or for services to provide help - enterprises to learn how to include persons with disabilities in their staff, the companies immediately opted for the payment of the penalty. Consequently, the number of people with disabilities employed significantly dropped from 33480 in the first quarter of 2017 to 30721 and only 4 of the 740 sheltered units remain today. The Ordinance therefore went against its own goal: fostering the employment of persons with disabilities and the main result was the State’s budget impressive increase at the expense of one of the most vulnerable groups of the Romanian society. From the new tax, the State budget collected rose from 47 million euros in 2016 to 571 million euros in 16 months⁴⁴. To this day, the budget was not used to develop employment measures and the only commitment made by the State was to raise disability benefits, which remain very low (around 100-150€, corresponding to half of an the already very low Romanian minimum income).

The only option left for the persons with disabilities who were formerly employed through the sheltered unit was to turn to pensions and retirement. Between September 2017 and January 2019, 11082 persons with disabilities opted for this⁴⁵ even though most of them having a 2nd or 3rd degree disability⁴⁶ would be able to work at least part time.

A positive provision of the Emergency Ordinance 60/2017 is the new obligation for the public authorities to employ persons with disabilities in their staff as well. Although this was a good step, this measure is not implemented in practice. The Ministry of Labour and Social Justice, initiators of the Ordinance, only employs 1,12% of persons with disabilities in their staff.

What are the solutions?

Giving the very conflicting consequences of the Emergency Ordinance, discussing its revision and developing new measures to foster inclusive employment in Romania should be a priority. Unlike for the Ordinance of 2017, new measures should be developed in strict cooperation with persons with disabilities and support service providers. As it is being done in other European Union countries, the budget made available through the penalties paid by the companies not respecting the quotas should be used to subsidise professional integration of persons with disabilities, supporting both public and private actors. Clear goals and measures should be identified in order to maximise the benefits from this budget.

⁴⁴ According to the National Fiscal Agency, in 2016 225 million Romanian lei (approximately 47 million euros) were collected to the State budget. After the Ordinance was adopted, between October 2017 and January 2019, the amount collected was 2 713 354 065 Romanian lei which equals to approximately 571 232 434 euros in 16 months.

⁴⁵ Data from the National Retirement Authority.

⁴⁶ A second-degree disability is classified as an “incapacity for any work but not requiring constant attendance”. A third-degree disability is classified as “an incapacity for usual work”.

Firstly, an annual increase of at least 3% of persons with disabilities employed in both the public and private sector should be aimed at, allowing not only to lower the pressure on the State budget but also alleviating the current workforce crisis in Romania. A way of reaching this goal would be to create “one-stop-shops” with integrated services including psychological and social assistance, testing, professional counselling, training, mediation, etc. This could be financed in part by the first 50% of the budget aimed at financing programmes for social and professional integration. The other 50% of the budget could be gathered via the procurement of products and services from sheltered workshops, allowing them to preserve their activity and knowledge.

Additionally, the subsidies for employees from sheltered workshops and social enterprises should be revised. Law 76/2002 on unemployment currently foresees only 12 months subsidies, however this timeframe should be extended to 36 months and indexed on the degree of disability⁴⁷.

A joint agreement between ministries should be developed establishing that 10% of the annual procurement budget should be allocated to reserved contracts with social services. This measure could be applied gradually, starting with 5% the first year, 7.5% the second and 10% on the third. This should be achieved by reforming Law 98/2016 on public procurement and Law 99/2016 on sectorial procurement.

Lastly, the Emergency Ordinance’s positive provision of applying the quota also for public administration should be strongly sought out so that the State could lead by example. However, supplementary funding and training are very much needed --. The government should also establish deadlines for the public administration to comply with the quota as well as establishing sanctions for noncompliant bodies.

⁴⁷ Namely, for a disability of first degree, the subsidy should be multiplied by 2,5, for a disability of second degree, the subsidy should be multiplied by 2, for a disability of third degree, the subsidy should be multiplied by 1,5.

Spain: Access to services remains an issue

Main topics: Unemployment, Quality of services, Education

Pillar principles: 11, 12, 17, 18, 20

Context

In Spain, the structure organising social care and support services for persons with disabilities is highly complex. First, from a territorial point of view, both the Central Government and the seventeen regional governments, called the Autonomous Communities, have different competencies. Second, there are several policy sectors involved in the provision of services for persons with disabilities, in particular, healthcare, education, long-term care, justice, employment, culture, public works and social services. While the provision of social services are an exclusive competence of the Autonomous Communities, the rest of the mentioned policy areas are, in different proportions, shared competences between two or three territorial levels. In this sense, all the national ministries as well as all regional ministries for these sectors are involved in the design and implementation of these policies. In front of this complex structure which needs coordination, there is a need to improve the provision of social services.

Challenges

Unemployment

Persons with support needs who seek employment support are being excluded from the labour market. This is one of the main problems that hinder social inclusion in Spain. According to the latest report from the Spanish public employment services, the level of unemployment of persons with disabilities is around 9 percentage points higher than that of persons without disabilities (28% vs 19,49%). However, as it often happens, this rate is well underestimated as it does not include persons with disabilities classified in Spain as “inactive”. The inactivity rate is at least of 16%.

Access to services

The current system of services for persons with disabilities is very rigid, both in the configuration and in the access to them. Persons that are not registered as having a disability may not have access to basic support services. Persons with drug addiction or women with disabilities who experienced gender-based violence for instance are not allowed to access those services because of their different situation and when resources are provided to them, they are not adapted to their needs.

Administrative barriers

The service provision sector in Spain creates many administrative barriers. Its heavy bureaucratic processes and the length of administrative procedures prevent social workers from responding to changes in support needs of the population. This hinders greatly the quality of the service granted. For instance, on the choice of place of residence, Spain still maintains residential care services that do not facilitate participation and inclusion in society, therefore creating further isolation and segregation.

Inclusive education

In the field of education, although there are regional disparities, the basic structure of the Spanish system consists of two main ways: mainstream schools, and “Special Education Centres”. Experience from grassroots services have proven that there are not enough resources to provide inclusive education. Despite the adoption of dedicated laws, the reality is that they cannot be implemented due to the lack of human resources. The UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities released a report in June 2018 following an Inquiry Procedure on violations of article 24 of the CRPD on the right to education. The Committee stated that the dual system of Spain is leading children with disabilities to be exclusively redirected to “special schools”. Further, the Committee underlined that when children with support needs are included in mainstream schools “students with disabilities, particularly those with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities, who attend mainstream schools continue to be separated from their classmates”⁴⁸.

What are the solutions?

Spain should invest more on the sustainability and the quality of support services. There should be new criteria for assessing the quality of programs, actions and outcomes. A method would be taking as a reference the concept of quality of life and ensuring that services and resources are adapted to social needs and community development.

Faced with the exclusion of people with disabilities from the labour market, the Special Employment Centres and Inclusive Enterprises have played an essential role in Spain in the promotion and defence of persons with disabilities’ employment. With a ratio of at least 70% of workers with disabilities in their workforce, the experience of the Special Employment Centres in Spain has been recognised as a successful model for the integration in the labour market.

Lastly, in the field of education, more resources should be allocated to enable pupils and students with support needs to be included and fully participate in the education system. The know-how from special education schools should be transferred to mainstream education

⁴⁸ [Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Inquiry concerning Spain carried out by the Committee under article 6 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention, CRPD/C/20/3, 4 June 2018, page 11.](#)

schools to exploit the expertise and facilitate inclusion of individuals with support systems in the school system.

Key messages to EU policy-makers

Uncomplete statistics on employment

A recurring issue from the 2019 assessment of the 8 countries from a geographical diversity is the classification of a considerable number of persons with disabilities in the “inactive” category. Inactive persons are not counted in the official statistics on unemployment. Moreover, persons defined as “unable to work”, such as in Austria, are also not included in the unemployment statistics. Given this, rates of unemployment of persons with disabilities are therefore not based on the reality and related policies fail to address the employment issues of people with high support needs.

- The EU should take better into consideration the specificities of unemployment for various segments of the population and be mindful of this gap in the collection of data to draw statistics.

Unemployment

Although improvements in the unemployment rates have been witnessed in many countries and the 2018 European Semester process has been positive about this change, most vulnerable groups were left behind. As a result, the policy efforts to foster employment are not addressing persons with support needs and there is a concrete risk to hinder improvements in their employment rates.

- The EU should continue supporting the Member States in their reforms of the social care system focusing on the active inclusion of persons with disabilities. The crucial role of support services should be better incorporated in the spectrum of services if the EU is to develop a healthy labour market which is inclusive for all population.

The “unable to work”

In Austria and Belgium, persons with disabilities who are assessed as having a severe disability may be excluded from the possibility to work. Labelled as “unfit” or “unable” to work, they cannot be contracted by a company or have to pay an insurance by themselves in order to convince an employer to hire them. This exclusion from employment is also dooming persons with severe disabilities to segregation from society, to more dependence towards keens and/or benefits, which ultimately leads them to poverty.

- The EU should better support the Member States to follow the principles of Article 27 of the UNCRPD, promoting the development of services with expertise in supporting people in accessing the labour market.

Deinstitutionalisation

In several EU Member States, the provision of care and support for persons with disabilities is not part of comprehensive strategies with clear goals and benchmarks. The lack of long-term planning of support services development as well as the lack of clear roles and responsibilities in the deinstitutionalisation process puts at risk the viability of support.

- In Latvia, the deinstitutionalisation process is too much reliant on EU-funds, leaving therefore concerns about the sustainability beyond the funding period.

Access to services

Access to support services remains an issue throughout the EU. The examples of this report show that in many Member States measures should be taken to alleviate the complexity of administrative procedures and enhance the cooperation between public administrations and services.

- The EU should promote dialogue with national and local service providers organisation in order to facilitate the access to the support that persons with disabilities might need.

Education

EASPD welcomes the recommendations to the 2018 Semester reports on the need of developing more inclusive education systems in several countries. However, the reports fall short in detailing how this goal is reachable.

- The EU should continue to support the Member States in their efforts to build inclusive education systems and should enhance the benefits of cross-sectorial cooperation in adapting and improving the availability of support systems for students with support needs.

Annex: List of the European Pillar of Social Rights Principles

Chapter I: Equal opportunities and access to the labour market

1. Education, training and life-long learning
2. Gender equality
3. Equal opportunities
4. Active support to employment

Chapter II: Fair working conditions

5. Secure and adaptable employment
6. Wages
7. Information about employment conditions and protection in case of dismissals
8. Social dialogue and involvement of workers
9. Work-life balance
10. Healthy, safe and well-adapted work environment and data protection

Chapter III: Social protection and inclusion

11. Childcare and support to children
12. Social protection
13. Unemployment benefits
14. Minimum income
15. Old age income and pensions
16. Health care
17. Inclusion of people with disabilities
18. Long-term care
19. Housing and assistance for the homeless
20. Access to essential services

Source: [European Commission website, *The European Pillar of Social Rights in 20 principles*](#)

EASPD

[EASPD](#) (European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities) is a European NGO network representing over 17 000 social and health support provider organisations across Europe and across disabilities, working towards the promotion of equal opportunities for persons with disabilities through effective and high-quality service systems.

EASPD bases the development of social services on the human rights framework provided by the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (UNCRPD). EASPD is accredited to the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the UNCRPD has become the core of EASPD's policy strategy.

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DISABILITY SUPPORT SERVICES IN THE EU: A REALITY CHECK



This report contains an assessment of the most pressing challenges for support services for persons with disabilities in Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Greece, Latvia, Romania and Spain. It includes key messages to EU policy-makers to inform their work on the European Semester in those 8 countries for the delivery of high quality services, contributing to the full implementations of the rights of persons with disabilities on the basis of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).



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