

EASPD Provider Forum in Iceland: Innovations in Support Services for Independent Living



Acknowledgement

This is the report by the European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD).

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VENUE, TIME, AND TOPIC

The EASPD Provider Forum in Iceland has taken place on May 10th, from 10:00 to 12:30, in the Room Hvammur of the Grand Hotel Reykjavík, Sigtún 38, 105 Reykjavík. This session also served as a pre-conference event for the 2023 edition of the [Conference of the Nordic Network on Disability Research](#). The event gathered more than 30 participants, who came together to discuss the key challenges and innovations linked to inclusive living and Article 19 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD).



The participants, originating from many different countries across Europe and the world, represented a broad range of stakeholders, from service providers to public authorities, researchers, and representatives of organisations of persons with disabilities.



The event, co-hosted by EASPD and [Proskahjálp](#), focused on how support services can impact the quality of life of persons with disabilities and their opportunities to take part in the community. In particular, the session examined the question of inclusive living. As many organisations across Europe work towards

ensuring Human Rights and dignity for persons with disabilities, the process of deinstitutionalisation brings about new challenges and opportunities. In this context, self-directed support and user-centred services and funding models have become key approaches to ensure that users are at the centre of service provision and that service actually contributes to an improvement in their quality of life and meaningful participation in the community.

CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

The session began with a welcome and presentation from the **European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities**, which stressed the importance of Article 19 of the Convention to guide our efforts toward removing barriers to independent living and participation in the community. This presentation also discussed the necessity to support dialogue across countries and sectors to exchange resources and innovative practices. **The UNIC project**, funded by the European Union, was presented as an example of such practice. This project supports to transition towards user-centred funding models, in particular the Personal Budget system. The project's outputs aim to support public authorities and other stakeholders in implementing this system.

The presentation was followed by **Aðalbjörg Traustadóttir of the Office for Disability Policy and Practice of the City of Reykjavik**. The presentation discussed the recent policy developments in Iceland regarding the decentralization of disability policy and the challenges linked to the funding of increasingly person-centred services. As a flagship initiative towards the independence of persons with disabilities, the implementation of consumer-controlled personal assistance was presented, while stressing that its implementation would not be possible without the collaboration of multiple stakeholders.

The next presentation by **Anna Lára Steindal of Proskahjálp** highlighted key factors of inclusive housing, such as economic status, access, support, physical and mental health, social participation, relationships, and community, etc. Echoing the previous presentation, Ms. Steindal confirmed the importance of collaboration across multiple stakeholders to remove barriers and maximise the impact of new tools such as ICT and assistive technologies.

The next speaker, **Erna Eiríksdóttir, IL Specialist at NPA miðstöðin**, recapped the historical development of inclusive living in Iceland, as a backdrop for the tremendous increase in the number of personal assistant contracts in the country. With this system, persons with disabilities can receive the individualized support they need.

The NPA, a user-led cooperative, provides an essential framework for these services, and the financial and legal dimensions of the organisation's work were discussed.

After a short networking coffee break, **Katarzyna Beata Kubiś, Project Manager for Disabled Children with Immigrant Backgrounds** at **Proskahjálp** presented her personal story and the many challenges she faced as an immigrant mother of a child with autism. This example, one among many in Iceland, illustrated the lack of accessibility, data, and integration, of many essential services. Various solutions to improve the availability and accessibility of information were highlighted.

Finally, **Maarit Aalto, of M.A. Education & Survey**, shed light on Nordic experiences of deinstitutionalisation and development towards independent living. Drawing from examples such as Sweden, key elements included the crucial role of research and data, as well as the necessity for policy to be value-based and backed by political will. This discussion took place in the context of encouraging further dialogue between Nordic countries and the EU, as both can learn from each other.

The following Q&A tackled important questions such as the role (and challenges) of new technologies, the difficulties to fund inclusive housing, and the lessons that can be shared across countries. With this event, the participants were able to explore various innovative practices related to independent living in Iceland and across Europe, before discussing the next steps for European collaboration and research needs. In his conclusion, **Javier Güemes, from ONCE and EASPD**, reiterated the Importance of supporting a transition to user-centred services in funding, in service delivery, and quality monitoring, as well as the importance of connecting stakeholders and exchanging practices and innovations. To conclude the event, Mr. Güemes invited all the participants present to save the date for the upcoming **EASPD Conference on Social Innovation, to be held in Helsinki, Finland, on October 12-13, 2023.**



EASPD is the European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities. We are a European not-for-profit organisation representing over 20,000 social services and disability organisations across Europe. The main objective of EASPD is to promote equal opportunities for people with disabilities through effective and high-quality service systems.

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