

## Kick-off meeting of Stakeholders' Consultation "The Future European Disability Strategy"

Hearing with Commissioner for Equality – Helena Dalli  
*Brussels, 1st July 2020*

On behalf of Autism-Europe, thank you very much Ms Commissioner for the opportunity to share our views today. Autism is a lifelong disability, associated with difficulties in social communication and social interaction. **A least 5 million people are on the autism spectrum in the European Union.**

Autistic people face **discrimination in all aspects of life**, from lack of access to education to very high level of unemployment (up to 90%). According to research autistic people die on average 16 years younger than the general population due to lack of access to healthcare.

A holistic approach and **some targeted actions are needed to tackle the many challenges they face in their everyday life.**

Therefore, we welcome that the future European disability strategy will aim at supporting the full implementation of the convention at the EU-level and in the member states. It needs to be adequately resourced, and supported by strong implementation and monitoring mechanisms, including data collection disaggregated by types of disability.

The future strategy needs to **takes into account the diversity of disability, including those with invisible disabilities and complex support needs, and promote all forms of accessibility, also in relation to communication.**

We call on the European commission to support actions toward the full realisation of autistic people's rights, notably by:

- Promoting a **comprehensive antidiscrimination legislative framework** and ensuring the full implementation of existing anti-discrimination legislation
- Promoting the **coordination between Member States of relevant policies in the field of disability**, including encouraging the adoption of adequately resourced **cross sectoral national action plans for autism**
- Promoting the **transition from institutions to community-based services** across all EU countries
- Promoting **training of professionals in autism across all relevant sectors**
- Promoting **mutual recognition of autism diagnosis and more generally disability assessment to foster mobility**
- Support mutual learning and **research to improve the quality of life and inclusion of autistic people**
- **Raise awareness** of all stakeholders
- **Supporting autism organisations** through funding and involving them in continuous structured dialogue

## Autism-Europe's statement

### Stakeholders' Consultation "The Future European Disability Strategy" Brussels, 6th July 2020

On behalf of Autism-Europe, thank you for giving us the opportunity to share our views with you today.

#### **1. What legislative and policy initiatives would be priority at EU level for the first part of the Strategy (2021-2025)?**

First we would like to express our support regarding the demands of the European Disability Forum for a [European Disability Rights Agenda](#).

- In terms of priorities, given the current context, the response to the COVID-19 crisis should take fully into account autistic people and their families. They have been particularly affected, in relation to access to health, education and support services. Plans should be made to protect the rights of people with disabilities, without forgetting people in institutions, notably in case of future crisis.
- It is estimated that 90% of autistic people are not in employment, we would like to see a better implementation of the directive on equal treatment in employment. We would also need further actions to promote awareness of the needs of autistic people in terms of reasonable accommodation.
- Developing a comprehensive antidiscrimination legislative framework would help fight discrimination experienced daily by autistic people in many other fields of life. We also call for expanding the scope of existing legislation, such as the European Accessibility Act to cover the needs of people with invisible disabilities.
- The European Pillar of Social Rights should promote actions to tackle challenges faced by autistic people in relation to access to education, employment and social protection. For example, by investing EU funds in training, employment and job mobility for persons with disabilities and promote minimum standards for social protection.
- The EU has an important role to play to promote the transition from institutions to community-based services. It can be done through proper allocation of EU funds to support sustainable initiatives and capacity building.
- It is essential to promote better understanding of the support needs of autistic people, and EU-funds should be used to promote training of professionals in autism across all relevant sectors, including education, health and employment.
- It is key to ensure the mutual recognition of disability assessment, since currently a lack of recognition of autism diagnosis is a big barrier to mobility in the EU. When

moving in the EU, disabled people should also keep their rights and entitlement to financial support.

It is also important to support research that improves the quality of life and inclusion of autistic people, who should be involved in setting priorities.

Overall, the EU has also a key role to play to support awareness of all stakeholders.

## **2. What are the priority UNCRPD governance issues to be addressed?**

In terms of governance, in order to successfully mainstream disability rights across all EU policies, it is key is to ensure adequate coordination.

With Disability Focal Points in each Directorate Generals and EU institutions that are adequately resourced.

Their central coordination should be ensured by a dedicated unit under the direct supervision of the Commissioner for Equality.

It is also key to ensure coordination between the various European institutions and member states, through regular meetings with the national focal points.

In terms of monitoring, we need data collected by Eurostat, disaggregated by types of disabilities.

## **3. How can the EU better support implementation at national level?**

For the implementation at national level, the EU has of course a key role to play to support mutual learning, led by example and promote the coordination between Member States of relevant policies in relation to disability, including encouraging the adoption of cross sectoral national action plans for autism.

EU funding should be earmarked in all the European funds to promote the implementation of the UNCRPD, including the European Social Fund Plus, the European Regional Development Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the Coronavirus Response Initiative. Strong monitoring mechanisms should also put in place for the allocation of the funds.

The EU should provide funding for representative organisations of persons with disabilities – in all their diversity - as they are essential stakeholders to foster the implementation of the UNCRPD.

Thank you very much for your attention.