Mobility and inclusion of people with disabilities and the European disability strategy 2010-2020

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The Committee on Employment and Social Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Ádám KÓSA (EPP, HU) on mobility and inclusion of people with disabilities and the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020.

Objectives: Members emphasise that the Europe 2020 Strategy target of 75 % of the population aged 20-64 in employment cannot possibly be achieved unless this includes the population with some form of disability. They further stress that financial expenditure for the benefit of, and economic investment in, people with disabilities is a long-term return investment in the well-being of all in a sustainable society and that it is unacceptable in the context of public austerity measures for unjustified cuts to be made to services for persons with disabilities or to projects for their social inclusion. In this context, they draw attention to the importance of the objectives of the new European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 (EDS) and consider that the basic principle of 'nothing about persons with disabilities without persons with disabilities' should be observed, so that people with disabilities are involved in all measures which affect them.

The committee regrets that the Commission Communication on the European Disability Strategy does not include an integrated gender perspective or a separate chapter on gender-specific disability policies. It stresses the need for an efficient new approach to disability starting with the creation of a European Disability Board, which would meet on a regular basis and with the active involvement of the European Parliament and the participation of representative organisations of persons with disabilities.

Civil and human rights: Members call for full respect of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and support for the principles of Design for All and Universal Design. Full respect must also be ensured for the rights of children with disabilities. Generally, the report calls attention to the fact that many people with disabilities continue to suffer discrimination with regard to the lack of equal recognition before the law and calls for effective access to justice for persons with disabilities, equal participation in political and public life, access to, universally-designed goods and services, and special provision in the social protection systems for women with disabilities. It calls on Member States to pay considerably more attention to the social aspects of disability, encouraging personal assistance and other services which support independent living in order to reduce institutional care in general in favour of other forms of support. It stresses the importance of guaranteeing and ensuring equal access to public information with special regard to the public management of natural and man-made disasters.

The importance of data collection and consultation with stakeholders: Members stress that consistent data on disability issues and disability-related services, including specific indicators and information regarding the number and quality of residential institutions and homes, are currently lacking. They call on the Commission to speed up the process of monitoring, cooperation and exchange of good practice between Member States, especially with respect to the gathering of comparable gender-specific data and progress indicators. They recall, at the same time, that registration of people with disabilities for services and public-budget-based support must not lead to violation of their human rights and privacy or the creation of stigmas.

Demographic changes and a barrier-free environment: demographic change will also lead to a growing number of elderly people with disabilities. Members encourage alliances between the two groups in society, in order to contribute to innovative growth, based also on employment and social development

in the Member States and in order to meet the new demands arising from the ageing society and demographic change. They call on the Commission to strengthen both sanctions and positive incentives for Member States to implement Article 16 of Regulation 1083/2006/EC and to respect its legally binding requirements. They also call on the Commission to promote the use of European Structural Funds, especially the European Regional Development Fund, to improve the accessibility of goods and services.

Free movement and barrier-free services: the report points out that accessible transportation enables people with disabilities to participate in the labour market more easily and therefore helps in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, and calls on the Commission and Member States to bring about accessibility of services more speedily via various strategies. Member States are asked to remedy shortcomings in accessibility legislation, especially as regards public transport and passenger rights legislation, including damage to mobility equipment, the services of electronic information communication systems and rules on public-built environments and services. Members recall that mobility is a core issue for the European Employment Strategy and that the specific obstacles to a life of dignity and independence for people with disabilities in the EU remain extremely significant. In this context, Members recognise the importance of Council Recommendation 98/376/EC on a parking card for people with disabilities, which states that this card should exist in a standard format and should be recognised by all Member States.

The committee recognises that innovative forms of free communication tools for the blind and the deaf, such as accessible information services with special regard to online services, are also essential for the full enjoyment of their rights. More generally, it calls for the creation by the Commission of a more informative website targeting people with disabilities, explaining their rights and providing additional specific information on travelling. It also calls for the necessary measures to promote access without physical barriers to workplaces and homes, accessible mass media services, online services for people using sign languages, smart phone applications and tactile and vocal aids in public media.

Members want to encourage the integration and acceptance in society of people with disabilities in all fields of social life strengthening measures for integration and socialisation.

Equal opportunities: Members believe that people with different disabilities should have access to appropriate means of purchasing goods and services, creating real equal opportunities. They reaffirm the need to guarantee universal, effective, non-discriminatory access for persons with disabilities to social protection, social advantages, health care and education, and to the supply of the goods and services which are available to the public, including housing, telecommunications and electronic communications, information – including information provided in accessible formats – financial services, culture and leisure, buildings open to the public, modes of transport and other public areas and facilities. Members stress that integration into working life and economic independence are extremely important factors for the social integration of people with disabilities, and emphasise he exceptional importance of employing people with disabilities on the ordinary labour market. The committee is aware of the great need for more flexible legal forms of employment relations and calls on Member States to improve and adapt their active employment policies to enable people with disabilities both to join the labour market and to remain on it, advocating the introduction of initiatives aligned with the needs of each type of disability, including plans and vocational guidance that operate from the moment individuals in need register with the services set up for this purpose. Generally, Members call on Member States to consolidate and improve active employment policies adopted with a view to integrating people with disabilities at the workplace, and for European public procurement legislation to be reviewed in order to make the accessibility criteria mandatory for enforcing selection criteria aimed at promoting accessibility for people with disabilities.

Investing in people with disabilities: Members state that the present education and training systems are not sufficient to prevent a high drop-out rate of people with disabilities without additional public policies offering specific learning support, since the figure relating to the Europe2020 objective represents a reduction to less than 10%, which leads to significant social and employment disadvantages, and resulting

poverty, among people with disabilities. They stress the need to invest in and promote effective (including alternative) educational and (vocational) training programmes that are tailored to the needs and abilities of persons with disabilities. Inclusive education should be the focus, and Members stress that all children, including those with disabilities, need to be guaranteed the right to universal access to education in all institutions. Member States are urged to establish dedicated and accessible offices where information and administrative advice can be obtained. Efforts must also be made to address the issue of non-formal education and learning for young people with disabilities, including in areas such as social relations, the mass media (which should be subject to ever more stringent accessibility requirements, including in relation to subtitling and audio description systems). The Commission and Member States are asked to support rehabilitation services in the fields of health, education, training, employment, tools for independent living, transport, etc. Members believe that suitable funding needs to be channelled to organisations of people with disabilities; insists that for such organisations the co-financing rate should be no less than 10 % of the value of the projects presented by them.

Lifestyles: Members reaffirm that training of public officials in the EU Institutions and the Member States in receiving and informing people with disabilities should be the rule. They call on the EU institutions to set an example as regards the employment of people with disabilities and urges Member States also to pursue this strategy. In the same way, they stress that policies to support independent entrepreneurship and call on Member States to introduce more suitable and effective aid for independent entrepreneurship policies. Members also encourage the creation of special forms of leave so that parents can take care of their children with disabilities.

The fight against poverty: Members call on the Commission to secure adequate financial support for the EU umbrella organisation representing people with disabilities, as well as other European impairment-specific organisations, in order to enable full participation in policy making and implementation of legislation which builds on the commitments in the EDS and the UN CRPD and in other decision-making processes concerning issues relating to people with disabilities. Generally, Members point out that eliminating or seriously alleviating the poverty of people with disabilities would entail having more people with disabilities in work, which would increase net tax revenue for the state and would reduce the number of people needing benefits for reasons of extreme poverty. The committee calls on Member States to avoid unjustified cuts in social protection for people with disabilities under the austerity policies introduced in response to the economic crisis. It highlights the fact that the poverty rate of persons with disabilities is 70 % higher than that of people without disabilities; emphasises that persons with severe or multiple disabilities and single parents with children with disabilities are in the most vulnerable position. It is important to guarantee their rights and take measures to improve their quality of life.

Parliament continues to demand a socially sustainable and human-rights-based approach: the committee calls on Member States and the Commission swiftly to ratify and implement the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as well as its Optional Protocols. It also calls on the Council and the Commission to consider concluding an interinstitutional agreement with the European Parliament and to draw up within one year a specific recommendation for Parliament to be involved in monitoring the implementation of the UN CRPD. The Commission is asked to develop concrete, appropriate, more detailed measures and to set up a monitoring mechanism for all levels of governance in respect of the implementation of the EDS in line with the list of actions of EDS, in close cooperation with the European Parliament. Member States are urged to give as much support as possible to suitable measures and tools tailored (apart from the medical aspect) to a higher level of independent life in order to ensure equal opportunities and active life for persons with disabilities and their families.

Members also call on the Commission to:

- present a legislative proposal for a European Accessibility Act;
- take the necessary measures to help the visually impaired to carry out business transactions;

- as per the outcome of the debate following publication of the Green Paper on Pensions, to argue in favour of a cross-cutting policy on disability in the forthcoming white paper, due to be published in the second half of 2011;
- assess whether further measures taken in the context of the European Structural Funds with special regard to the Rural Development Fund help people with disabilities to be active citizens living in rural areas in Europe;
- make every effort to draw up rules on personal screening when using transport services which will guarantee passengers' fundamental rights and dignity;
- increase efforts to achieve individually-tailored navigation-based services for the blind and those with serious visual impairments;
- improve access for people with disabilities in the field of copyright;
- take action on the basis of the practice and experience of the European Parliament to make ICT barrier-free for deaf people;
- prepare a study with people with visual impairments in mind analysing the characteristics of the digital displays (interfaces) of industrial and domestic products and alternative, equivalent information solutions for blind people and making specific legislative proposals;
- recognise sign language as an official language in the Member States;
- pay attention to the inclusion of the interests of people with disabilities, in accordance with the UN' s Millennium Development Goals, when handling assistance for international relations and development.