

## PM+: EU failing to recognise the role of support services for persons with disabilities

Written by Luk Zelderloo on 30 June 2015 in Opinion Plus  
Opinion Plus

The EU and member states have not fully implemented the principles of the UN convention, argues Luk Zelderloo.



Five years have passed since the convention on the rights of persons with disabilities (CRPD) entered into force and we have still not seen full compliance with its values and principles within the EU.

This shortfall is due to several factors. First, the convention's text represents a fundamental change not only for the sector but for society as a whole. It provides an international human rights framework that values freedom, choice and control of life for people with disabilities.

Second, this change requires the development of innovative support services that are individualised, tailor-made and provided in the community of origin.

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Thirdly, the provision of effective, affordable, accessible and individualised support services in the EU is not only a matter of investment but also a matter of political will. 2015 is a particularly relevant year to raise these questions as for the first time the UN is assessing the compliance of EU policies with the convention.

As representatives of more than 11,000 organisations across Europe providing support services for people with disabilities, we at the European association of service providers for persons with disabilities (EASPD) have also executed our own assessment, sent to the UN earlier this year.

We have equally shared our views with EU policymakers, organising two political events some weeks ago. First, a public hearing in the European parliament in Brussels, and second, a side event in New York during the eighth session of the conference of states parties to the UN CRPD.

Both events addressed co-production as the possible leverage needed to transform the sector and inspire future legal frameworks and political actions.

Co-production is defined as a policy process that is based on inclusive working partnerships between experts by experience (people with disabilities), support organisations and decision makers.

We are convinced that this type of cooperation will be essential in the coming years at local, national and European levels, if we are to fulfil our legal commitments in the international arena.

Do current EU policies address the real needs of the people? In general terms, we consider that policies are currently designed and implemented with limited participation from people with disabilities and support organisations.

It should be an EU priority to protect and promote the rights of people with disabilities, and this must also include the provision of individualised community-based support services that should be designed, developed and delivered in co-production with users.

We therefore urge the EU to see if the existing policies and legal frameworks facilitate and promote co-production and to what extent the support services' perspective is sufficiently addressed.

The revision of the European disability strategy should be the starting point. This EU framework and the main instrument for the implementation of the convention still fails to recognise the support dimension for people with disabilities' needs. This misrecognition puts the viability of services under threat.

For those EU policies and tools directly addressing service provision – public procurement, state aid, structural funds, European semester, etc. – policymakers, disabled people's organisations and support providers should cooperate to find the best way forward where each partner's roles and responsibilities are clearly established.

Of particular importance will be the monitoring and assessment of the correct use of structural funds, such as the European social fund to finance social protection reforms and high quality services that are in line with the convention's principle of individualised and community-based support services.

## About the author

Luk Zelderloo is secretary general at the European association of service providers for persons with disabilities (EASPD)

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