**English**

**Questionnaire on** **the provision of support to persons with disabilities**

1. Please provide information on the following services that are available for persons with disabilities in your country, including data on their coverage, geographic distribution and delivery arrangements, funding and sustainability, challenges and shortcoming in their implementation:
2. Personal assistance;
3. In-home, residential and community support;
4. Support in decision-making, including peer support; and
5. Communication support, including support for augmentative and alternative communication.
6. Please explain how persons with disabilities can access information about the existing services referred to in question one, including referral procedures, eligibility criteria and application requirements.
7. Please elaborate on how these services respond to the specific needs of persons with disabilities throughout their life cycle (infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood and older age) and how is service delivery ensured in the transition periods between life cycle stages.
8. Please provide information on the number of certified sign language interpreters and deafblind interpreters available in your country.
9. Please provide information on the existence of any partnership between State institutions and private service providers (e.g., non-governmental organizations, for-profit service providers) for the provision of support to persons with disabilities.
10. Please describe to what extent and how are persons with disabilities and their representative organizations involved in the design, planning, implementation and evaluation of support services.
11. Please provide any other relevant information and statistics (including surveys, censuses, administrative data, reports, and studies) related to the provision of support to persons with disabilities in your country.

**Statement with regard to the questions above**

**About EASPD**

EASPD (European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities) is a European NGO network representing over 10,000 social and health service provider organisations across Europe and across disabilities. Its objective is to promote equal opportunities for people with disabilities through effective and high-quality service systems. We work towards ensuring the full implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) and are accredited to the Conference of State Parties to the CRPD.

**Provision of support in the European Union**

Service provision in the disability sector has been undergoing substantial changes over the past years, and many services that were set up according to the medical-based approach to disability, are currently moving away from this model towards the social rights model introduced by the UN CRPD whereby needs and preferences of the individual are at the core of the attitude towards disability. These fundamental changes in the services design and delivery are clearly yet to be fully accomplished, at policy and at practical level, and they represent the challenge for the service provision of tomorrow as well as for policy makers at EU and national level.

Service provision in the disability sector has been organised in different ways according to socio-economic and cultural variables in each country. Services in the past were built and set up by families, by the State and/or by charitable organisations that looked at solutions to provide care of and to keep persons with disabilities in safe and protected environments. Traditionally services were set up with the explicit objective to cure the “illness” of persons with disabilities, hence often being structures that would focus on the “disability” in the first place, rather than the individual’s human rights. This was done in line with a medical approach to disability that led to perceiving persons with disabilities as humans with problems, to be treated and/or pitied, without recognising their skills and competences. In recent times the disability sector has faced tremendous changes as service provision is being structured more and more around the needs and the preferences of the individual, becoming more person-centred and individualised. These changes are clearly yet to be fully accomplished, at policy and at practical level, and they represent the challenge for the service provision of tomorrow. By bringing about its social model of rights, the Convention has legitimised this change of vision about disability and has become the lead model for the development of support services for persons with disabilities.

EASPD acknowledges that the level and the quality of service provision may differ from country to country, due to the political, socio and economic models in place. The European Union territory overall has been the birthplace of considerable innovations and models of best practices, where the design and the delivery of services is undertaken in co-production with persons with disabilities. Recently, however, these innovations have been jeopardised by the austerity measures applied to the social sector by several governments, as well as by the European Union, as a result of the economic crisis that has hit Europe. As a consequence many support services have been forced to run their services with reduced staff and other resources, and to provide them to more users. This is clearly putting at risk the positive developments attained so far and is hindering any further innovative developments towards support measures.

**The support dimension in European policies**

The role of the European Union in the implementation of the Convention is made complex by the share of legislative competences with its Member States. The provision of support services is not specifically a competence of the European Union; however, the European Union, having committed to implement the UN CRPD, can fulfil its obligations from three angles:

* The regulatory frameworks (e.g. Fiscal consolidation measures, the European Structural and Investment Funds, the Research and Innovation Agenda, the State Aid Regulation, Public Procurement Directive, etc.)
* The funding streams made available to attain the objectives of the European Union.
* The European institutions internal functioning.

Support services are often challenged in their facilitating role to promote the implementation of the Convention due to the multi-layered structure that governs their set up, development and funding both at national and European level.

The European Union has issued a European Disability Strategy (EDS). The Strategy covers key areas for the implementation of the UN CRPD at European level; however, the role of individualised support services is not structurally integrated. In the Strategy, social and health support services are hardly mentioned. The main focus of the EDS is to improve the accessibility of mainstream services and products, which is clearly a vitally important objective, but it overlooks the fact that, for many disabled people, individualised forms of support are preconditions for the enjoyment of rights.

**Workforce in disability support services**

The support services sector is currently suffering from human resources shortages and from a lack of qualified professionals. Indeed, care and support professionals are leaving the sector, because it offers poor working conditions and very few attractive career opportunities[[1]](#footnote-1). Professionals now have to work under deteriorating working conditions that put them at a higher risk of burnout or of changing professions. In a time where the demand for support and care services is increasing, it is essential that policy-makers take proactive steps to ensure that the sector receives sustainable and adequate funding, which support the recruitment of skilled staff. Yet, it is also important for policy makers to take pro-active steps to improve the attractiveness of the sector in order to be able to recruit skilled staff. This can be done supporting the development of social dialogue structures in the sector, where social partners will be able to discuss and negotiate on how to improve the sector’s attractiveness and working conditions. This would result in helping to unlock the important job creation potential in the sector due to rising demand. The current situation is not favourable to end-users who should unconditionally receive the support they require.

**Co-production**

EASPD recognises that to deliver services that are fully in line with the UN CRPD principles the involvement of persons with disabilities in the design, planning, implementation and evaluation is needed. The co-production approach is therefore key in attaining this objective and EASPD has launched the debate around co-production within its structures, its membership and stakeholders at European level. Together with other disabled people’s organisations EASPD has also agreed on a common definition on co-production.

In line with several European Disabled People’s Organisations[[2]](#footnote-2), EASPD proposes three main elements for co-production in the disability field:

1. Co-production promotes shifting the balance of power and responsibility solely from professional support services and authorities. It also establishes that all stakeholders are integral to the policy, service or activity, developed in equal partnership with persons with support needs as the drivers. Co-production goes beyond consultation, all partners in a co-production process collectively seek to identify and overcome barriers towards full implementation of the co-production principal.

2. Coproduction recognises that every individual with support needs should be fully, structurally, meaningfully and in an ongoing manner involved at all stages in the design, development and delivery of the relevant service, policy or activity. It requires all stakeholders to acknowledge and recognise the expertise, desires, will and preferences of the person with support needs. Mechanisms must be put in place to ensure that people are provided with the right level of independent support, which empowers persons with disabilities to make fully informed decisions on how to engage in a co-productive process.

3. Co-production is an innovative working practice ensuring that all stakeholders actively rethink and reassess how they are currently operating. Shared dialogue, jointly agreed outcomes, fully inclusive environments and reasonable accommodations must become an essential part of their work structures.

1. 2013, Vlerick Business School, HR Strategies and recommendations for improving the attractiveness of the social services sector in Europe.

<http://www.easpd.eu/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/Policy/Vlerick/gsb_report_easpd.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See Common Definition of Co-production between EASPD, EDF, Inclusion Europe, ENIL, MHE and COFACE-Families Europe, [www.easpd.eu](http://www.easpd.eu) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)