

POST-2020 EUROPEAN DISABILITY STRATEGY CEEP POSITION

12 November 2020

CEEP is committed to empowering people with disabilities so that they can enjoy their rights and participate fully in the economy and society. CEEP therefore welcomes the EC Roadmap for the Post-2020 European Disability Strategy, whose approach represents a further step towards the social integration and recognition of social and economic rights of people with disabilities. During the past 10 years, European Institutions and Member States have shown substantial commitment in this field, but further action is needed to ensure that the priorities and targets are achieved, especially in the current challenging context caused by the COVID-19 health crisis and its economic and social consequences. People with disabilities (e.g. work and leisure-time accidents, chronic illnesses, temporary chronic illnesses, mental illnesses) will indeed be strongly affected by the current crisis.

The Disability Rights Strategy for 2021-2030 should therefore be designed to help acquire and improve factual understanding in order to assess the effectiveness of inclusion of people with disabilities in EU Member States, raise awareness of the issue and produce knowledge about what helps people with disabilities to cope with disadvantage and marginalisation.

CEEP wants to underline several key elements that will contribute to the definition of the next Strategy and ensure its implementation and delivery over the next 10 years.

1. Developing an ad hoc policy framework

CEEP believes that the next Strategy should be **consistent with existing EU initiatives and strategies** and with the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights, as well as in line with the commitments made under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. This framework will provide a solid basis and orientation for all inclusion policies and activities in the Member States, municipalities and enterprises.

The next Strategy should also build on the current strategy through targeted actions and programmes ensuring social inclusion of people with disabilities and their equal opportunities in all areas including employment, vocational education and training, accessibility to essential public services and social services. In this respect, the development of a **comparable data collection tool**, which would mainly serve as a basis for providing targeted solutions and tailor-made services for people with disabilities, is particularly relevant.

CEEP also calls on the European Commission to structurally **integrate the European Disability Strategy within the European Semester process**. The Commission should therefore commit to using the

European Semester as a tool to strengthen the EU social dimension, e.g. addressing CSRs to Member States focusing on investment at national level in the social services sector.

Furthermore, the next Strategy should **address the main economic and social challenges that emerged in the context of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic**, thus paying particular attention to the precarious conditions and rights violations experienced by people with disabilities during the crisis – e.g. disruptions in personal assistance, care and support services, unequal access to healthcare and alternatives offered by educational institutions – which are likely to resurge in the months and years ahead if not adequately addressed. Mainstreaming of disability in all EU policies and funding instruments, including Next Generation EU, is therefore particularly relevant.

2. Promoting quality inclusive education and employment

The considerable variations in the definition of disability across Member States imply that the legal framework and integration policies for people with disabilities also vary. This diversity is important to ensure that **policies are suited to the needs of each individual** and to the cultural, social and economic environment.

The post-2020 European Disability Strategy should pay particular attention to **early intervention programmes in education for children with special educational needs** in order to ensure their effective and equal access to quality inclusive education. As different definitions and implementation practices are used in each country, it would be useful to further examine the different inclusive education policies existing at EU Member State level, and thus design EU measures and guidelines taking into account the various national approaches. The post-2020 Strategy should also have a special focus on the **access to the primary labour market for young people with disabilities** in order to guarantee them a swift transition from school to work.

In the field of employment, it is essential to find **tailor-made solutions** that take into account factors such as the type of disability of the person, the size of the company, the nature of the sector and the occupation. In fact, these factors have an impact on what measures can and should be taken to match the capacity of the individual with the specificities of the tasks to be performed.

CEEP believes that **increased awareness and a greater understanding of disability** are two essential elements for promoting the employment of people with disabilities and can contribute to the economic success of a company. Companies would be better equipped to respond to the needs of people with disabilities if they participated directly in the development of products and services.

The next Strategy should follow an **equal opportunities approach** to improve employment opportunities for people with disabilities in the mainstream labour market, while ensuring that exclusion, discrimination based on disability and on factors irrelevant to the task at hand does not occur in the working environment, as it is detrimental to the individual concerned, good working relations and to the efficiency of the company. Furthermore, it should promote the idea that hiring people with disabilities is cost beneficial and has tangible and intangible benefits, e.g. social integration, benefits for the quality of life of disabled employees and their families.

In this regard, the promotion and further improvement of **well-functioning Sheltered Workshops** can play a key role in the forthcoming Strategy for 2021-2030. Such practices are essential in providing

people with disabilities with employment opportunities, which would not otherwise exist without their intervention. Sheltered Workshops should serve as a vector for societal integration of people with disabilities into the open labour market, ensuring that participation in employment is accompanied by a framework including vocational education and training to support the transition to the mainstream labour market, in line with the rights to education and employment enshrined in the UNCRPD. In addition, **Supported Employment schemes** should be further developed and promoted, as they are an important tool to support people with disabilities in accessing the labour market, and in ensuring and maintaining paid employment in the open labour market.

The management of accidents at work and during leisure time, as well as the care of those affected, programmes for the integration of affected people into the labour market, the promotion of high quality services close to home are also key priorities for the participation of people with disabilities in the labour market to be addressed in the next Strategy. The creation of **company-based employee representations** for people with disabilities throughout the EU should also be considered.

The post-2020 European Disability Strategy should provide a framework to support unemployed people with disabilities, guaranteeing them decent living conditions and protecting them from poverty and social exclusion.

3. Investing in essential public services and social services

The COVID-19 crisis has exposed the results of years of underinvestment in public and social services and infrastructure in some Member States. CEEP is therefore convinced that the main message underlying the post-2020 European Disability Strategy should be that **expenditure in essential public services and social services should no longer be seen as a cost, but as an investment for the future.**

EU funds, and notably the European Social Fund+, should complement national efforts to **increase investment in public services and services of general interest and social services** in order to improve accessibility to services for people with disabilities. EU funds should also provide targeted support for vocational education and training and lifelong learning for and by people with disabilities in order to ensure their transition to the open labour market.

Similarly, EU funding is particularly important with regard to support for social professions, in particular social workers and people active in social services. The labour force available in social services is in fact a particular concern today. While demand for services is naturally increasing, in particular due to the ageing population and the social needs that will arise as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, social services suffer from labour shortages. **Initial training and qualification of employees** in the new professions related to the changing needs of the assisted persons are key priorities. This should also be linked to the digitalisation of the labour market and the challenges posed by rapid technological change affecting service provision.

More generally, it is also about **raising the profile of social work** and increasing the attractiveness of these professions. The EU has an important role to play in this area, in particular through the allocation of funds for training in social careers, as well as for the improvement of working conditions and the promotion and recognition of the role that social services play in society and for the improvement of the lives of people with disabilities.

Investment in public and social services also responds to the need to **ensure their effective delivery**. It is therefore crucial to support the development of services that work for the well-being of the population and for the prosperity of the European social model and employment.

4. Improving accessibility for people with disabilities

CEEP appreciates that the 8 priorities of the previous Strategy are maintained for the post-2020 Strategy, and in particular accessibility. Access to essential public and social services for people with disabilities is a key element to guarantee them an autonomous and independent living and their full participation in society.

CEEP believes that the Strategy for 2021-2030 should follow a **Universal Design approach** as conceived in the 2004 Public Procurement Directive as “Design for All”. This would ensure that the built environment, products and services – including housing, healthcare, education, training, transport, tourism, ICT and digital services – are accessible by people with disabilities on an equal basis with others. A framework supporting those essential services through a Universal Design approach would also have effects on increasing labour market access for people with disabilities.

In this respect, it should be considered the creation of a specific **European fund to promote accessibility**, which could be used by public and private operators as a financial instrument to remove barriers in the built and digital environment.

5. Strengthening the involvement of social partners

Social partners, at the appropriate level, seek to promote, through collective bargaining which may lead to collective agreements, or through actions between their members, equal opportunities policies in favour of people with disabilities.

Employers’ organisations should be regularly consulted on policy progress at cross-industry and sectoral level to ensure that new provisions and/or policy developments can be implemented effectively.

Collaboration with social partners at European, national, regional and local level is a key element for a proper implementation of the post-2020 European Disability Strategy.