

Vilnius, 27 May 2018

A Europe for all its people

The European Disability Movement gathers in Lithuania to demand a decent standard of living for all persons with disabilities in Europe.

European disability movement demands that “nothing about us without us” becomes reality.

The General Assembly of the European Disability Forum took place in Vilnius, Lithuania on May 26th and 27th, co-organised and co-hosted by EDF and the Lithuanian Disability Forum. The Assembly brought together over 150 delegates from across Europe in Vilnius, Lithuania, this weekend. The conclusion was clear: European and national authorities need to do more to meaningfully involve persons with disabilities and the organisations that represent them.

The Assembly opened with a strong call for political participation of persons with disabilities in the European elections. All persons with disabilities should have the right to vote and should be able to vote. Persons with disabilities should stand for election, and be elected, to ensure that their issues are central to the political decision-making process in Europe.

Yannis Vardakastanis, President of the European Disability Forum proclaimed that “We need to vote. We need to keep the European project in our hands. Persons with disabilities and their families must vote. Candidates with disabilities must stand for election.”

The General Assembly included a meeting between the European Disability Forum, Lithuanian Disability Forum and the national authorities; a conference on the implementation of the Web Accessibility Directive” and discussions on disability assessment, the European Pillar of Social Rights, the future of EU structural funds and the European Accessibility Act.

EDF members also had the opportunity to discuss with the CRPD Committee rapporteur Stig Langvad on the drafting of the general comment no. 7, and stressed the need for organisations of persons with disabilities to be fully involved and closely consulted in all spaces of public decision making on an equal basis of others.

European Disability Forum and Lithuanian Disability Forum call for full involvement of organisations of persons with disabilities in Lithuania



The presidents of the European and Lithuanian Disability Forum meet with the Minister for Social Protection of Lithuania

On the 25th May, the European Disability Forum and the Lithuanian Disability Forum met with Linas Kukuraitis, the Minister for Social Security and Labour of Lithuania. We held an extensive discussion on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Yannis Vardakastanis, President of the European Disability Forum, emphasised the importance of involving organisations of persons with disabilities in all aspects of implementation and monitoring of the Convention. The importance of building the capacity of the national disability movements and of ensuring cooperation between organisations of persons with disabilities across Europe were also discussed.

Yannis Vardakastanis stated “Countries need to ensure proper support for their national disability movement. This is an essential obligation to fully implement of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.”

Time to make sure that the Web Accessibility Directive becomes a reality.

Delegates discussed the web accessibility directive with **Marco Marsella**, Head of Unit G3 in the Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology of the European Commission, and **Shadi Abou-Zahra**, Strategy and Technology Specialist Web Accessibility Initiative at the World Wide Web Consortium.

The meeting was preceded by a statement from the Commissioner Mariya Gabriel, EU Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society, which highlighted the importance of this directive on creating inclusive digital technologies.

Marco Marsella insisted on the importance of involving all stakeholders in the transposition of the Directive to national law. He assured Delegates that the European Commission will closely review the national laws and challenge them if they are not according to the spirit and letter of the Directive.

Shadi Abou-Zahra underlined that not only the websites need to be accessible – the tools that are used to create them have to be accessible as well.

Alejandro Moledo concluded that “organisations of persons with disabilities have to act now to ensure that the Directive is correctly transposed. We have to contact our governments and demand to be fully involved.”

Case studies from Denmark, Slovenia, Spain and Lithuania highlighted that involvement of organisations of persons with disabilities is necessary to make the process of transposition easier, better and more cost-efficient for national governments. They also explained their advocacy actions so far to ensure that the Directive was transposed in the most ambitious way possible, including the widest scope, and no loopholes. Delegates appreciated the recommendations for transposition in the [EDF toolkit](#) for the Web Directive.



Experts from Denmark, Spain, Slovenia, Lithuania describe their experiences implementing the Web Accessibility Directive

“If we need to, we will protest on the streets of the EU Capitals for Inclusive Structural Funds” declares EDF president

We are deeply concerned with the current proposal for Cohesion Policy 2021-2027. We call for the budget to be increased and to ensure that the needs of persons with disabilities are always taken into account in all projects that are funded by the EU.

It is also essential that structural funds support accessibility for persons with disabilities and the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Yannis Vardakastanis, President of the European Disability Forum declared that: “The budget of the European Union must not produce anymore exclusion. The European disability movement will take to the streets to guarantee this, if we have to!”

The General Assembly approved a [resolution on the future of the Cohesion Policy 2021-2027](#).

Disability Assessment should never be a tool to cut disability benefits.

Worrying trends on disability assessment across Europe were displayed during presentations of case studies from Lithuania, Portugal and Croatia. Lack of proper support, lack of individual assessment and focus on a medical model of disability, among others, lead to discrimination, increased risk of poverty, and health issues due to stress and anxiety.

“It is clear that the European disability movement has to be more involved in the process of disability assessment” said **Yannis Vardakastanis**. **Rodolfo Cattani**, Executive Committee member added that “Disability Assessment is a priority for EDF. We have to ensure that changes are made in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the full protection of disability benefits.”

Disability assessment should be as objective as possible, ensuring the respect and dignity of persons with disabilities.



EDF President Yannis Vardakastanis affirms need for the disability movement to be involved in the disability assessment process

It is urgent to adopt a strong, meaningful European Accessibility Act

The European Disability Forum adopted an emergency resolution on the European Accessibility Act. We demand the Act to:

- Support the accessibility provisions of other Union acts, such as the Public Procurement Directive or the EU Funds Regulations,
- include a compulsory clause on the accessibility of the built environment,
- cover emergency services fully,
- cover all microenterprises,
- to cover transport services broadly,
- not to limit the scope for self-service terminals,
- ensure that audiovisual media services and the access to the latter can benefit from common accessibility requirements

The resolution also includes the demand to adopt a horizontal principle on promotion of equality between men and women, accessibility for persons with disabilities and non-discrimination in the Structural and Investment Funds Common Provisions Regulation 2021-2027.

[Read the resolution here](#)

Puríður Harpa Sigurðardóttir elected as board member of the European Disability Forum

Elections for a vacant position in the Board of the European Disability Forum were held. The General elected Puríður Harpa Sigurðardóttir, the Chair of the Organisation of Disabled in Iceland, (ÖBÍ Öryrkjabandalag Íslands) as a new member of the Board.

The General Assembly concluded with an intervention of Kamil Goungor the new chair of the European Disability Forum's Youth Committee. In it he stressed that young persons with disabilities face double discrimination.

He stated "It is difficult for a person with a disability to be employed. But it is twice as difficult if you are young and disabled."

EDF has committed to greatly increase the visibility and the impact of youth within its work.

The next General Assembly is provisionally set for 1st and 2nd June 2019.

Related documents

- [EDF Toolkit for transposition of the Web Accessibility Directive](#)
- [Emergency resolution on the European Accessibility Act](#)
- [Resolution on the future of the Cohesion Policy 2021-2027](#)

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