To:
Nina Gregori, Executive Director, European Asylum Support Office

CC:
Margaritis Schinas, European Commission Vice-President - Promoting our European Way of Life
Helena Dalli, Commissioner for Equality
Emmanuelle Grange, Head of Unit, Disability and Inclusion, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

Brussels, 21st October 2020
Ref. EDF-20-99-YV

Subject: inclusion of persons with disabilities in EASO’s work and membership to EASO Vulnerability Expert Network Advisory Group

Dear Ms Gregori,

I am writing to you in your role as Executive Director of the European Asylum Support Office in relation to the rights of asylum seekers and migrants with disabilities.

The European Disability Forum (EDF) is an independent umbrella organisation of persons with disabilities that defends the interests of more than 100 million Europeans with disabilities. EDF is a unique platform which brings together representative organisations of persons with disabilities from across Europe, run by persons with disabilities and their families. EDF is a member of the Social Platform and Human Rights and Democracy Network and works closely to the European institutions, the Council of Europe and the United Nations.

We started our advocacy work on refugees with disabilities in 2015, in cooperation with our members and organisations such as Human Rights Watch, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

We welcome the invitation we received from EASO to participate in the 10th Edition of the Consultative Forum last week. Nonetheless, we are very concerned that the work
of EASO does not sufficiently include the rights of persons with disabilities and involve representative organisations of persons with disabilities.

Migrants and asylum seekers with disabilities face the same risks as other refugees, however those are compounded by many other issues that need to be addressed by the EU and its Member States. Migrants and asylum seekers with disabilities find themselves at heightened risk of violence, discrimination, inaccessible facilities, inaccessible support services or disruption of these services, being confined to segregated structures or institutions. In some cases, pre-existing health conditions make them more at risk of developing serious illness or dying. They are at higher risk of being affected by COVID-19, as the virus spreads quickly in refugee camps, where people are living in overcrowded conditions, without access to adequate sanitation, food and water supplies.

Under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities ratified by the EU and all its member states, the European Union and its agencies have an obligation to protect the rights of persons with disabilities, including asylum seekers and migrants with disabilities (article 11 CRPD), and to consult and involve organisations of persons with disabilities in all matters that concern them (article 4.3 CRPD).

We are calling you:

- To ensure that the rights and needs of persons with disabilities are fully included in the work of EASO, in particular in relation to vulnerable groups
- To nominate organisations of persons with disabilities, including EDF, to become members of the Vulnerability Expert Network Advisory Group; to this date no organisation of persons with disabilities is member of the Advisory Group

We remain at your disposal to support the work of EASO in ensuring full implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities.

Yours sincerely,

Ioannis VARDAKASTANIS

President

European Disability Forum