

SKOPJE MANIFESTO

“Towards community-living: current realities & future challenges”

INTRODUCTION:

On the 7th and 8th of October 2010 the Skopje Conference brought together 220 representatives of international organizations, public authorities, service providers for persons with disabilities, professionals from the sector, families of service users and persons with disabilities themselves, as well as the scientific community.

The conference, opened by the Macedonian Minister of Labour and Social Policy, was on the calendar of major events of the Macedonian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. For the first time in EASPD history, an annual conference saw the simultaneous participation of representatives of the European Union, the Council of Europe and the United Nations.

All participants took this unique opportunity to discuss the way forward in the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities, especially by having a thorough look at issues at stake in the sector in South-Eastern Europe. It also enabled key stakeholders to build concrete bridges in knowledge and practices, across geographical and cultural borders.

Delegates shared their experience of the dramatic impact of the economic and financial crisis on social services and expressed a strong disagreement towards follow up measures taken by many governments over the continent, especially the radical cuts in public funding targeting the sector.

FROM PRINCIPLES AND VALUES TO ACTION

The delegates to the Skopje Conference “Towards community-living: current realities & future challenges”, held on the 7th and 8th of October strongly reaffirm their commitment to the aims and values conveyed by:

- The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which purpose is “to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity” (Article 1)
- The Council of Europe Disability Action Plan 2006-2015
- The European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 – “A Renewed Commitment to a Barrier-Free Europe”

And declare that:

- They fully support the paradigm shift reflected by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities, emphasizing the need for a Human Rights-based approach of disability, centered on the needs, empowering rather than segregating
- All barriers preventing persons with disabilities from enjoying full participation in society, on an equal basis with other citizens, should be removed
- Persons with disabilities should benefit from high quality and community-based services
- Disability stakeholders from all parts of Europe can learn from each other, as many challenges are shared
- Political commitment of governments to the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities is widely announced amongst European governments, but gaps are persisting when it comes to the ratification and proper implementation of the provisions of the document
- The global economic and financial crisis has led in many countries to harsh cuts in the social and health sectors. Therefore, the most disadvantaged groups in the population have to face increasingly difficult living conditions, while support systems are led to a breaking point.

In order to achieve the objectives set by the UN Convention, delegates call for:

- The **immediate ratification of the Convention** and its optional protocol by all governments in Europe. In this sense, Macedonian government should lead by example after having hosted this very successful conference
- The participative elaboration by National Governments of **comprehensive action plans aimed at implementing the Convention** in each European country, including measurable objectives, supported by realistic budgets and accompanied by independent monitoring mechanisms
- A clear focus of European governments on the **sustainability of services** for persons with disabilities, which can only be achieved through appropriate regulation and funding systems
- A real and **balanced dialogue between all stakeholders** in the disability sector, from authorities to service providers and users, respecting their respective roles and responsibilities
- A **continued cooperation** between service providers from different regions of Europe, as mutual learning has proven to be a key for success
- **Additional efforts by service providers** to implement the transition towards community-based services, through the ongoing training of professionals and a continued support of persons with disabilities, their families and informal caregivers. This process will follow the principle of **evidence-based practice**, under the lead and coordination of the EASPD
- A **clear commitment from the European Commission** to politically and financially **support, facilitate and monitor the implementation of the Convention** within the European Union and all Candidate Countries, in accordance with the aims and objectives of the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020



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