

**Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on 'Harmonised indicators in the field of disability as an instrument for monitoring European policies'**

(2008/C 10/20)

The European Economic and Social Committee received a letter, dated 13 February 2007, from the future Portuguese presidency requesting its opinion on *Harmonised indicators in the field of disability as an instrument for monitoring European policies*.

The Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 17 July 2007. The rapporteur was Mr Joost.

At its 438th plenary session, held on 26-27 September 2007 (meeting of 26 September), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 160 votes, with no votes against and six abstentions.

## 1. Conclusions and recommendations

1.1 The EESC believes that the adoption of a roadmap similar to the one which was adopted in the field of gender equality, with the development of a set of indicators and quantitative targets to be achieved by Member States in a number of agreed priority areas, would be the right way to move forward and achieve progress in making equal opportunities a reality for disabled people.

1.2 The EESC urges the Commission and Member States to focus on gathering a reliable and coherent set of indicators, as well as quantitative targets in each of the statistical fields and policy objectives identified, for each Member State to achieve within a set time. The previous statistical attempts mentioned earlier in this document have not been endorsed at European level and are not a permanent indicator that could be measured on a regular basis, for example within the indicators of social inclusion. This endorsement and systematic measurement is necessary for any coherent policy.

1.3 The EESC calls on the High-Level Group on Disability to endorse a list of priorities for data collection based on a core set of indicators already existing in the ISTAT<sup>(1)</sup> list, which needs to be updated.

1.4 Member States should continue with their efforts to gather data on disability based on surveys, which should be released on a regular basis, for example every second year. The work on definition at international level with the Washington Group must be continued.

1.5 The EU Labour Force Survey should assess the progress achieved on a more regular basis. The Social Protection and Employment Committees could in future include a set of indicators which would be systematically researched, as opposed to independent one-off initiatives.

1.6 Therefore, the EESC urges the EC to include in Eurostat surveys a coherent disability module including the above-mentioned elements, with regular reports to allow a proper assessment of policies, as well as identification of priorities.

1.7 National disability organisations should be involved in working out priority indicators for the individual Member State concerned. Endorsement of harmonised indicators and collection of data will enable to exchange best practice solutions between Member States, as the effectiveness of the used initiatives is measurable.

## 2. Introduction

2.1 The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) welcomes the Portuguese presidency's request to draw up an opinion on *Harmonised indicators in the field of disability*. The Portuguese presidency is determined to contribute to enabling the European Union to obtain reliable and comparable data in order to assess the inclusion of people with disabilities.

2.2 People with disabilities make up more than 15 % of the total population — a figure that is rising as the population ages. This means that, in the enlarged EU, more than 50 million people are disabled<sup>(2)</sup>. The SILC survey from 2005 does not take into account children with disabilities, older people, or people with disabilities living in institutions.

2.3 To make social rights, — including free movement of people — which are recognised by the Treaties and by the European Charter of Fundamental Rights, a reality for disabled people, policies and situations must be assessed and compared on a common basis in all Member States. This is the first step towards designing and implementing policies to allow people with disabilities to enjoy the same rights as non-disabled people.

<sup>(1)</sup> ISTAT — National Institute of Statistics — Italy, Project 'Indicators on integration of disabled people into social life', final report, June 2001, published by Eurostat.

<sup>(2)</sup> According to the Eurostat SILC (Statistics on Income and Living Conditions) survey of 2005.

2.4 Indicators measuring the progress of Member States in the inclusion of people with disabilities in society are various: accessibility of the built environment, participation in the labour market, access to education, culture, e-accessibility, just to mention a few. Being able to assess the actions undertaken by Member States in this field and their impact is of crucial importance.

### 3. Lack of coherence in existing legal and political instruments

3.1 The recently adopted UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities identifies many urgent needs for promoting the mainstreaming of disability issues. EU Member States should embrace these principles by ratifying the Convention without delay. In order to be in line with the objectives and principles of the UN Convention, which the EC has signed, the EU must adopt suitable policies. All countries and the EU should also be encouraged to sign the optional protocol to the UN Convention.

3.2 The European Disability Action Plan <sup>(3)</sup> sets itself the ambitious goals of achieving full application of the Equal Treatment in Employment and Occupation Directive (2000/78/EC), reinforcing mainstreaming of disability issues in relevant Community policies, and improving accessibility for all. In order to achieve these objectives, progress must be measured by the means of indicators which, for each political priority, assess the progress achieved in each Member State and allow the setting of measurable targets.

3.3 Directive 2000/78 EC adopted in November 2000 prohibits discrimination against disabled people in the field of employment and vocational training. The assessment of its implementation by Member States, beyond the mere issue of legal transposition, is however problematic, as no available comparable data allows the measurement of the increase in employment levels of disabled people as the law is implemented in each Member State.

3.4 The Council of Europe Action Plan on full participation of people with disabilities sets a number of concrete goals in many society and policy fields, which apply to all 46 Member States and have to be followed up. A drafting group has been set up to develop indicators to measure progress.

3.5 The Lisbon Strategy has set ambitious targets for the EU, which include raising employment levels and enhanced social cohesion. These objectives cannot be achieved without concrete measures to remove the barriers faced by disabled people in accessing employment and services to allow their full integration into society.

<sup>(3)</sup> See: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment\\_social/disability/index\\_en.html](http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/disability/index_en.html).

3.6 In all policy fields which impact on disabled people and can improve their inclusion into society and facilitate their access to rights, indicators are needed to measure progress, as well as to ensure a comprehensive view of results of different measures undertaken at European level. Existing laws must also be assessed in order to modify or improve them.

## 4. The need for a set of reliable and comparable statistics

### 4.1 Existing data measurement systems

4.1.1 The EESC regrets the lack of indicators in the field of disability, and more particularly the lack of existing political commitment at EU level on agreeing common indicators to support and assess policies.

4.1.2 The EESC notes that Eurostat has undertaken several interesting projects and initiatives aiming at the development of a regular data collection on aspects of disability in coordinated way across Europe: the module on health in the European Community Household Panel (ECHP) on the period 1994-1996 included a small module on disability which was published in a pocket book; in 2002, the European Labour Force Survey (LFS) included a module on the employment of disabled people in order to have a coordinated and harmonised input in the UNSD Washington Group meeting; Eurostat has launched the European Disability Measurement (EDM) project.

In 2002 the European Directors of Social Statistics agreed on a framework for regular collection of harmonised data by means of survey and/or survey modules on health, named the European Health Survey System (EHSS). Within this context the Member States have agreed — end 2006 — the final version of a European Health Interview Survey (EHIS) questionnaire; the first wave of which will be carried out in 2007-2009. The EHIS includes questions on several aspects of disability. Disability is also included as a variable in the Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) <sup>(4)</sup>.

Eurostat's annual work programme 2007 includes activities in the European Statistical System (ESS) <sup>(5)</sup> on further developing Community statistics on disability and social inclusion in order to provide the relevant and comparable statistical data needed to monitor the situation of people with disabilities, in cooperation with international organisations. By mid of 2008 a new survey module on Disability and Social Integration — supported by Eurostat grant — should be ready for pilot implementation in the Member States.

In all this development work, the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) — established by the World Health Organisation — is used as a basis.

<sup>(4)</sup> [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page?\\_pageid=1913,47567825,1913\\_58814988&\\_dad=portal&\\_schema=PORTAL#B](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page?_pageid=1913,47567825,1913_58814988&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL#B).

<sup>(5)</sup> For the European Statistical System, see: [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page?\\_pageid=1153,47169267,1153\\_47183518&\\_dad=portal&\\_schema=PORTAL](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page?_pageid=1153,47169267,1153_47183518&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL).

4.1.3 At international level, Eurostat has engaged on the development of global measurements on disability, based on the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) from the World Health Organisation, within the Washington Group on Disability Statistics <sup>(6)</sup>. The Council of Europe has published methodological guidance to how to develop social indicators on social cohesion <sup>(7)</sup>.

4.1.4 The proposal for a Regulation on Community statistics on public health and on health and safety at work will give a framework to activities in this field in the future. The Regulation can be utilised for gathering data on disability, changing the situation where data gathering is conducted by Member States without the relevant legal basis.

#### 4.2 Need for further European indicators

4.2.1 Article 31 of the UN Convention states that countries have to collect appropriate information, including statistical and research data, to enable them to formulate and implement policies to give effect to the Convention. The EESC urges EU Member States to follow that principle closely.

4.2.2 The EESC welcomes the above-mentioned initiatives but regrets the lack of coherence and of agreed political indicators gathering those initiatives, in order to analyse the situation of persons with disabilities, measure the impact of policies and legislation and to evaluate their needs.

4.2.3 Indicators must be set to measure employment levels, in order to better understand what the issues to be addressed are, and to design appropriate policies. The 2006 Spring Council reiterated the need to take appropriate measures to raise employment levels of disabled people.

4.2.4 An assessment of the impact of the European Anti-Discrimination Directive, and of legislation in the different Member States, would be necessary in order to better design political and legislative action in the future.

4.2.5 Data on discrimination must be further collected in conjunction with indicators in the other fields of access to goods and services, employment, social inclusion, etc., so as to ensure a coherent view of issues affecting disabled people and how they interact.

4.2.6 Social inclusion is also a field where further assessment is needed to better understand the complex reasons that lead to the social exclusion of disabled people. Issues such as income must be measured, but also participation in social life (representation, access to associations, volunteer work, politics, etc.) and access to health care, education, culture, means of communication and social services.

4.2.7 Existing best practice solutions, such as the European parking card, should set an example for the introduction of new, similar solutions, which cannot be achieved without a set of indicators to measure social inclusion of people with disabilities, with relevant and comparable data.

#### 4.3 Challenges in the setting of European indicators

4.3.1 The provision of data from Member States to assess the level of the inclusion of people with disabilities currently takes place without any European-level agreement on common indicators except data collection in framework of OMC <sup>(8)</sup> and ECHIM <sup>(9)</sup>. It should also be further explained to the Member States why gathering data on disability matters is of great importance.

4.3.2 The SILC survey includes an estimate of the number of disabled people in the EU but excludes from this data people living in institutions, children and older people with a disability, which makes this figure less relevant.

4.3.3 Definitions of disability are different in all countries, and should be expanded to include, for example, people with mental health problems, who are often not included in national statistics. In order to secure a universally recognised basis for determining which groups of people are subsumed under the term 'persons with disabilities', any definition should draw on the second paragraph of Article 1 of the UN Convention.

4.3.4 Disabled people are a heterogeneous group, and it is difficult to establish measurement criteria. A set of indicators should therefore take into account the diversity of disabilities, as well as the policy fields that impact on the lives of disabled people, and identify barriers to full participation in society for people with disabilities.

Brussels, 26 September 2007.

The President  
of the European Economic and Social Committee  
Dimitris DIMITRIADIS

<sup>(6)</sup> For the Washington Group, see:  
<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/citygroup.htm>.

<sup>(7)</sup> 'Concerted development of social cohesion indicators — Methodological guide', Council of Europe Publishing.

<sup>(8)</sup> Open Method of Coordination.

<sup>(9)</sup> European Community Health Indicators Monitoring.