



EUROPEAN  
DISABILITY  
FORUM



DOC-B-17-02-09

## EDF work with refugees with disabilities in Europe

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### Document for information

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#### 1. Introduction and purpose

The purpose of this item is to update the Board on recent work concerning refugees with disabilities, our future plans, and to get strategic input from the Board.

#### 2. Questions for discussion and decisions

- Do you have news from your actions or the situation in your countries? (We can include your issues in the hearing to be organized with Human Rights watch at the European Parliament)
- Are there other partnerships/ areas of work we should pursue?

#### 3. Recent activities

EDF secretariat sent out a call for members involved in this topic in order to establish the email expert group of EDF members on refugees with disabilities. So far, we have participants from Greece, Sweden, Italy, Finland, Norway, Cooperatives for the Psychosocially Disabled (CEFEC) and Mental Health Europe (MHE). The expert group is supported by EDF President, EDF Director and EDF Human Rights Officer. The expert group will examine ways to advocate for the inclusion of refugees with disabilities in the EU debate, and a pilot programme on refugees with disabilities in 2017.

EDF took part in a mission together with the EESC exploring the situation of refugees with disabilities in Greece to develop a better understanding of the situation of refugees with disabilities and what we as DPOs can do. The mission was planned with a lot of support by the Greek National Council of Persons with Disabilities (NCDP) and involved a series of meetings and visits to local authorities, international and local organisations and reception centres in Athens and Lesbos. Please find the report in Annex.

EDF President Yannis Vardakastanis, participated in an event “Embracing Diversity” organised by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Geneva on 6 December. Marking the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (3 December), the event strengthened the dialogue between UNHCR and organisations working to promote active participation for persons with disabilities. EDF proposed to set up and consolidate a long-term partnership between UNHCR and disabled people’s organisations (DPOs) in order to effectively handle contemporary migration flows in an inclusive and effective way. More information can be found in [EDF web article](#). EDF Human Rights officer took part in a fact-finding mission organized by the



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Social Platform to South Sweden in December 2016. The purpose of the visit was to gather evidence on the solutions and challenges faced in the integration of migrant/refugees in Sweden. The visit will serve as a starting point to the work that the Social Platform will continue next year, to develop our recommendations to the European Union on economic inclusion of migrants, including how to best ensure opportunities on the labour market for low- and medium-skilled migrant workers.

#### 4. Future plans

It is important that EDF can now take more concrete steps with our members to improve the situation of refugees with disabilities.

- The EESC **hearing on refugees with disabilities takes place on February 14<sup>th</sup>, with EDF involved**. The objective of the hearing is to draw attention on the situation of refugees with disabilities, by raising awareness among organizations working with them on the rights and needs of persons with disabilities. In the first part we will focus on the situation in Greece and will present the report and recommendations issuing from the EESC visit to Lesbos and Athens in October 2016. In the second part we will enlarge the picture and look at what the EU and civil society can do to tackle the crisis in particular with regard to vulnerable refugees and migrants. Please see the draft programme in Annex.
- The Greek national council NCDP has a pilot initiative agreed with **United Nations High Commissioners of Refugees** on training of staff. This is a concrete follow up to the mission that took place in Greece with the EESC.
- We are coordinating closely with **Human Rights Watch** at EU level following their [report](#) and planning a **hearing in the European Parliament** on this in March, focussing on the situation in Greece. This event will bring together representatives from organizations of people with disabilities, human rights organizations, humanitarian organizations, and the European Union. It will provide a forum for the discussion of the situation of refugees and asylum-seekers with disabilities. By doing so, it aims at providing recommendations to humanitarian organizations, Greek authorities and the European Union to respond to the rights and needs of refugees and asylum-seekers with disabilities and develop more inclusive humanitarian response in line with the CRPD.
- A pilot programme and work plan for the EDF email expert group on the topic will be elaborated in the coming weeks for 2017.