

DOC-BOARD-22-11-05

Accession to the EU and advancing the rights of persons with disabilities

Document for information and discussion

Purpose of this item

The EU has 27 member states and a number of member states on the official path to EU memberships- known as accession. The purpose of this item is to update the board about EU accession, and how we can, with our members and partners, advance the rights of persons with disabilities through this process. The accession countries are: Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Moldova, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine. This paper will be supported by a presentation and direct input from our member in Serbia represented by Ivanka Jovanovic.

Questions for the board

- Are you personally or, is your organisation engaged in working with the disability movement in accession countries to the EU?
- Do you have any suggestions for EDF work in that region?

Overview

Accession to the EU is an acknowledged strategic opportunity for national organizations for people with disabilities (DPOs) to advance disability rights and implement the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Although the process of accession takes on average nine years, it does provide a clear chance for DPOs to leverage and effect significant change if well exploited.

Current applications by Member States to become part of the EU are (in application order):

- Turkey (applied in 1987),
- North Macedonia (2004),
- Montenegro (2008),

- Albania (2009),
- Serbia (2009),
- Ukraine (2022),
- Moldova (2022).

In recent years, EDF did not have resources to engage in this scope of work and we did not follow it closely. However, this is back on our radar due to our increased engagement in the eastern European region. DPOs in Ukraine and Moldova see accession as a big opportunity for improving disability policies, and our members in the western Balkans continue to engage in the process.

Our work so far

- Consultation with our members (so far) from North Macedonia, Serbia and Ukraine as well as DPO partners in Moldova
- Following-up on the European Disability Summit on International Cooperation we had in February 2022, so it becomes embedded as part of the Global Disability Summit (next one is in 2025 in Germany). EDF wants to bring more focuses on Eastern and Central Europe.

Our future work

- Develop a strategy around the following three pillars:
 - EU- including the accession process at the EU level
 - National work- supporting DPOs national efforts to influence accession
 - Networking and building capacity – amongst members in these countries
- Mobilise resources to support this work
- Support SUSTENTO in developing the Riga Disability Rights Academy, to train activists, organisations and government officials in the region
- Organise monthly online exchanges on various topics decided by members
- Organise workshop with all DPOs to share and learn from each other on EU accession