



Brussels, April 15th 2020

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Subject: COVID 19 economic recovery planning – planning for sustainable inclusive societies

Open letter addressed to the:

President of the European Council,

President of the Eurogroup,

President of the European Parliament,

President of the European Commission,

President of the European Central Bank,

President of the European Investment Bank,

President of the Committee of the Regions,

President of the European Economic and Social Committee,

All heads of State and Government of the European Union.

Copied to:

Members of the European Parliament

Commissioner for Equality

The European Disability Forum is an umbrella organisation of persons with disabilities that defends the interests of over 100 million persons with disabilities in Europe. We are a unique platform which brings together representative organisations of persons with disabilities. We are run by persons with disabilities and their families. We are a strong, united voice of persons with disabilities.

Our members have been working tirelessly to promote the rights of persons with disabilities during the COVID 19 crisis. We would like to express our deepest concern about the situation for Europe's 100 million persons with disabilities during this time and call on EU leaders to plan for a fully inclusive COVID 19 response and recovery which builds a more inclusive Europe.

This crisis has highlighted the catastrophic impact of underinvestment in social and health services in Europe. The economic recovery, which you are currently planning, should fully address the cracks in the system. Life-saving treatment and protective equipment are currently being denied to citizens who need them, and persons with disabilities are being stripped of the support needed to live their lives, due to service providers being left unprotected and unable to continue their work. Political and financial support needs to be given to social, employment and health services that keep our societies running; these services have proved essential during this crisis.

The impact of COVID 19 on employment and income stability is justifiably an area of deep concern for policy makers. It should be recognised that it is having a double impact on persons with disabilities, particularly women with disabilities. Even before this crisis, 28.7% of persons with disabilities in the EU were at risk of poverty, and only 50.8% were employed. Many persons with disabilities have precarious contracts and low salaries, giving them little or no protection during business closures.

The response to the COVID 19 pandemic should not simply target a return to the status quo ante. We should invest in a Europe that provides better protection for its citizens, guarantees social protection and inclusion, and creates more resilient employment and health structures.

While flexibility should be shown in funding actions to save lives and protect people's livelihoods during and after the pandemic, these must always be done in line with the EU and Member States' human rights commitments. The protection of life and respect for human rights are inseparable.

Actions need to be taken to avoid COVID 19 creating long-term damage to our societies and economies. We therefore call on you to:

- Earmark a considerable percentage of funds in the EU Budget post-2020 for the social inclusion of those who were at high risk of poverty and social exclusion and now find themselves even further marginalised, including persons with disabilities.
- Earmark EU funding from the European Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative specifically to support community-based disability support services in the medium and long-term. Investment through this Initiative and from the European Investment Bank should not be used for structures that segregate persons with disabilities, which is contrary to the EU's human rights commitments, except for investment in hygiene measures to protect persons with disabilities and staff from COVID 19.
- Ensure that this funding particularly supports the transition to community-based living, as persons with disabilities in residential institutions are especially at risk of infection, abuse and neglect.
- Ensure that this funding is provided for the foreseeable future and adapts to the fact that many persons with disabilities will be likely to be requested to self-isolate for a longer period than the average population.

- Include representative organisations of persons with disabilities in the committees, taskforces and other bodies established to discuss, decide and monitor the crisis response to COVID 19 and ensuing economic recovery at both EU and national level.
- Include health and social services, including disability services (inclusive education, inclusive employment, personalised support, etc) when monitoring the liquidity in cash and capital for businesses: every person with disabilities has the right to appropriate care and these services need funds to provide it. Create measures to monitor the attribution of these funds and guarantee that health and social services remain sustainable and are able to cope with, and adapt to new forms of service delivery. Ensure that there are no financial barriers to access healthcare.
- Ensure that new flexibility in the use of Structural Funds and State Aid does not result in divestment from actions foreseen to support the social inclusion of persons with disabilities.
- Ensure extensive collection of data on COVID 19, its consequences and the response is disaggregated by age, sex and disability so that targeted support measures can be developed to prevent the situation of persons with disabilities worsening.
- Put in place, within the framework of the financial stimulus measures already proposed, financial measures to support persons with disabilities. These measures may include, but are not limited to, lump sum payments for qualifying individuals, tax relief measures, subsidisation of goods or leniency for the payment of specific expenses, automatic extension of any soon-to-expire disability related entitlements, extension of cash transfers and disability entitlements to all persons with disabilities officially registered that may not be eligible under regular circumstances.

100 million persons with disabilities and their families in Europe are looking forward to hearing from you that their needs are properly included in Europe's COVID-19 recovery measures.

EDF is ready to work closely with you on a disability inclusive COVID-19 recovery planning.

Yours sincerely,

Yannis Vardakastanis

President

European Disability Forum

Additional information:

- Letter to Commissioner for Equality
- [Open letter to leaders at the EU and in EU countries: COVID-19 – disability inclusive response](#)
- [Our letter to EU Commissioner for Health Stella Kyriakides](#)
- Our statement "[Persons with disabilities stripped of support and protective equipment during COVID 19 crisis](#)"
- Our statement "[Residential institutions are becoming hotbeds of infection and abuse – governments need to act now](#)"
- [Letter to World Health Organisation from the International Disability Alliance](#)
- Our open letter "[COVID 19 - medical guidelines should not discriminate against persons with disabilities](#)"
- [EDF members' activities](#)