

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Recommendation 361 (2014)¹ Promoting equal opportunities for people with disabilities and their participation at local and regional levels

1. An estimated 15% of Europeans live with a disability, and one European in four has a family member with a disability. The Council of Europe recognised the need to promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities and committed to implementing its Disability Action Plan 2006-2015, adopted by Committee of Ministers Recommendation Rec(2006)5. This commitment was developed further in Recommendation CM/Rec(2009)8 on achieving full participation through Universal Design; Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)2 on deinstitutionalisation and community living of children with disabilities; Recommendation CM/Rec(2011)14 on the participation of persons with disabilities in political and public life; Recommendation CM/Rec(2012)6 on the protection and promotion of the rights of women and girls with disabilities; and Recommendation CM/Rec(2013)2 on ensuring full inclusion of children and young persons with disabilities into society.

2. Referring to its Resolution 371 (2014) on promoting equal opportunities for people with disabilities and their participation at local and regional levels, the Congress notes with concern, however, that many people with disabilities in Europe continue to face difficulties in exercising their right to vote and to participate in decision making, as well as a lack of access to both physical (built) and non-physical (policy) environments, which represents a major barrier to their self-realisation, full integration into society and meaningful participation in democracy. They also experience difficulties with having access to education and vocational training, health care, employment and housing, and with maintaining an adequate standard of living. The impact of the economic crisis has further undermined progress towards full realisation of their rights, as austerity measures and budgetary cuts to social programmes contribute to exposing people with disabilities to higher risks of exclusion, poverty, discrimination, marginalisation, illiteracy and negative stereotypes.

3. The Congress is convinced that mainstreaming disability in national, regional and local policies is key to promoting equal opportunities for people with impairments, and that such mainstreaming requires both the inclusion of disability issues in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes at all levels of

governance, and the participation of persons with disabilities and their representative organisations as an integral part of this process. In this regard, local and regional authorities can make a genuine difference in ensuring equal opportunities for persons with disabilities, their participation in decision making and their access to social rights, by adapting the built environment and inclusion policies and practices, and by providing individually tailored social support.

4. The Congress is also convinced that the right of people with disabilities to vote and to stand as a candidate in elections, together with their meaningful involvement in policy decision-making, constitute essential components of their participation in political life.

5. In the light of the above, the Congress requests that the Committee of Ministers invite member States of the Council of Europe to:

a. ratify, if they have not yet done so, the 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and establish appropriate mechanisms to monitor its implementation;

b. ensure the compliance of their national legal frameworks with the provisions of the Council of Europe Disability Action Plan 2006-2015 and the Committee of Ministers recommendations referred to in paragraph 1 above;

c. in particular, revise the legal provisions as appropriate in order to ensure the effective exercise of legal capacity for persons with certain types of impairments and their right to vote and to stand as a candidate in elections;

d. develop and implement, with the participation of local and regional authorities and disabled people's organisations (DPOs), national strategies and action plans for ensuring equal rights and opportunities for persons with disabilities and their participation, focusing on mainstreaming disability in national development policies and programmes, improving accessibility of the built environment and ensuring access to social rights;

e. set up mechanisms to co-ordinate the implementation of these strategies and action plans at subnational level, aimed at building synergies with local and regional measures and providing support to local and regional action plans on disability;

f. establish national mechanisms for the effective involvement of disabled people's organisations in decision-making processes;

g. ensure sufficient budgetary funds for social services at local and regional levels in order to enable the full participation of people with disabilities.

1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 14 October 2014, 1st Sitting (see Document CPL(27)8FINAL, explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: Josef Neumann, Germany (R, SOC).