

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Resolution 371 (2014)¹ Promoting equal opportunities for people with disabilities and their participation at local and regional levels

1. According to estimates, over 15% of Europeans live with a disability, and one European in four has a family member with a disability. Persons with disabilities are entitled to enjoy the same human and fundamental rights, and equal opportunities for a life without discrimination in all its dimensions, as anyone else, regardless of the nature and severity of their impairments. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD), adopted in December 2006, represents a major step towards the recognition of disability as a human rights issue, and a commitment to enable people with disabilities to play an active role in policy-making and participatory democracy.

2. The “social model of disability” established under the UN CRPD moves away from the impairment of the individual to the ability – or inability – of society to ensure equal access to his or her rights. This model recognises that it is the environment that is disabling and not the impairment itself, and that disability is the result of the dynamic interaction between persons with impairments and the social, physical and attitudinal barriers they face. This approach shifts policy and action on disability from protection to inclusion, stressing that people with impairments are not a vulnerable group in need of protection from public administrations but active players in political decision making, with their unique potential, talents and strengths.

3. The Council of Europe recognised the need to promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities and committed to implementing its Action Plan to promote the rights and full participation of people with disabilities in society: improving the quality of life of people with disabilities 2006-2015, adopted in the Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/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.

4. 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-fulfilment, full integration into society and meaningful participation in democracy. People with disabilities also experience difficulties accessing education and vocational training, health care, employment and housing, and with maintaining a decent standard of living. The impact of the economic crisis has further undermined progress towards full realisation of the rights of people with disabilities, as austerity measures and budgetary cuts to social programmes expose them to higher risks of exclusion, poverty, discrimination, marginalisation, illiteracy and negative stereotypes.

5. The Congress is convinced that 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. The Congress notes in this regard the continued relevance of its Resolution 227 (2007) on access to public spaces and amenities for people with disabilities.

6. The Congress is also convinced that mainstreaming disability issues 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.

7. In the light of the above, the Congress invites local and regional authorities of the Council of Europe member States to implement, within the remit of their competences, the relevant provisions of the Council of Europe Disability Action Plan 2006-2015 and the Committee of Ministers recommendations referred to in paragraph 3 above, as well as Resolution 227 (2007) of the Congress on access to public spaces and amenities for people with disabilities, and in particular to:

a. develop, with the participation of disabled people’s organisations, local and regional strategies and action plans for ensuring equal rights and opportunities for persons with disabilities and their participation, focusing on:

i. mainstreaming disability issues in local and regional development policies and programmes, in particular those dealing with social protection and inclusion;

ii. improving accessibility of the built environment, goods and services, information and communication;

iii. ensuring access to social rights such as inclusive education, employment and vocational training, health care and housing;

b. set up, as appropriate, local and regional disability councils to co-ordinate the implementation of these strategies and action plans, and establish mechanisms for the effective involvement of persons with disabilities and their representative organisations in all stages of decision-making processes at regional and community levels;

c. develop operational guides on how to foster access to education, employment, health, social protection and community-based services for persons with disabilities, and facilitate synergies between local and regional stakeholders in the education system and the employment, welfare and health sectors;

d. implement specific programmes and measures addressing disadvantages of persons with disabilities in vocational training and recruitment programmes as well as the working environment;

e. pursue inclusive education policies providing for the enrolment of pupils with disabilities into mainstream schools, involvement of young disabled people as well as

their parents and representative organisations in educational policy making, and adaptation of schooling facilities;

f. provide targeted training programmes for health-care workers, general practitioners and service providers aimed at equipping them with adequate knowledge and skills on how to manage the health-care needs of people with disabilities and to improve their access to comprehensive health-care services.

8. The Congress instructs its Current Affairs Committee to continue to address questions related to improving the opportunities available to people with disabilities and their participation at local and regional levels, and to ensure that relevant good practices are disseminated to local and regional authorities, *inter alia* through their national and European associations.

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