



The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities **entered into force on 3 May 2008**. Not only is it the first human rights treaty of the 21<sup>st</sup> century but it also **marks the official recognition of disability as a human rights issue** by confirming a radical shift of approach regarding disability from a medical/charity model to a human rights/social model.

Consequently, this UN Convention sets a new perspective for those foundations active in the field of disability, human rights, social economy and inclusion providing them with a unique opportunity to influence the reform process that is long over-due in this sector. **It creates a new opportunity for foundations to break new ground in these interrelated fields of action.**

## *European Foundations and the UN Convention*

**In this perspective, Fundación ONCE, Fondazione Banca del Monte di Lucca, Fondation de France, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Sabanci Foundation, The Atlantic Philanthropies, Fondazione Cassa Risparmio di Torino and Essl Foundation** have decided to work together, in the form of a European Consortium, to make a distinctive contribution to mobilising the foundation sector. The aim is for foundations to play a catalytic role in ensuring that the European Union and the European governments and other relevant stakeholders commit to and support both the ratification and implementation of the Convention.

The Consortium is organised under the umbrella of the EFC. No activity regarding disability makes any sense without the involvement of persons with disabilities ("Nothing about us without us"). For this reason, the Consortium works in close cooperation with organisations representing persons with disabilities already active in the European disability field, and has signed a memorandum of understanding and cooperation with the European Disability Forum (EDF).

The Consortium liaises regularly with the European Commission, the European Parliament Disability Intergroup and those national government units which have been designated as responsible for the implementation of the Convention in the Member States.

## *A selection of Consortium activities*

- A series of **high-level seminars for experts** have been held at the European Economic and Social Committee to provide policy makers and legislators with solutions to issues emerging from the Convention, which required clarification or further discussion. So far three such seminars have been organised.
- Legal professionals play a crucial role in the practical implementation of any international treaty on equality and anti-discrimination. However, they are too often left out of the debate on its practical implementation. In order to avoid this, the Consortium has participated as content advisers to the Commission's Tender to organise **conferences to train legal operators on the UNCRPD together with ERA** (European Academy of Law) in Trier. Two additional conferences for judges and Legal Practitioners are planned for 2012.
- The Consortium launched the **League of Historical Accessible Cities project**, to improve accessibility in historical towns. The project is currently being implemented simultaneously in 5 different Historical European cities (Avila, Lucca, Mulhouse, Turin, and Viborg) and one of its main out-comes will be the creation of a best practices technical guide providing innovative solutions to tackle the issue of accessibility in historical towns.
- The Consortium also carried out a **Study on the Challenges and Good Practices in the Implementation of the UN Convention** on behalf of the European Commission. This research report, launched in February 2011, analysed in detail the obligations set forth in the Convention and provides information on the various practices, giving recommendations on the implementation of the Convention by the European Union and its Member States. The report was compiled by a high-level team of academics and researchers as well as the

European organisation representing persons with disabilities, as part of the civil society panel.

- The report's conclusions and recommendations have contributed to shaping the European debate about the strategic direction and dynamics of European disability law reform, and also informed about the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 that the European Commission has adopted.

**Examples of activities planned for 2012:**

**2012 brings a new and unprecedented political context** in the European Union to develop policies and practices to promote the rights of people with disabilities. We have decided to closely monitor developments in the much more difficult economic environment with severe financial cuts affecting public services in most European countries. A comparative study will be launched shortly.

The New Lisbon Treaty, the ratification of the UN Convention by the European Union and the New European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 set the stage for an unprecedented opportunity to help improve the lives of people with disabilities in Europe. The Vice President of the European Commission, Vivian Reding, has made a commitment to launch a proposal for a new European Accessibility Act before the end of 2012.

The European Consortium will monitor these developments very closely, while supporting the European Disability Forum and the European NGOs representing people with disabilities in Europe.

- The Consortium will continue to press for the new Regulation governing in **EU Structural Funds** to respect and support the implementation of the Convention, influencing the **Structural Funds**, raising awareness amongst Commission officials, MEPs and Member States (MS) of obligations.
- The Consortium will also produce a **Study on the impact of financial cuts on the rights of people with disability resulting from the economic crisis**. The austerity measures by European Governments all include drastic reductions on social policies and provisions. The Consortium has launched a call for proposals to gather comparative data of a representative sample of European countries. By gathering concrete data on the impact this will have on the full and equal participation of people with disabilities in society we can inform other stakeholders and decision makers of the danger and provide an appropriate political tool for putting pressure on the obligations derived from the Convention.
- In view of the elaboration of the **European Accessibility Act**, announced by Commissioner Viviane Reding by the end of 2012, the Consortium plans a high level conference on accessibility and will present a position paper on this subject to the European Commission.
- The Consortium will work with EESL Foundation to develop further its 2010 **Zero Project report**, with the aim of adjusting it to different countries' needs and specificities. This Study aims at evaluating the real picture on the implementation of the Convention rather than a scientific/ academic approach.

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