**the European Structural and Investment Funds 2014 – 2020:**

**The NCDP OBSERVATORY ON DISABILITY ISSUES**

*Presentation of Ms. Foteini Zafeiropoulou, Member of the Executive Secretariat of the NCDP in the Annual General Assembly of the European Disability Forum*

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*Dear colleagues,*

On behalf of the National Confederation of Disabled People (NCDP), the umbrella organization representing the disability movement in Greece, I will try to share with you briefly our own experience concerning the implementation of the European Structural and Investment Funds at national level.

At a very early stage, NCDP realized that -due to economic and financial crisis- these Funds were the only tools which could be used for the implementation of the requirements of the UNCRPD at national level, especially those referred to accessibility (article 9) and non-discrimination (article 5) since the article 7 “Promotion of equality between men and women and non-discrimination” of the EU General Regulation 1303/2013 is fully aligned with them.

Thus:

-The NCDP was involved in the preparations of the Greek Partnership Agreement and the Operational Programs 2014 – 2020 as well in its capacity as a member of Monitoring Committees with voting rights. Many of our proposals were included in the final texts of the Operational Programs, sectoral and regional ones. A simple proof of our effective action is the special reference to the NCDP, 7 times in the text of the Greek Partnership Agreement 2014-2020!

-In March 2014, a Working Group on the mainstreaming of disability dimension and accessibility principle, was established under the Ministry of Economy and the National Monitoring Authority with NCDP’s participation for the fulfillment of the Ex-ante Conditionality 3, and mainly of its 2nd criterion which concerns the “*Training for staff of the authorities involved in the management and control of the ESI Funds in the fields of applicable Union and national disability law and policy, including accessibility and the practical application of the UNCRPD as reflected in Union and national legislation”.*

After the NCDP proposals, the National Monitoring Authority and the Monitoring Committees of all Operational Programs adopted a special ON/OFF eligibility criterion for accessibility to persons with disabilities. Furthermore, an annex concerning the accessibility to persons with disabilities of the information and communication actions of all regional and sectoral Operational Programms was included in the Communication Guide of the Greek Partnership Agreement 2014 – 2020.

-Also, NCDP established a help desk and 14 Technical Meetings were held all over the country to support Managing Authorities and main beneficiaries in specializing and implementing the principle of non-discrimination on the ground of disability and the accessibility criterion according to the provisions of articles 5 and 9 of the UNCRPD. In addition to the disability mainstreaming, NCDP proposed also actions targeted persons with disabilities under all thematic objectives. 172 executives from the 18 Managing Authorities of the Sectoral and Regional Operational Programs and 700 representatives of beneficiaries participated in the above mentioned meetings.

This period we are working on several projects funded by ESIF 2014-2020. I will focus only on two of them:

* The first concerns the creation of a manual, based on article 9 of the UNCRPD and the national legislation’ provisions, which can support the Managing Authorities to answer questions of the potential beneficiaries concerning the implementation of accessibility as well as to evaluate the submitted deliverables. This project, even with a small budget, is evidence that Authorities place trust in the NCDP work and knowhow.
* The second, with a budget of 1.500.000€ as well as a huge importance for the national disability movement, concerns the creation and operation by NCDP of an “Observatory on Disability issues”. It is an initiative launched by the NCDP, co-funded by the European Social Fund and implemented in the framework of the Greek Operational Programme "Human Resources Development, Education and Lifelong Learning 2014-2020".

*The aims of the “Observatory on Disability issues” are:*

* + to work as a disability policies monitoring and evaluating mechanism,
  + to strengthen the capacity building of NCDP as a disability policy maker,
  + to work as a human rights watch for persons with disabilities in Greece,
  + to monitor the implementation of the UNCRPD at national level,
  + to produce evidence-based political recommendations, which could contribute to the planning of a national disability strategy based on the human rights-based approach as enshrined by the UNCRPD,
  + to be the main source of information on disability issues, not only for the competent public authorities but also for Civil Society Organizations, DPOs, persons with disabilities and their families themselves etc,
  + to raise awareness about the real situation of persons with disabilities and their rights,
  + to disseminate the social model of disability at national level.

In order to fulfill its aims, the Observatory should develop a multiple activity. More specifically, Observatory is an umbrella project which consists of:

* scientific and research activities,
  + networking & awareness raising actions,
  + Information and counseling services for persons with disabilities and

The whole project is subdivided into 4 sub-projects, which are the following:

* Design and Operation of the “Observatory on Disability Issues” (Direct Labour)
* Development of the application (software) of the “Observatory on Disability Issues” (Open international tender)
* Conduct Studies-Researches and national reports to support the operation of the Observatory (Open international tender)
* Publishing of the results in conventional and alternative forms (Open international tender)

**The Observatory:**

-has started cooperating closely with the Hellenic Statistical Authority and other public authorities, which are included in the Greek statistical system, in order to develop, produce and disseminate statistics concerning not only persons with disabilities but also the obstacles persons with disabilities are facing when exercising their rights. The collaboration and consultation of Greek authorities with the NCDP’s Observatory is already imposed by the national legislation frame.

-has issued 2 statistical releases so far, one for poverty and social exclusion and one for the employment of Greek citizens with disabilities.

- cooperated with the Educational Policy Development Center of the General Confederation of Greek Workers on the elaboration of its annual report on education, which was dedicated to the education of persons with disabilities.