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TO THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT,  
THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE  
AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

**ON THE EVALUATION OF THE THIRD COMMUNITY ACTION  
PROGRAMME TO ASSIST DISABLED PEOPLE (HELIOS II)**

**1993-1996**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Third Community Action Programme to assist disabled people, known as the "**HELIOS II programme**", was established by Council Decision 93/136/EEC of 25 February 1993<sup>1</sup>. It covered the period 1 January 1993 to 31 December 1996.

Article 11(3) of the above-mentioned Decision establishes that the Commission must submit, before 1 July 1997 a full report to the European Parliament, the Council and the Economic and Social Committee on the implementation and the results of HELIOS II.

In accordance with Article 11 (4) of the Decision of 25 February 1993 and with section 1.2 of the Annex to the Decision, the report is essentially based on the outcome of an independent and objective evaluation of all the measures adopted under HELIOS II<sup>2</sup>. It seeks to give an overview of the findings of the independent evaluation, and its implications for future actions in the field of disability.

## **2. OVERVIEW OF THE HELIOS II PROGRAMME**

### **2.1 Objectives**

The HELIOS II programme was set up with the aim of promoting equal opportunities for and integration of disabled people. Underlying these aims are four key objectives:

1. to develop and improve exchange and information activities with Member States and non governmental organisations;
2. to promote effective approaches and measures in order to achieve increased effectiveness and better co-ordination of actions;
3. to promote the development of a policy at Community level of co-operation with the Member States and the organisations and associations concerned with integration, based on the best innovative and effective experience and practice in Member States;
4. to continue co-operation with European NGOs and NGOs which are regarded as representative in the respective Member States, through national disability councils.

### **2.2 Measures**

The main measures designed to promote these objectives were as follows :

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<sup>1</sup> OJ L56/30 of 9.3.93.

<sup>2</sup> For this reason, the evaluation was entrusted by the Commission, following an invitation to tender, to the Tavistock Institute (United Kingdom) in co-operation with three other research institutes: Nexus (Ireland), ECWS (Netherlands) and Prisma (Greece). The report is available as a working document of the services of the Commission (in English only).

1. Activities relating to exchange and information between the Member States : consisting of conferences, seminars, exchange of information, study visits and training courses organised in the areas of functional rehabilitation, educational integration, economic integration and social integration for people with disabilities. Participants in such activities were appointed by the Member States.
2. Collection, exchange and dissemination of information gathered in the Member States through the development of the computerised information and documentation system HANDYNET
3. Co-operation with NGOs through the funding of conference, study visits, training courses and other European-scale co-operative activities, the provision of information for NGOs on actions undertaken at Community level and advice from the NGOs to the Commission on specific issues
4. Information and awareness-raising aimed at public opinion through the award of annual prizes for model projects in the various fields relating to integration of disabled people and through media activities

### 2.3 Funding

The amount of funds estimated to be necessary for the implementation of the programme was 37 million ECU. The budget allocation was 40.16 MECU and the amount effectively spent was 39.74 MECU.

The breakdown of funding per year was as follows (in million ECU):

Year	Budget	Execution
1993	5.60	5.40
1994	10.06	10.04
1995	11.81	11.78
1996	12.69	12.52

### 2.4 Management structure of the programme

The central management of the programme was undertaken by the Commission with the support of an external technical assistance office (the HELIOS Team of Experts) and a number of consultative committees including:

- **Advisory Committee:** made up of Member State government representatives;
- **European Disability Forum:** made up of National Disability Councils and European NGOs;

- **Liaison Group:** made up of representatives from the other two committees, set up to provide an interface between them.

At national level, the consultative mechanisms of the programme required a national co-ordinating body represented on the advisory committee, and a national disability council represented on the European Disability Forum. The national co-ordinating body was responsible for the selection of participants for Information and Exchange activities, and provision of support for, and evaluation of, HELIOS II activities at national and local level. An important part of this task was the organisation of national information days, usually on an annual basis. The variations in co-ordinating structures from country to country meant that these provided rather varied opportunities for co-ordination and information exchange.

At local level, information and exchange activities were co-ordinated by lead members among the participants themselves. The HELIOS Team of Experts had a major role in providing support to the co-ordinators of activities at a local level.

## 2.5 Overview of the participants in the programme

The activities of HELIOS II provided opportunities for a large number of organisations involved in the field of disability at local, national and European levels, to become involved in discussions and exchange with similar organisations from other Member States. This included around **1150 core participants**, who had a continuing involvement in programme activities throughout the three years, and around **30,000 peripheral participants** whose involvement was more limited.

### Core HELIOS II participants

Members of Consultative Structures	Number of Organisations	Characteristics
Advisory committee	34 <sup>3</sup>	National government officials
European Disability Forum	17 <sup>3</sup> 13 2	National Disability Councils European NGOs Social partners
Working groups	84 <sup>3</sup>	Government officials, NGOs and professional experts
<b>Participants in local activities</b>		
Participants in Information and Exchange activities	832 <sup>3</sup>	Mainly organisations providing services to disabled people and education institutes
Participants in HANDYNET centres	142	Experts and service providers.

<sup>3</sup> These included representatives from Norway and Iceland

Peripheral participants included organisations and individuals involved in the NGO exchange activities<sup>4</sup>, the members of the NGOs represented on the consultative committees of the programme (856 National and European NGOs) and applicants in the annual HELIOS II competitions (around 200 a year). Beyond this, there were also the participants in National Information Days organised by individual Member States (no consistent data available on numbers involved), other members of the organisations that participated in HELIOS II activities, and the readers of its various outputs. Potentially, the last of these included a very broad spectrum of disability organisations across Europe: the mailing list for HELIOSCOPE and Flash was over 30,000.

### **3. EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAMME**

The main findings of the external evaluation are developed below.

#### **3.1 HELIOS II as a laboratory**

HELIOS II incorporated a number of innovative aspects which took forward Community approaches to disability policy in three important ways:

1. Where earlier action programmes tended to emphasise a 'welfare' orientation towards disability, HELIOS II focused more on issues of equal opportunities and integration.
2. Rather than promoting change via support for pilot actions or demonstration projects, HELIOS II operated within a social learning model of change, based on local exchange, combined with a more policy-led model of action, the latter being pursued through the dissemination of learning derived from local exchanges and the provision of a structure for co-operation between organisations at national and European levels.
3. HELIOS II was the first action programme in which a formal structure was established for consultation with disabled people and their organisations.

The innovative aspects of HELIOS II gave a strong experimental element to the whole programme which, combined with its emphasis on exchange and learning, suggested that the programme could be seen in some respects as a 'laboratory' in which issues related to disability, equal opportunities and integration could be examined, new understandings forged, and new solutions tested before being disseminated to a wider audience. In this respect, it was important for the evaluation to pay close attention not only to the outcomes of the programme, but also the processes by which these outcomes were achieved.

#### **3.2 Evaluation of the programme processes**

Three processes are examined under this heading: the involvement in the programme of disabled people, the management of the programme, and the synergy of the programme with other actions taking place in the field of disability.

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<sup>4</sup> Extrapolating from a sample of annual sector reports estimated at around 24,000 a year.

### 3.2.1 Participation of disabled people in HELIOS II <sup>5</sup>

Although major steps were taken to encourage a high level of representation of disabled people and their organisations in some of the consultative structures of the programme, there were areas of the programme in which disabled people remained underrepresented.

This was particularly true of activities in the information and exchange programme. The choice of participants in these activities was mainly the result of Member States' strategies for nominating participants and their strategy for disseminating information about the upcoming programme. However, a number of structural problems remained which also inhibited the ability of disabled people, and disability organisations, from participating in the programme on an equal basis to professionals and professional service organisations. These included:

- Availability of resources and suitable facilities: organisers of exchange activities often failed to take into account the need for fully accessible facilities, and timetables appropriate to the needs of disabled participants. Part-funding of activities and the late reimbursement of expenditure presented financial difficulties.
- Accessibility of information: too much information and the late arrival of information prior to meetings presented problems, particularly for participants in the consultative structures who needed to consult with their members.
- The level of involvement was a particular problem with information and exchange activities, where local organisations were invited to encourage a higher proportion of disabled participants, but made it difficult to maintain continuity of involvement.
- The quality of the discussion that took place: a tendency remained, in some activities, for some professionals to regard disabled people as lacking the necessary expertise to take part in discussions on an equal basis, and disabled participants sometimes felt that professionals and service providers were more interested in maintaining the status quo than in change.

In response to widespread concern, expressed at the under representation of disabled people in programme activities in the early stages of the programme, efforts were made by the Commission to increase their involvement. These efforts had a positive impact, particularly in those sectors where involvement of disabled people is not part of the traditional approach. Participation in the sector on social integration was from the start reasonably high (around 50%); in the sectors of functional rehabilitation and education the proportion of disabled participants moved up to 20%; and in economic integration the proportion doubled from approximately 20% to 40% by the end of the programme.

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<sup>5</sup> Although a primary focus of the evaluation activities was on the participation of disabled people in programme activities, it should be noted that concern was also expressed at the under-representation of other groups. For example, in activities within the economic integration sector, the lack of involvement of employers was noticeable and in some NGO exchange activities, there were very few national and European representatives with a policy remit.



Partly as a result of these efforts, many of the exchange activities did represent a major step forward in encouraging a dialogue between service providers and disabled people. This appears to be having repercussions in terms of changing attitudes in the organisations to which participants returned and wider national policies.

### 3.2.2 Effectiveness of the management structures

Concerns were raised at the start of HELIOS II regarding the complexity of the programme structures, which led to the focusing of evaluation activities on this element of the programme.

Overall, there was broad agreement that the support provided by the Commission and the HELIOS Team of Experts was effective, and welcomed, particularly by the participants in programme activities at a local level. However, the evaluation highlights that considerable resources are required, particularly in encouraging a high level of participation of disabled people in the programme. The resources requirement needed to take into account both the overall manpower requirements and the kind of expertise required, which included general experience of the disability field and issues related to effective integration and participation by disabled people.

Other areas of difficulty that were identified related to the consultative structures of the programme, and the level of communication that took place between the Commission and national government departments, and in some cases, between different ministries at a national level. One of the central difficulties in the consultative structures was the different lines of development which took place between the two main consultative bodies (the Advisory Committee and the European Disability Forum) and the fact that the Liaison group was insufficiently robust to deal with the differences between the two committees.

### 3.2.3 Structural links between different Community initiatives

The structural links between HELIOS II and other programmes and initiatives at Community level were maintained by the Commission via an interservice group, and through the consultative structures of the programme. Important changes took place in some of the other programmes and initiatives relating to disability, which can be seen to be directly related to the links established by the Commission at this level (see section 3.3.3.)

At national level, structural links between different Community programmes and initiatives related to disability were established in around half the Member States. However, it must be noted that in larger Member States, responsibility for different Community programmes and initiatives often falls within different ministries, which limits the extent of co-operation and co-ordination between officials at this level. A few countries adopted a conscious policy of encouraging participants in HELIOS II to apply for other programmes or initiatives, and some favoured participants in other Community activities in their selection of HELIOS II participants. This led to considerable overlap at a local level between programme participants, with around 60% the local participants in the HELIOS II programme either

involved in, or having applied for funding under, other Community programmes or initiatives. HORIZON was the most frequently mentioned initiative. Many participants indicated that taking part in HELIOS II had made a significant contribution to their ability to gain access to other Community activities through provision of information, opportunities to find partners, and through gaining experience of working at European level.

This highlights the distinctive nature of the HELIOS II programme, which did not in itself provide resources for demonstration or practical projects. However, the function it provided was very complementary to those that did, through providing opportunities to exchange information, develop ideas for new activities, and to gain experience.

### **3.3 EVALUATION OF THE IMPACT OF THE PROGRAMME**

The impact of HELIOS II has been examined in relation to three elements:

- the extent to which it promoted the transfer of learning related to 'effective approaches and measures' between participants at a local level;
- its contribution to networking and co-operation between disability organisations;
- and its contribution to synergy and policy development at national and European levels.

#### **3.3.1 Transfer of learning**

The transfer of learning within a programme such as HELIOS II can take place at a number of levels. It is helpful to distinguish between transfer as process (i.e. the exchange of information) versus transfer as outcome (i.e. the adoption of new practice) and internal transfer (between member of the programme) versus external transfer (dissemination of learning to a wider audience).

##### **A. Exchange between participants within the programme**

The level of exchange that took place between participants within the programme itself was widely reported as one of the most effective elements of the programme. Almost overwhelmingly, participants reported that they had derived value from their exchange experiences. For three quarters of respondents in the survey, this had led to a better concept of good practice, and ideas on how they could improve their services. The enhanced sense of solidarity (90%) and support they received from other participants (75%) were also valued.

Learning was more often conceived of in terms of cultural shift, rather than specific information: a new orientation towards disability issues or an increased openness to new ideas. Experience at this level highlighted some conditions which best promoted effective cross cultural, cross disability, and cross professional exchange.

##### **B. Dissemination of learning to others, outside the programme**

Information and learning derived from programme activities were shared with a wider audience either:

- through the efforts of the participants themselves, when they returned to their own location (horizontal transfer) or
- through the written reports and publications of the programme (vertical transfer)

### Horizontal Transfer

Most programme participants appear to have made considerable efforts to share the knowledge that they had derived from the programme with others. Typically, this took place through discussions with colleagues (97%), reports sent to members of their organisations (73%), or through articles sent to newsletters (57%), or disability journals (39%). Many organisations (75%) were also successful in obtaining some kind of **media coverage**, although they were usually more successful at local newspaper or radio coverage than either national, or television coverage and more successful with the specialist disability, rather than public, media.

The lack of resources was the main obstacle to sharing their experience with a wider population. HELIOS II did not fund wider dissemination activities (apart from national information days) and for organisations where staffing and resources were limited, this could present problems.

The role of **national co-ordinating bodies** was particularly important in ensuring the wider dissemination of the learning that arose from programme activities. 80% of participants in information and exchange activities reported having shared their experience of exchange activities with others at **HELIOS II conferences** and **national information days**.

### Vertical Dissemination

In addition to the dissemination of information via this horizontal exchange, a substantial number of information documents has been prepared to support the programme objectives..

Dissemination of materials was mostly through mailing to programme participants, or distribution by participants themselves. National representatives varied in their plans for any further dissemination; a few planned to send copies of materials to all local and regional authorities, while others had no clear plans for dissemination at all. This does raise the wider issue of the need for a clear dissemination strategy for materials generated by a programme of this kind. Wide dissemination of the learning derived from programme activities is an important prerequisite for the wide-scale debate of the issues.

HANDYNET was also criticised because it was more aligned to the needs of professionals than to the needs of disabled people themselves, although steps were taken part way through the programme, in response to the interim evaluation report, to involve disabled people and their organisations more actively in the development of the database.

C. Application of learning by participants in the programme

Although many participants (53% information and exchange and 56% NGO survey respondents) indicated that they had been able to adopt innovative practices in their organisations as a result of the programme activities, at or above their expectations, for many participants, translating ideas into practice was a long-term project. Some indicated that a process of change had begun, and attitudes within the organisations in which they worked had changed - an essential prelude to change. However, translating ideas into action often required resources. In this respect, they indicated that the programme had supported them in two ways:

- it reinforced the convictions that participants already had about new approaches, sometimes providing additional material with which to convince colleagues and obtain local funding;
- the programme had also helped many to gain access to another Community programme which did provide the resources for new projects.

#### D. Contribution of the programme to wider developments in policy and practice

Surveys of programme participants indicated that nearly half believed that they had had some influence on policy development at local (48%) or national (43%) level, although this was rarely as much as they would have liked to have achieved. However, many organisations felt that their public profile had been enhanced by the programme, which it was hoped would contribute to their ability to influence policy in the future. This element was also closely linked to the contribution that the programme had made towards networking and enhancing the lobbying capacity of disability organisations, which is discussed in the next section

### **3.3.2 Contribution to the development and support of networks**

Disability networks had an important role to play in the achievement of the main programme objectives. The extent, for example, to which HELIOS II was able to contribute to the transfer of learning across Europe was largely dependent on the capacities of organisations involved in exchange activities to disseminate information to a wider audience, which in turn was dependent on their networking capacities. There was also a view held by some participants that the most effective long-term contribution that the programme could make, towards promoting of equal opportunities and integration for disabled people, was through providing opportunities for disability organisations to build an effective platform, or lobby, from which to press for change at national and European levels.

There was considerable evidence to suggest the consultative structures of the HELIOS II programme, together with its funded activities, have made an important contribution to the level of networking taking place between organisations involved in disability issues, through fostering new networks, strengthening existing networks or encouraging networking between new groups of participants.

At European level, HELIOS II has greatly strengthened and enhanced the level of co-operation between European NGOs and between these and national NGOs, sometimes increasing the contact and level of consultation between these and national governments and local organisations. There appears to be a higher level of co-operation now around broad issues (such as promoting equal opportunities policies), rather than around individual

disability, or sector-specific issues. This in turn enables cross-disability / cross-sectoral dialogue to take place.

There is some evidence that co-operation between professional agencies and organisations representing disabled people have also been enhanced, and that participative structures have been also been strengthened, both within individual organisations and at national and European levels.

### **3.3.3 Contribution to the development of synergies between Community and national policies**

There does appear to have been a considerable shift towards increased synergy in the last few years, both between different Community programmes operating in the field of disability, in particular the Structural Funds, and between disability policies at a national level. The exact contribution of HELIOS II itself to this change is not easy to estimate at a time when many different forces are operating to shape social policies at all levels. However, it was apparent that the programme has provided important opportunities for dialogue between different parties, and the activities and structures of the programme have underlined and supported developments taking place elsewhere. In this respect, it has provided an important complementary function to Community action programmes and initiatives operating in the field of disability.

#### **A. Contribution to policy development at Community level**

The Communication of 30 July 1996 on Equality of Opportunity for People with Disabilities - A New Community Disability Strategy<sup>6</sup>, the Resolution of 20 December 1996 of the Council and Government representatives meeting within the Council on Equality of Opportunity of People with Disabilities<sup>7</sup> as well as the Resolution of the European Parliament of 13 December 1996 on the Rights of Disabled people<sup>8</sup> represent important steps forward in the development of equality of opportunity of people with disabilities at EU level. Debates taking place within the context of HELIOS II have provided an important input into the development of this policy.

One important source of influence has been the European Disability Forum, which as part of the consultative structure of the HELIOS II programme, has played an important role in raising awareness of issues which lie within the competence of the Union, and which have a direct bearing on the quality of life of disabled people. This has encouraged greater dialogue, both between different parts of the Commission, and between the Commission and disability organisations, on these issues.

Effective interventions and visible steps to consider the needs of disabled people in other European programmes have been taken during the last two years, when the "second generation" of Community Initiatives was introduced. This may be taken as an indication of the contribution of HELIOS II towards the achievement of synergy regarding disability-related policies at European level. Changes in the Community Initiatives and in EU

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<sup>6</sup> COM (406) final.

<sup>7</sup> OJ no C 12 of 13.01.97.

<sup>8</sup> OJ no C 20 of 20.01.97.

programmes to cater for the needs of persons with disability were identified for example in SOCRATES, YOUTH FOR EUROPE, LEONARDO and TIDE. Strong links have been established with HORIZON at national level, with considerable overlap between participants in the two programmes. A number of new actions have also been initiated after the end of HELIOS II, by other Commission Directorates-General, which represent an important step toward the mainstreaming of disability issues; such as the working groups sport and tourism, the setting-up by the Danish Government of an European Agency for Development in Special Education and the distribution of material generated by the exchange activities within the education sector.

#### B. Influence on policy development at national and local level

During the course of the HELIOS II programme, many Member States were involved in a process of implementing, or considering, major policy changes which would have an impact on the quality of life of disabled people. How far the HELIOS II programme had any influence on this was hard to assess. Changes in socio-economic conditions and in welfare systems were often more decisive; for example, in issues related to financial provisions and services for disabled people.

However, national representatives in a number of Member States indicated that HELIOS II had an influence on the development of national policy in the following ways:

- Providing background information and models of practice;
- Indicating areas in which national policy needed to be developed;
- Providing a forum in which different parties came together to discuss policy;
- Creating the necessary conditions for a change in policy (clear policies at a European level was indicated as relevant here);
- Reinforcing policy directions which were already under discussion;
- Enhancing support and solidarity between disability organisations, and strengthening their capacity to lobby for change.

Areas of policy influence included policies on anti-discrimination, equal opportunities, new technologies, training, pathways counselling and job coaching and the setting up of new interdepartmental committees and commissions. The priorities for change varied in each country; in many countries legislative changes are either in hand, or being considered in accordance with the philosophy of equal opportunities, but employment policies were also a high priority in a number of Member States, particularly finding the right balance between sheltered workshops, protected and supported employment initiatives. Other issues considered were accessibility (transport, buildings), education and training, support for parents and families, and care facilities for the most severely disabled people.

#### **4. LESSONS TO BE DRAWN**

HELIOS II represented an innovative approach to Community intervention in an important field of social policy. The evaluation indicates that in spite of its limitations, the programme has made an important contribution to certain developments in the disability field, although many of these developments may take some time to come to fruition. The main lessons to be drawn from the evaluation of the programme are drawn under three broad headings:

- the added value of HELIOS II
- the weaknesses of the programme
- the implications for future action

##### **4.1 Added value**

**At European level**, the programme provided added value through

- the establishment of a common pool of knowledge concerning policy contexts and innovative practices;
- increased communication, mainly between professionals from different countries, which enabled them to assess their performance, promote self-evaluation and put their practices into context;
- building support and solidarity between disability organisations, and enabling many of these to acquire experience which has enabled them to participate more effectively in structures and programmes at European level;

**At national level**, the main added value of the programme has been the:

- stimulation of interest and creativity in the disability field, through participants being confronted with alternative solutions and new approaches to familiar problems;
- strengthening of solidarity, support and communication between participants themselves, both within and between different Member States. This has contributed to the breaking down of isolation of disabled persons, informal carers and professionals in the field;
- the promotion of solidarity in more or less politicised forms of action. This has given a feeling of empowerment to and assisted organisations of disabled people, to lobby by providing argumentation, increasing persuasiveness and upgrading the profile of lobbying associations;
- the knowledge and self-awareness of both users and professionals were enhanced since in several cases, they were brought together for the first time;
- the development of a better concept of good practice, particularly related to the active participation of disabled people in service provision and policy development.

The actual implementation of these processes, however, must be seen in a long-term perspective.

#### 4.2 Limitations of the programme

The most obvious limitations of HELIOS II lie within the conception of the programme itself: focused primarily on **exchange**, with limited resources, it remained **very dependent on participants at a national and local level** for its capacity to bring about 'real' change (in services and policy for disabled people), rather than merely stimulating debate and enhancing awareness of issues.

It also remained very dependent on local and national participants for **its capacity to bring about real participation and consultation** for disabled people. One consequence of this was that the programme tended to replicate within itself difficulties directly involving of disabled people which are encountered throughout the field of disability policy and practice. Despite its best efforts, these limitations were never fully overcome. This reflects the uneven acceptance of a philosophy of action which sees disabled people themselves as essential actors in the process of change and development, and an underestimation of the level of additional resources required to support the direct involvement of disabled people.

More might also have been made of the opportunities provided by the programme to disseminate its learning to a wider audience through a clearer **dissemination strategy**, particularly for the materials developed towards the end of the programme.

A more strategic approach might have been taken, and more resources put into, the field of **public awareness**. Media involvement in activities related to disability is hard to achieve, and in spite of some successes in this area, the programme mainly addressed itself to those already involved in the disability field.

The development of **solidarity and co-operation** at European level related to issues of disability appears to have been less effective at the level of national governments, in part because the consultation processes of the programme encouraged bilateral communication with the Commission, rather than effective collaboration between national representatives.

#### 4.3 Implications for future action

These implications should be seen in the context of the new Community Disability Strategy presented in the Commission Communication of 30 July 1996, the Council Resolution of 20 December 1996 and the Resolution of the European Parliament of 11 April 1997.

The evaluation of HELIOS II provides some useful information with regard to the steps to be taken for the implementation of the new strategy.



#### 4.3.1 Steps to promote a rights based approach in the field of disability

The new disability policy framework based on the principles of citizenship and equality calls for **further research** and analysis of the structural nature of disadvantage and discrimination experienced by disabled people. This need is highlighted by the evaluation. Strategies are also needed to ensure that information collected centrally is widely disseminated.

Furthermore, the active co-operation of Member States will be required for such strategies to be effectively implemented. This is the reason why, within the framework of the High Level Group on Disability, the Commission has initiated a debate on the appropriate ways to pool research findings and experience in the field of disability.

It is also clear that support for and dissemination of innovative practice could also play a role in the development of the new approach. The evaluation suggests that **targeted and experimental actions** towards equal rights, consumer-driven, support-oriented and personal planning approach. These actions would not overlap with any other existing Community programme or initiatives and could constitute appropriate tools to achieve the goals of the Union. Building on the knowledge derived from HELIOS II, on the exchanges as well as on the principles set out in the New Community Disability Strategy, the Commission launched on 8 April 1997 a call for proposals for pilot projects of non governmental organisations and associations formed by people with disabilities<sup>9</sup>.

Following this call, more than 100 pilot projects and exchange activities representing innovative ways of empowering people with disabilities have been selected by the Commission and are currently being implemented across the European Union.

#### 4.3.2 Steps to enhance the dialogue with Member States

The primary aim of the Commission is to pursue an integrated and coherent approach to disability, as expressed in the Council Resolution on Equality of Opportunity of People with Disabilities. Such an approach also requires integrated structures.

The evaluation underlines that structures established in the framework of the follow-up to the Communication of 30 July 1996 and of the Resolution of 20 December 1996, such as the High-level Group and the European Disability Forum represent significant efforts towards the formalisation of communication channels. However, it emphasised that these structures should become truly participative in order to avoid distancing themselves from users or becoming a 'closed' policy-making network at Community level, which has low visibility to disabled people, professionals and administrators at local level. It is also important that similarly participative structures are established at Member State level, to operate as 'antennas' of the Community structures.

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<sup>9</sup> OJ No C 109/18 of 8.4.97.

Co-ordination also implies the establishment of effective communication channels between the public authorities (European, national) and the other interest groups and the promotion of synergies among Community programmes and initiatives.

The further development of strategic and executive capacities within the Commission is also a prerequisite to promote strategic planning and cross-departmental co-ordination at policy and executive levels. The evaluation highlights the need for a structure which could advance thinking on issues that pertain to disability, propose strategic directions to the Commission to accommodate these issues and liaise actively with various Directorates to promote disability policies, and ensure synergy between sectoral programmes that include provisions for disabled people.

The new High Level Group and European Disability Forum all represent important developments in terms of ensuring that debate and discussion continues at Community level but which require considerable efforts of the Commission itself to respond to initiatives arising from these, to develop effective links between the many areas of work which relate directly to the interests of disabled people, and co-ordinate policy.

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#### **4.3.3 Steps to ensure the full representation of disabled people and organisations in mainstream actions**

An important basic issue developed in the framework of the new disability strategy is the principle of mainstreaming which entails the formulation of the overall Community policy, taking into account the needs, the interest and the participation of disabled people. The importance of this principle has been reinforced by the results of the Intergovernmental Conference. Article 6a of the Treaty of Amsterdam provides that 'the Council acting unanimously on a proposal from the Commission and after consulting the European Parliament, may take appropriate action to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation'. The declaration linked to Article 100a provides that 'in drawing measures under Article 100a, the institutions of the Community shall take account of the needs of people with a disability'. Lessons drawn from HELIOS II indicate also that the interests of disabled people cannot be ensured within mainstream activities without the existence of suitable measures to promote their full participation. These include:

- **appropriate resources:** which are particularly needed because the organisations that represent disabled people often operate on very limited budgets, and rely heavily on voluntary input;
- **enhanced accessibility:** the experience of HELIOS II suggests that there is still widespread lack of understanding of the access requirements of people with physical, sensory and mental disabilities. Access issues include the availability and presentation of information about activities, accessibility of buildings, transport, and the timing and time-tabling of activities. It also extends to the attitude of other participants in activities;

- **monitoring:** the accessibility of mainstream actions can only be assessed if the participation of disabled people is adequately monitored. This includes consideration of the extent to which disabled people are active participants in the organisations funded under Community initiatives and programmes;
- **availability of expertise and training:** the role of expert advice in strengthening the capacities and enhancing the potential of disabled people to intervene and influence changes in policies that affect them, has been shown to be crucial. **Suitable training** should be considered for those unfamiliar with the disability field to make them aware of the implications for disabled people of the activities for which they are responsible.

#### 4.3.4 Steps to ensure a real civil dialogue with Non-Governmental Organisations

Ensuring adequate representation of disability issues in all mainstream activities also requires suitable mechanisms for disability organisations to advocate for appropriate actions. HELIOS II has contributed substantially to this end by establishing direct communication channels between the Commission and NGOs, and among NGOs, by providing information and technical support and resources. However, many of the relevant organisations remain very dependent on Community funding to maintain this level of activity, and their capacity to continue to operate depends largely on further action in this area. For this reason, in accordance with the budgetary provisions laid down in 1997, the Commission has already taken the necessary steps in order to give an adequate financial support to the work programme of the European Disability Forum and of the European NGOs of co-ordination.

### 5. The way forward

HELIOS II has opened many doors, identified many options, and begun important processes of promoting a European dialogue on disability. As the conclusions of the evaluation indicate, the need now is to continue the process of dialogue, formalise what has been achieved, and carry forward the more promising directions identified within the programme.

The main steps to carry this policy forward have already been identified by the Commission and also incorporated in its New Disability Strategy. However, the final evaluation also provides invaluable information on some prerequisites for success of the strategy, the way to further implement it as well as some warnings on its possible limitations or shortfalls.

The Commission will build on the experience gained from HELIOS II by focusing on the following:

- a) ensuring the full implementation of the new disability strategy as outlined in the Communication of 30 July 1996 on Equality of Opportunity for People with Disabilities and the Council Resolution of 20 December 1996, in particular as far as the principle of mainstreaming disability issues in all relevant Community actions

and programmes and the co-operation with the Member States and NGOs are concerned;

- b) incorporating in the new European Community Disability Strategy some elements which were not identified previously, in particular with regard to the need to conduct structural research on exclusion experienced by people with disabilities;
- c) examining the feasibility of underpinning the new disability strategy and taking stock of the experience gained under HELIOS II ; studying the possibility of presenting a new legislative proposal to the Council, taking into account the first results of the pilot projects and preparatory actions undertaken in 1997 and the Amsterdam Treaty when it is ratified.

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