

EUROPEAN PLATFORM FOR REHABILITATION

The network of leading service providers to people with disabilities

NEWSLETTER

Editorial

Special:

- Latest developments in EPR member centres
- Use of Social Media in EPR
- Annual Conference
- Innovation Prize
- Public Affairs

Sections:

- | | |
|-------------------------|---------|
| Calendar of EPR events | [2] |
| News from members | [3-8] |
| CAPs activities | [9] |
| The use of Social Media | [10] |
| Annual Conference | [11] |
| Innovation Prize | [11] |
| Public Affairs | [12-13] |
| Projects | [14] |
| EQUASS | [157] |



Dear EPR Members,

The impact of EU policies on the provision of social services at national level is growing, and the European elections of 25 May should be seen in this context. The European Parliament can use its powers to protect and support social and health care services. As those services contribute to the Europe 2020 strategy by creating employment, tackling poverty and reducing early school leaving, the newly elected members of the Parliament should promote their strategic importance. To this aim, the EPR has together with its partners in 'Social Services Europe' drafted a Manifesto with 10 recommendations to put social and health care services at the heart of a stronger Social Europe.

The growing importance of the European dimension in our sector contrasts sharply with the increasing pressure on international co-operation. The added value of mutual learning and exchange of good practice in a transnational context is more than ever questioned. The reduction of financial resources and accumulating workloads pose considerable challenges for both organisations and individual staff to engage in international activities. As a consequence, European co-operation requires a strategy, a methodology

and an in-depth reflection on the 'what' and 'how' of it. In terms of mechanisms, EPR has responded to this development by a conducting a substantial part of its activities via on-line platforms and ICTs. In this way, we allow our members to benefit from the wide range of expertise in the network, without travel costs and with a minimal time investment. The next step is a more flexible and modular approach to membership, in which EPR members can select from a range of concrete products and activities. The new EPR strategic plan 2015 – 2017 needs to include this orientation.

But let there be no doubt that there will remain a need to learn from each other. Although socio-economic contexts may change, social service providers still face similar challenges in the different European countries. And it is still more effective to transfer good practices and to learn together, than to re-invent the wheel over and over again. But more than anything else, international contacts and exchange widens the views of the professionals in the rehabilitation sector, and gives them new inspiration for their day-to-day activities.

I am looking forward to seeing many of you at our Annual Conference in Köln, which again offers great opportunities to network to discover the opportunities of our network.

Jan Spooren
Secretary General



Calendar of EPR Events 2014

- **Services to people with autism**, training seminar, date tbc
- **Assistive technologies and technical aids**, Visit to Technosite and Via Libre, 21-22 May 2014, Madrid, Spain
- **EPR General Assembly**, 25 June 2014, Cologne, Germany
- **Outcome measurement in Vocational Rehabilitation**, benchlearning group, 25 June 2014, Cologne, Germany
- **European Semester mechanism - Open discussion on National Reform Programmes**, 25 June 2014, Cologne, Germany
- **EPR Annual Conference**, 26-27 June 2014, Cologne, Germany
- **Supporting employers in working with people with mental health difficulties, service pilots**, September 2014 (date tbc), Spain
- **Strategic Workshop for Directors**, 2-3 October 2014, Lisbon, Portugal, open to Associate Members
- **EU Funding opportunities**, training seminar, 28 October 2014, open to Associate Members, Oslo, Norway
- **EU Employment and social policy**, training seminar, 29 October 2014, open to Associate Members, Oslo, Norway
- **Job coaching**, webinar, November 2014, open to Associate Members
- **EPR Centre Coordinators Meeting**, 2 December 2014, Brussels
- **Learnabil-IT Final Conference**, 3 December 2014, Brussels
- **EPR General Assembly**, 2 December 2014, Brussels

This list is subject to change and is regularly updated as new events are planned.

Please consult EPR website for the most up-to-date information: www.epr.eu or contact EPR secretariat
Tel: +32 2 736 54 44, e-mail: claudedelfosse@epr.eu

News from the members

GREP

FROG Online Identity project

In 2013-2014 GREP has participated in a pilot project together with 3 other rehabilitation companies in Norway. The project's name is Frog (The full name is: Frog Online Identity: www.lyk-z.no/frog-online-identity).

FROG Online Identity is a methodical training program that builds on theories from Neurophysiology and fundamental principles of cognitive therapy, communication techniques from film studies, leadership and co-active coaching.

The workshops run for 25 days with 12 young adult participants who are led by 2 certified FROG-trainers. The participants are taken through five modules; Vision, Identity, Communication, Impact and The Big Leap. During the training, and between each module, the participants work online at FROGS.no. FROG Online Identity is a learning-based web platform where the participants answer questions and do tasks related to the various topics. Through the platform they can also chat with the trainers and the other participants. During the seven-week training program profound positive changes happen as these young participants gain insight into their own personal values and unique qualities, and they make their own goals and plans for their own future.

The target group is mainly young people between 18 and 30 years, who have dropped out of school or don't take part in school or work life. The program has also successfully been conducted on older long-term unemployed. The result is the same: the participants gain faith and confidence in their own values and unique qualities, and are able to form a foundation for lasting change and growth in their own lives.

FROG Online Identity is distributed primarily through certification and licensing of companies and organizations working with youth, but also through workshops.

The owners of Frog (Lyk-z and daughters), together with GREP, want to help more young people to make fulfilling lives with dignity so they can contribute as a part of the society.

GREP has conducted three workshops in FROG.

From the first 2 workshops, 14 participants have completed:

- 3 enrolled in ordinary work,
- 4 went back to school
- 7 are heading into work or education

The third workshop was recently completed and it is too early to conclude on the results.

GREP Marketing

GREP acts according to a yearly marked plan based upon the company's long term strategy. This includes an annual business seminar, a comprehensive media strategy and selective sponsorship in addition to partnerships with a large number of private companies and some government and local agencies.

Business seminar

GREP invites all its business partners to an annual business seminar once a year, in November. The purpose of this seminar is to celebrate our partnership, to promote ourselves and to give something back by providing leading expert speakers on relevant subjects. We also present a GREP price to a company or individual who has contributed more

than could be expected to provide internships, job training and employment in partnership with GREP. More than 300 customers and GREP employees participate.

Media strategy

GREP aims to achieve at least 4 positive media posts each month. In addition to this we aim to maintain a lively homepage, we have a GREP page on Facebook (very lively) and LinkedIn and we promote a number of campaigns during the year using different platforms including these and more. GREP works with marketing professionals to ensure the best result. Every 2 years we conduct a survey to measure changes in recognition level and public opinion of the GREP brand name.

Valakupiai Rehabilitation Centre successfully completes the project “WE ARE ABLE TO WORK 2020”



Valakupiai Rehabilitation Centre (Lithuania) together with partners from Spain, Italy and Greece successfully completed implementation of the project “We are Able to Work 2020”, which aims to promote

youth's with disabilities active citizenship in particular by promoting the involvement in core EU policy making and implementation, at the same time improvement of their employment possibilities.

During the project activities 15 young people with disabilities from Lithuania participated in info sessions on the Europe 2020 strategy using the Forum theatre methodology. Later on, personal branding workshops were organized in order to gain skills on how to promote themselves and their competences in the real life and social networks. Finally participants had an outstanding experience to demonstrate the acquired skills while shooting video presentations for potential employers with professional video production company.

In March 2014 four participants from Lithuania together with youth from other participating countries took part in youth exchange visit in Thessaloniki (Greece). To sum up with the words of 29 years old project participant, “Particularly this project helps us to be more confident in our abilities and more active, open for new friends and to be creative. The most important thing in life is to move towards success at least with small steps.”

Video CV's are available: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCVw-e7uKf8LYcA3gnQHiteQ/videos>

The project “We are Able to Work 2020” is financed under Youth in Action programme of the European Commission.



Project “INOVATELL” for better accessibility of vocational training for people with limited hands functions

“Another very challenging project that Valakupiai Rehabilitation Centre coordinates is called INOVATELL. This title stands for INOVative Touchless tEchnologies in Lifelong Learning for people with severe disabilities. The project is financed under the Lifelong Learning Programme.

The main purpose of INOVATELL project is to develop and implement technological solution that will help people with limited hands functions to participate in lifelong learning process by remotely controlled specialized software on mobile and stationary computer devices using only head or hand gestures. During the 2 years period together with the software there will be developed and tested ICT training programme that contribute for improvement the quality, accessibility and efficiency of the

vocational training and rehabilitation programmes for people with the most severe motor disabilities.

At the end of 2015, the project will produce downloadable software that will run on a Windows 8 computer and a standard USB or built-in webcam. It is expected that people may use INOVATELL solution for education, communication and entertainment purposes, web browsers, and so on. This software will be available for free. The project is implemented in partnership with CRPG (Portugal), URI-Soča (Slovenia) and IT partner Idea Code from Lithuania.



RehabCare stars on the Big Screen

On Wednesday last the IMC Cinema Dundalk hosted a film premiere with a difference with the first screening of *The Dream Machine*, a feature film by 50 actors with disabilities. The Encore Productions group, who all attend RehabCare resource centre in Carroll Village, Dundalk, spent 10 months working on the film, writing the script, designing costumes and props as well as honing their acting skills. Over 300 people walked the red carpet at the sold out premiere and a standing ovation as the credits rolled was the highlight of the evening. All the actors were honoured to be presented with a trophy and DVD each to mark their achievement by Dundalk native Andrea O'Connor an Assistant Director whose film credits include *Men in Black 3*, *The Thomas Crowne Affair* and *Sex in the City – The Movie*. The after-party was held in the Crowne Plaza Hotel with music being provided by the famous Cross Border Orchestra of Ireland.

Encore Productions has staged a number of drama productions over the last ten years but earlier this year they decided to challenge themselves to make a feature film having been inspired by local man John Moore who directed this year's Hollywood blockbuster *Die Another Day*. Wanting to see their own names in lights the group set to work. The all action family film allowed the cast to play whatever character they dreamed of portraying including rappers, superheroes, brave time travellers, flirty barmaids, kings, wizards, a diabetic queen, rock stars, models, doctors vets and nurses, to name but a few.

With locations ranging from a medieval castle to the surface of the moon a large space was needed to film in. The group converted a disused space in the old National Learning Network facility on the Coe's Road into a technicolor sound stage and also designed and painted all of the 20 sets used. Jason Kelly, who acted in the film said, "I loved making the



film, it was so different to being on stage, we practised every day for months and spent lots of time making the props. I can't wait to see the film and I'm really excited about walking on the red carpet!"

Director Sandy Sneddon said, "We are very proud of this film. Many of the actors involved have performed in our Encore Productions drama's in the town hall over the last few years but even these seasoned actors have found new challenges in the film making process. And for some of the cast it is the first time they have done any acting at all and it is sure that the experience, confidence and self-esteem gained in the process will better equip them for the many challenges that life on and off the camera can present."

It is hoped that the film will be screened in other cinemas around the country next year. A DVD of the film is available to purchase from RehabCare Resource Centre, Carroll Village, Church Street, Dundalk priced €10.

Encore Productions and RehabCare would like to thank the following people without whom this film would not have been made: Film maker James Mullholland, documentary film maker and editor Cara Holmes, Dennis Darcy (Arts Office), Conor Hughes (Cross Cause Charity, Blackrock), An Garda Síochána, Outcomers Centre Dundalk, MASF School of Martial Arts, Aine Lawrence (make-up artist), IMC Cinema Dundalk and Reelgood. Particular thanks must be given to the Jonesborough Charity Walk/Cycle and families of the people who use RehabCare's services who sponsored the walk/cycle and also made generous financial donations to the film.

Today RehabCare in Louth provides services such as resource centres and supported accommodation to more than 100 people with disabilities, enabling them to achieve their full potential and a better quality of life.



RehabCare

European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM)

The European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) is a quality framework that enables organisations to compare themselves with attributes, qualities and achievements, to other sustainable organisations. This framework facilitates organisations to develop a culture of excellence, bring consistency to management styles, develop good practice, drive innovation and improve results.

RehabCare completed an EFQM Excellence Model assessment in January 2014 and were awarded 5 star Rating. This achievement brings RehabCare to European Excellence Level.

The assessment took place over a four day period where the assessment team met with the senior management team and then visited seven sites across the country. During the site visits the assessment team met with local management, staff from all areas, service users, funders, other stakeholder and families to validate RehabCare's application.

The assessment team reported being 'inspired and humbled' by the high levels of professionalism and competence demonstrated by staff. They also commented on the impact of staff as 'opening the possibilities for service users and families' their 'can do attitude' and the belief that 'anything can be achieved'. Finally they stated that RehabCare is 'changing lives and perspectives'. In their concluding meeting with the senior management team on the last day of the assessment, the assessment team stated that the organisation demonstrated 'visionary leadership at all levels' and displayed a 'strong sense of living the values'.

They also stated that RehabCare 'Innovate by finding out what you can do' and 'create a climate for change which allows employees to use their expertise to open doors for service users'.

RehabCare is proud of our work and of this achievement which validates the work that we engage in every day.

Centre de Réadaptation de Mulhouse (CRM)

Drawings and words

I dreamed about...The idea was proposed by a trainer of writing and communication workshops in vocational training. The object of this original initiative was to develop a personal subject, whether it is in the form of a text, a drawing or a painting and to present the results by hanging them out as "laundry".

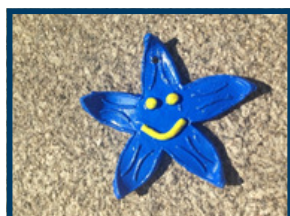
The first volunteers arrived one by one early in the morning to hang discreetly their dreams, and then little by little the emulation made its effect. In total, about hundred sheets suspended in the air colored and livened up the hall of the Center of Rehabilitation on last 27 March.

This day represented a beautiful opportunity to meet volunteers and exchange their "looks and words". The evoked subjects were as different as personal: a princess for a mom thinking to her little girl, Morocco for some native persons, democracy for someone else, a poem for others. Participants enjoyed loosening up and creatively expressing their thoughts and emotions. This day gave to participants the opportunity to express their own hidden talent; we hope that there will be others more to encourage all of them to continue.



APPACDM de Gaia

A flower for women



On International Women's Day, which was celebrated on the 8th of March, the APPACDM de Gaia contributed with the design and production of a flower to offer to 1031 female employees of Gaia's City Hall.

Eduardo Vitor Rodrigues (Mayor of Vila Nova de Gaia), stated: "The face and the image of the City Hall are very often associated with their employees. Today, through this symbolic moment, we intend to prove that we trust the dedication and rigor of all employees, especially women".

Dulce Coutinho (CEO of APPACDM de Gaia) said "The activities that APPACDM Gaia develops always have in mind the local community" and that "It is important for our clients to take part in these activities, to feel recognized and valued".



Smiling for 41 years

APPACDM Gaia celebrated its 41st anniversary on the 18th of March, with a street show called "Dancing Fado" performed by 20 people with mental disability. The celebration brightened the public space in front of the City Hall.

In his speech, Eduardo Vitor Rodrigues, Mayor of Vila Nova de Gaia, reinforced the "institution's fundamental social roll", one of the most important ones in Gaia, mentioning that "this is a path that they cannot and should not do alone".

At end of the show, Mário Dias, President of the board of directors of APPACDM de Gaia, concluded "There have been 41 years of smiles and 390 of special smiles, which is the number of families that we support at the moment, but we intend to increase the number of smiles by opening next month a new Occupational Activity Centre in Canidelo".



Astangu Vocational Rehabilitation Centre Introduces an English-Language Website

Astangu Vocational Rehabilitation Centre is happy to announce that our website, www.astangu.ee, is now available in English. The English-language version is accessible either via a flag icon in the top-left corner of our website, or directly through the link eng.astangu.ee. We hope that our current and future international partners, including EPR members, will find the website to be a useful addition. In case of comments and suggestions regarding website content and/or ease of use, website visitors are welcome to email Mai-Liis Söerd (mai-liis.soerd@astangu.ee).

Irish Wheelchair Association motoring rally

Complex tests of navigational and driving skills challenged participants in the fourth annual IWA Motoring Rally. IWA Transport Manager Tony Maher reports

The rally, which was open to both drivers and passengers, started and finished for the second year in the Maldron Hotel in Portlaoise, and was again generously sponsored by adapted vehicle sales company Wheelchair Cars Ireland from Glasston, Co Westmeath.

Forty contestants tested their navigational and driving skills on a 150km course which meandered through the counties of Laois, Tipperary and Offaly. Contestants were required to follow a prescribed route and also to drive particular stretches of the route at specified speeds. A number of driving skill tests were carried out on off-road locations along the route where drivers were required to navigate in and out of traffic cones and were marked on time and accuracy. This year, to add a different dimension and to test participants' observational skills, a number of trivia questions were added to the task, the answers of which were visible on make-shift roadside signs – that is of course assuming that were you were on the correct route!

The first contestants left Portlaoise at 10.30am and climbed their way through the spectacular Slieve Bloom mountain range, leaving the mountains at Kinnity to descend towards the plains of Tipperary. In Roscrea, contestants completed their first off-road test of the day and had a well earned rest and refreshments in the hospitable Racket Hall Hotel.



The presentation to winners of category for drivers with over two years experience (l to r): Donal Murtagh (Wheelchair Cars Ireland), Thomas Caulfield (driver), Dermot Hope (navigator) and Michael Doyle(IWA)



The presentation to the overall winner (l to r): Barry Reid (IWA), Donal Murtagh (Wheelchair Cars Ireland), Laurence Quain (navigator), Larry Quain (driver), Tony Maher(IWA) and Michael Doyle(IWA)

The second half of the day was mainly based in Laois and en route a further two off-road tests were completed. At about 5pm the first cars arrived back in Portlaoise after traversing the roads of Abbeyleix, Timahoe and surrounding areas.

The evening finished off with an enjoyable meal in the Maldron Hotel, followed by a presentation to prize winners. The overall winner was father and son combination, driver Larry Quane and his navigator son Lawrence from Athlone.

All participants, regardless of whether they made it to the winners' podium, felt a sense of achievement. For some, it was purely a social and fun event, whereas for others it was a challenge to test their navigational and driving skills in a competitive environment.

IWA is indebted to Rally Co-ordinator Declan Grogan and his dedicated band of fellow motoring enthusiasts, without whose guidance we could not run such a unique event. We would also like to express our sincere gratitude to Donal and Gerry Murtagh, our generous sponsors from Wheelchair Cars Ireland for their continued support of this event.

If you would like to participate in future events, contact the National Mobility Centre in Clane on tel: 045 893 094 or email: maats@iwa.ie

Centre Action Plans (CAPs)

Visit to a social firm



Some EPR members have expressed curiosity regarding the concept of “social enterprise” and its applications. Social enterprises were developed in Belgium

doors to the group of Coordinators who were provided with explanations about the functioning of the enterprise and who visited the textile department. Linked the visit of the social enterprise, the group visited a vocational training centre in the neighbourhood, A.U.R.E.Lie, which makes part of its revenues from commercial activities in the framework of training.

as a consequence of the lack of bridges between the training and the labour market, as commercial enterprises with a social aim. Economy here is thought as a mean of integration of people with disabilities. Social enterprises often propose lifelong learning and training, professional social accompaniment of the co-workers, and participative governance. In the distribution of the revenues, priority goes to the human and labour dimensions over the capital.

EPR members were invited to the visit of a social enterprise on 26 March in Herstal, Belgium. “Groupe Terre” is one of the largest social enterprises in Belgium and it opened its



Using social media in relationships with service users

This webinar in two parts (two hours at the end of February, two hours in the beginning of April) giving delegates practical and strategic advice on which social media to use, and how to do it, in order to engage in a two-way conversation with service users. It provided participants with useful knowledge and tools to optimize the services delivery through social media, and with an understanding of the risks and legal implications associated with online audiences. The 16 participants reflected on the use of tools such as Facebook and Twitter but also on many other applications aimed at video, image sharing, networking and image controlling.

ICT-based case management

EPR members strive to apply case management across the entire organisation, across departments and across multidisciplinary teams. Electronic client files smoothen the circulation of information throughout the personnel and makes service delivery more efficient. Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) can play an important role in supporting case management. This webinar addressed to 14 participants was delivered by Deloitte Belgium consultants. It provided insights into case management issues, key success factors and existing tools.

The use of Social Media in EPR



A new opportunity to reinforce the EPR Community



LINKEDIN

**BUSINESS
ORIENTED**
SOCIAL NETWORKING SITE

BRANDS THAT ARE
PARTICIPATING
ARE CORPORATE
BRANDS
GIVING POTENTIAL AND
CURRENT ASSOCIATES
A PLACE TO NETWORK
& CONNECT



**79% OF USERS
ARE 35
OR OLDER**

**in 240
MILLION
ACTIVE USERS**

The use of social media and other electronic communication tools is expanding exponentially. Individuals use blogs, social networking sites, and video sites to communicate both personally and professionally with others.

What social media are?

Social media are an exciting and valuable tool to generate and share multimedia content, interact with others and exchange knowledge. Online social networks are web sites where users create personal profiles, search for "friends" or "contacts," and create extensive networks of connections. There are different social networking sites in existence built around many different themes: video-sharing sites, photo-sharing sites, social bookmarking sites, music-sharing sites, blogging communities, all-purpose community sites like MySpace and professional networking sites like LinkedIn.

EPR Secretariat invites EPR members to create an online community on LinkedIn to reinforce the mutual learning and the exchange of good practices and expertise within the network and in a transnational context. Professionals will be connected each other and according to their interests will have the possibility to initiate and engage in relevant and valuable discussions, to share opinions and considerations, to simply inform on something, to brainstorm or build teams, refine skills or more.

Why LinkedIn?

LinkedIn is a business-oriented social networking service. It is different than other social networking sites because it is designed specifically for professional networking - finding a job, discovering sales leads, connecting with potential business partners - rather than simply making friends or sharing media like photos, videos and music.

EPR drafted some Guidelines exploring the main LinkedIn's features and facilitating the use of the social network to enlarge the EPR community's expertise.

For more information, please contact Cinzia De Letis at cinzia.de.letis@epr.eu

Follow EPR on LinkedIn
Be engaged!



Become a follower of the EPR company profile on LinkedIn and discover our latest updates!



Join the EPR Group!

EPR Annual Conference 2014



The EPR Secretariat and the host organisation Josefs-Gesellschaft are looking forward to welcome you to Cologne in Germany, on 26 and 27 June for the EPR Annual Conference. The Conference titled ***“Impact assessment in rehabilitation - A driver for sustainability and continuous improvement”***, is dedicated to the common challenges faced by EPR member organisations on their way to impact assessment. The programme of the conference sheds a light on different aspects of the theme, from the perspectives of the clients, the service providers and the funders.

This year the programme proposes a lighter format combining interactive speeches, open discussions and significant networking opportunities. The “Ateliers” will offer concrete training, creative space to the participants for an in-depth rolling-out of issues and exchange with peers. Participants will leave the conference with concrete methods and suggestions for further development of their organisations’ practice.

In addition, EPR is organising additional professional development activities around the conference: the EPR Board of Directors and the General Assembly, the meeting on Outcome measurement in Vocational Rehabilitation, the EQUASS KPI development group and the briefing meeting on the European Semester mechanism.

The conference will be held in the NH Hotel Mediapark, Im Mediapark 8B. Registrations are opened until Friday 23 May 2014. For more information about the programme and practicalities, please consult the [Annual Conference webpage on the EPR website](#).

Innovation Prize Contest 2014

EPR is looking forward for the winner of the 2014 edition of the Innovation Prize!

This year 10 EPR member organisations participated in the contest by sending a total of 17 practices. In the coming weeks EPR Centre Coordinators will select the Prize winner based on a series of pre-defined criteria on the quality and innovative aspects of the practice. The winning organisation will be given the opportunity to present its best practice during the Innovation Prize Awarding Ceremony at the EPR Annual Conference on 27 June 2014 in Cologne, Germany.

To discover the 2014 EPR Innovation Prize Winner, please consult the EPR website, www.epr.eu

Practices in competition:

- Occupational Therapist/ Researcher (Adelante)
- The brain is the heart of the matter. Live after survival of a cardiac arrest (Adelante)
- Integration through creative therapeutic activities (Astangu VRC)
- Raised Beds – A new way to more employability (BBW)
- A broader vision with Google Glass (Heliomare)
- Student Central (NLN)
- The online intervention the Growth Factory: Developing a Growth Mind-set! (Pluryn)
- Iplan it for people we support (RehabCare)
- Disability awareness: the path towards inclusion (RehabCare)
- Place and train Work Programme (RehabCare)
- The COMPASS project (RehabCare)
- The Dream Machine - Feature Film (RehabCare)
- What's Good for your head? (RehabCare)
- Youth Service Microsite (Irish Wheelchair Association)
- EcATIC project (ONCE Foundation)
- Operation Sign Up (Irish Wheelchair Association)
- Game is NOT Over” Project (Theotokos Foundation)

Public Affairs

Seminar on European Semester mechanism and the involvement of social service providers (27 March 2014)



In order to achieve the Europe 2020 targets of a 75% employment rate, increasing the number of adults completing third level education to at least 40% and reducing the number of people living in poverty by 20

million, the EU has set up a cycle of economic policy coordination called European Semester.

During this cycle Member States align their budgetary and economic policies with the objectives and rules agreed at EU level. They produce respective National Reform Programmes that are analysed by the EU Commission and the European Council. The European Council replies to the Member States with Country Specific Recommendations as an assessment of their efforts to achieve the EU 2020 goals. The EU Commission strongly recommends the involvement of the civil society in the European Semester process to ensure that the national economic and social policies have a direct impact on the fight against social exclusion and poverty.

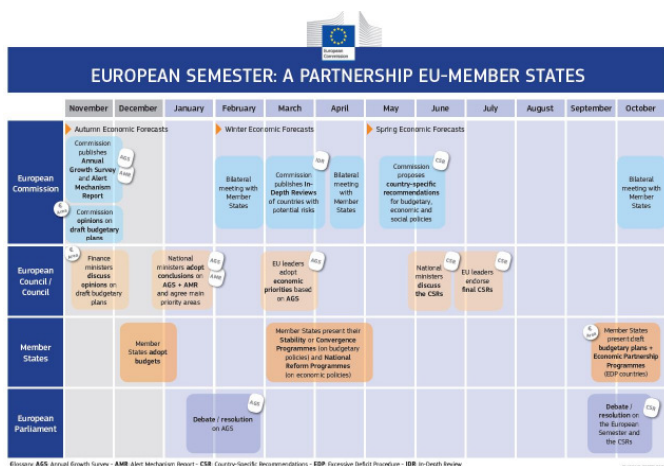
On 27 March 2014, in the framework of the Partnership Agreement with the European Commission (DG EMPL), EPR organised a training seminar on European Semester mechanism with the aim of supporting the understanding and

knowledge of EPR members about this EU mechanism as a tool to monitor the performance of Member States against the Europe 2020 targets.

During the seminar participants had the opportunity to familiarise with the National Reform Programmes (NRPs) 2013 and discover existing mechanisms at national level promoting consultations, participation and dialogue with the actions relevant stakeholders in the design and implementation of the social policies. Moreover they discussed about the importance of being involved in this participation process in order to strengthen the role of social service providers in addressing societal challenges and agreed on the importance of ensuring that their voice is echoed in the national consultations and in the National Reform Programmes.

At this end, EPR proposed to create on its website an Open Platform as a place where EPR members and other social service providers can strengthen their role in addressing societal challenges by providing continuous guidance and advice on processes and contents relating to employment of people furthest from the labour market and high-quality social services.

For more information, please consult the [Platform at www.epr.eu](http://www.epr.eu)



What's next in the agenda?

By the end of April the EU Member States will submit the National Reform Programmes 2014. EPR will analyse the new NRPs and in collaboration with EPR members and other stakeholders will draft a paper and organise an open discussion around this topic on **25 June 2014, Cologne, Germany.**

More information on EPR website, [upcoming events section](#)

Visit the EC website [European Semester 2014: first documents](#)

European Social Fund 2014-2020: towards more efficient and effective investments

In December 2013 the European Union adopted its Regulations for five European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), which include the European Social Fund (ESF), for the period 2014-2020. These EU funds are linked to the EU social and territorial “cohesion policy” and represent the main source of investment at EU level to help Member States to restore and increase growth and ensure a job recovery while ensuring sustainable development, in line with the Europe 2020 objectives.

The ESF Regulation adopted for the 2014-2020 programming period has the clear mission to reach out to people most excluded from society and the labour market and lift them out of poverty. Member States should clearly state these objectives in the priority-setting of the partnership agreements and operational programmes for the coming seven years and adopt national integrated social and active

inclusion strategies aimed at achieving the exclusion and poverty reduction targets.

National, regional and local authorities are strongly required to work in partnership with relevant stakeholders representing the civil society in order to take up this unique opportunity to ensure the ESF has a direct impact on the fight against social exclusion and poverty, as a contribution to the Europe 2020 strategy and to the implementation of the Social Investment Package of the European Commission. The EPR briefing paper aims to present information about the European Social Fund 2014-2020 as it currently stands, including the key principles and the opportunities for addressing social exclusion and poverty.

The [briefing paper](#) is available in the Public Affairs section of the EPR website, www.epr.eu

10 Recommendation to put social and health care services at the heart of a stronger social Europe. The Manifesto of Social Services Europe

1. Recognise the specificity of not for profit social and health care service providers
2. Ensure that social and health care services are provided within a rights-based framework.
3. Monitor the implementation of relevant EU legislation and consider the impact of new legislative initiatives to ensure they do not adversely affect social and health care services.
4. Reject the current reductions in funding for social and health care services and promote an alternative approach based on the social investment logic.
5. Support our call for investment in employment and training across the sector as well as the engagement of the not for profit social and health care services sector as a key partner in social dialogue.
6. Strengthen the role of the not- for-profit organisations in the creation of different forms of decent employment.
7. Prevent the “creaming” of profitable services over less profitable ones by service providers as well preventing “creaming” of easier-to-reach service users over more disadvantaged ones when providing services.
8. Promote quality in the design & delivery of services through supporting the implementation of the Voluntary European Quality Framework for Social Services.
9. Promote non-discrimination, participation and partnership between not for profit service providers and other providers in all matters concerning funding.
10. Establish an Intergroup on Social Services and Social Innovation to address the role of social services in social cohesion, social protection and solidarity.

The Manifesto is available in the Public Affairs section of the EPR website, www.epr.eu

Projects

Learnabil-IT project makes strides towards the first deliverables



On 29 and 30 January 2014 all partners met in Brussels for the Learnabil-IT project kick-off meeting. The project Learnabil-IT, funded by the programme PROGRESS of the European Commission, aims to promote the cooperation and mutual learning between the worlds of work and vocational education and training in the ICT sector, supporting a better labour skills match and a greater employability of people with disabilities in the open labour market. During the two-days meeting participants discussed and agreed on the project manual, on administrative and financial procedures and on the methodology to be used

during the first phase of the project dedicated to the mapping and the analysis of the practices in different countries.

Both national and European partners showed their enthusiasm to be part of this project. EPR was pleasant to encourage all partners to keep working in the following months with the same fervour.

At the moment, national partners are organising focus groups in their respective countries to collect information on existing sector-specific cooperation structures and mechanisms between employers and VET providers, examples of good practices of collaborative early identification of skills needed that allowed VET providers to adapt their curricula. At the same time European partners are busy with the literature review and the desk research activity to complement the country studies and provide a wider overview of the situation in Europe.

More information about the project on [EPR website](#)

PESSIS II kick-off meeting on 14-15 January 2014

The two days meeting marked the official start of the PESSIS II project. This project is a collaboration of 8 European and 5 national organisations representing social and health service providers with the European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU). The project focuses on the social and economic role of the social services sector and its major contribution to employment and growth in Europe. It is the follow up of the project PESSIS and represents the second step of a longer term process aiming at establishing a representative platform for employers in the social services sector at European level.

On 14-15 January all partners met at the EPR office, in Brussels, to discuss and agree on the project manual and on the methodology to be used to establish capacity-building with stakeholders in the selected countries. The fruitful meeting initiated the discussion about how social services sector could take part in European Social Dialogue.

François Ziegler, Policy Officer, Social Dialogue Unit, DG Employment - European Commission, was invited to give the view of the EU Commission on the importance and value of having social dialogue at European level and what the Commission is expecting from social partners. Partners agreed also on administrative procedures and on the dates of following project meetings.

More information on [PESSIS website](#)



DeSqual project: second meeting



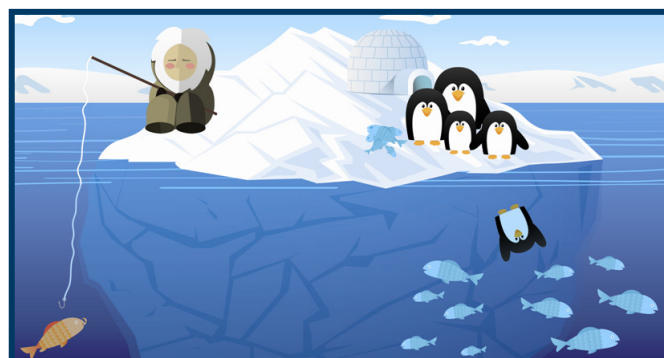
On Monday 17 and Tuesday 18 of February 13 partners from 10 European countries came together for the second meeting in the DeSqual project.

DeSqual aims to create sustainable quality assurance in VET-providers for people with a disability in a European framework. At 10 pilot sites, Vet Providers will work on improvement actions/plans to increase quality awareness, quality culture and quality behaviour of staff. For this a tailored modular training program for quality assurance will be developed by expert organisations. EPR is represented in the project by Guus van Beek. He supports the partners as an external EQUASS expert.

In Lisbon partners got a better understanding of the concepts quality awareness, quality culture and quality behaviour. Also the needs of each partner to come to improvements in those fields, were analysed. The coming month it is up to the experts to work on the development of the training program.

In June the partners will meet again in Bigge, Germany. There, the final curriculum will be determined. In autumn the pilot sites will start with the implementation of the improvement plans, after a first training session in Spain.

There is an evaluator involved in the project. She evaluates all meetings, to find out whether your needs and expectations are met and she evaluates each pilot site on the success of the improvement activities.



EQUASS information seminars in Latvia



On 27 January and 24 March 2014, EQUASS Key expert Guus van Beek contributed to two information events in Latvian capital, Riga.

The events were organised and supported by the Latvian branch of SOS Children's villages, an international organisation that provides a range of programmes and facilities to support of socially disadvantaged and impoverished families, and children who have been separated from their parents. The Alternative Childcare Alliance of Latvia, the Municipality of Riga and Welfare Ministry were also in attendance. These events mark the beginning of what we hope to be an on-going collaboration to further promote EQUASS Assurance in Latvia.

EPR on the web!

For regularly updated information on EPR and its activities, visit our
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The EPR newsletter is issued three times a year.

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