



# EPR Annual Report 2023

European Platform for Rehabilitation (EPR)



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# ■ Introduction

Dear members & EPR friends,

It is my pleasure to address you as EPR Secretary General for the first time in our Annual Report. This year has been particularly special for our organization and community for several reasons. We celebrated our 30th anniversary with a fantastic Annual Conference focused on the green transition hosted by one of our founding members, CRM, in France. We also navigated significant internal changes with adaptability and excitement, including a restructured team, and bid farewell to former Secretary General Laura Jones after eight years of dedication and commitment. We take a moment in this report to thank her for her time, effort, and numerous achievements for EPR.

In 2023, we embarked on new collaborations and strengthened our partnerships, including joining the European Disability Forum (EDF) to work closer to organisations representing persons with disabilities at the European level. We continued joining efforts with other European partners under the umbrella of Social Services Europe to influence policy at EU level. We actively engaged with European policymakers to create a supportive regulatory environment. As an example, our Public Affairs event was a notable success, featuring high-level speakers who shared insights on disability and services, and their impact on creating a more inclusive Europe.

Our online National Awareness Raising event with Greek partners was an excellent opportunity to highlight the importance of quality assessment in service delivery to persons with a disability. In Madrid, we co-organized an event with Fundación Ramón Rey Ardid, addressing the current challenges faced by older persons with disabilities, with truly inspiring experts sharing their expertise.

We continued building the capacity of our members through creating mutual learning opportunities. Our Working Groups continued to meet and exchange knowledge. Highlights included the Intereha meeting hosted by Fondazione Don Gnocchi in Milan, the Youth WG meeting in Germany hosted by Mupolt and Mariaberg, and the publication on soft skills developed by the Mental Health Working Group, which was also hosted by Chance B in Austria. Additionally, we visited CRM and the Autism Foundation Finland to engage closely with their professionals.

Projects such as Qolivet, concluded in December 2023, laid the groundwork for potential new services within EPR and driving changes in our sector through the use of new online tools that measure the impact on the quality of life of services.

I want to extend my warm thanks to all our members and partners for their support and collaboration. Your dedication and hard work are the cornerstones of EPR's success. Let's continue to strive for high quality service delivery ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to live a fulfilling and independent life.

Sincerely,

Alicia Gómez Campos  
EPR Secretary General





# EPR Board & Secretariat



## EPR Board

The EPR Board is composed by:

- **Patrick Ruppol**, GTB
- **Sabina Lobato**, Fundación ONCE
- **Pablo Sánchez**, Fundación INTRAS
- **Tom Cardoso**, CRM
- **Anne Marie McDonnell**, Rehab Group
- **Veronika Kaska**, Astangu VRC
- **Furio Gramatica**, Fondazione Don Gnocchi

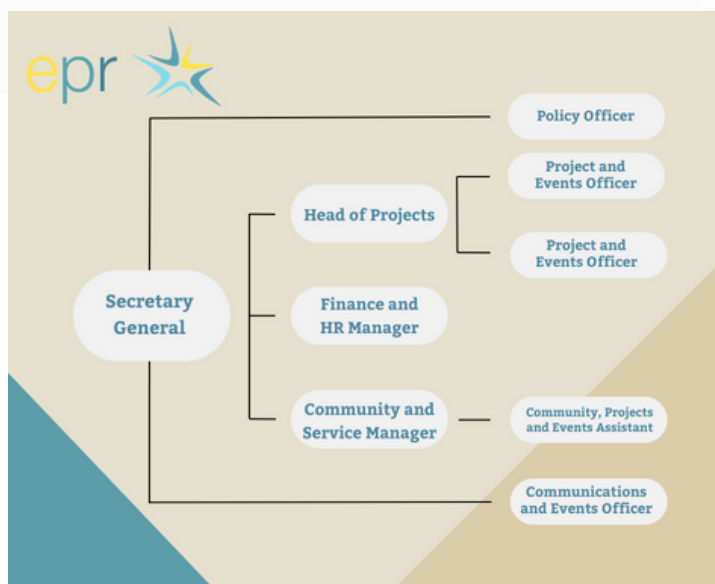
## EPR Secretariat

### New Secretary General!

After serving as EPR's Secretary General for eight years, Laura Jones bid farewell to embark on a new chapter in her professional journey. Starting in August, Alicia Gómez Campos took on the role of EPR's new Secretary General, bringing a fresh perspective to lead EPR into its next phase of growth and innovation.

### Changes in the EPR Organigram

In 2023, EPR welcomed new team members to the EPR Secretariat: Greta Giardi, Marta Beska and Eberhard Lueder!



Alongside welcoming new team members, the EPR Board was busy restructuring the Secretariat. This update reflected the Board's desire for a strong management team, which is crucial for our continued growth. With this new setup, we aim to ensure that our work at the Secretariat is well-organised, allowing EPR to thrive and evolve smoothly.

← 2023 EPR Organigram

# ■ Embracing Sustainability

## ■ EPR Annual Conference 2024

In 2023, EPR celebrated its 30th anniversary by partnering with the Centre de Réadaptation de Mulhouse (CRM) in Mulhouse, France, for a milestone Annual Conference. With sustainability at the forefront, the event focused on eco-innovation, the green economy, and organisational capacity building.

Key themes included supporting service providers in their green transition, showcasing social enterprises in the green economy, and exploring green skills needs in education and training. Discussions also revolved around engaging with CSR & ESG debates, sustainable staff recruitment, and retention initiatives.

The dynamic program featured workshops, plenaries, and networking sessions, offering practical insights and fostering collaboration. Participants left inspired and empowered to drive positive change within their organisations and communities, reaffirming EPR's commitment to sustainability and inclusive growth as it looks toward the future. Thank you all for this memorable conference!

[Read the event's report here.](#)





## EPR Study: Skills and jobs for an inclusive green economy

The Study “Skills and jobs for an inclusive green economy” explores the concepts of the green economy and green jobs, along with the requisite skill sets for employment. This study also examines the services offered by EPR member organisations to assist people with disabilities in obtaining training and support for green jobs.



## EPR Online Campaign: Green Transition



In 2023, EPR launched an online campaign centered on promoting an inclusive Green Transition for everyone. The aim was to increase awareness and understanding of the opportunities and obstacles encountered by people with disabilities during the shift to a green economy. To achieve this, we created graphics showcasing EPR's green initiatives, environmental strategies, the advantages of a circular economy, and the importance of green skills, among others. These graphics were shared on all EPR's social media platforms.

[Explore the visuals here.](#)

## EPR Environmental Strategy

In 2023, EPR continued to promote the exchange of experiences, environmental practices, and sustainability initiatives among its members. In 2022, EPR released the [Environmental – Sustainability Strategy & Resources](#) document to assist members in fostering sustainable organizations and enhancing the sustainability of the network and secretariat's activities. This document underwent implementation, monitoring, and evaluation by the end of 2023 to consider potential adjustments, such as incorporating new initiatives.



# European Pillar of Social Rights: Rights-based approach



## Public Affairs event: Ensuring rights-based services for people with a disability

The EPR Public Affairs event took place on December 4th in Brussels, Belgium, focusing on EPR's advocacy for best practices in providing rights-based services for individuals with disabilities as part of this year's [EPR Study](#). The event started with a presentation of the EPR 2023 study's main findings and the announcement of the winner of the EPR Prize 2023: the "Ayho! web platform and app for pre-employment training and on-the-job support," created by Fundación ONCE (Spain).

Additionally, a thought-provoking panel discussion was held with the other nominees of the EPR Prize 2023. The event concluded with the participation of esteemed guests including Katarina Ivanković Knežević, Director for Social Rights and Inclusion, DG Employment, European Commission, Katrin Langensiepen, MEP, Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance, European Parliament, and Nadia Hadad, Co-chair of ENIL and member of the Executive Committee of EDF, in a panel discussion involving policymakers.

[Read the event's report here.](#)

EPR Study: Ensuring rights-based services for people with a disability



## EPR Study Visit Autism Foundation (AFF)



EPR members gathered in Helsinki to explore Autism Foundation Finland's services, aiming to raise awareness of the European Pillar of Social Rights, share best practices, discuss challenges, and develop recommendations. The meeting centered on supporting people with autism, including discussions on the EU Disability Strategy and other initiatives.

## EPR Study Visit Centre de Réadaptation de Mulhouse (CRM)

EPR organised a study visit during its Annual Conference in CRM in Mulhouse, France. Members visited their training facilities for nurse assistants, professional security staff, psychotherapy, and technology departments. CRM shared their sustainability activities and sports installations. Discussions included CRM's practices, challenges, and success factors, leading to the development of success factors for policymakers.

## Older People with Disabilities in a European Dimension: Care Models and Service Provision

Fundación Rey Ardid and EPR jointly organised the conference "Older People with Disabilities in a European Dimension," which took place in Madrid, Spain, on December 14th. Professionals from Spain, Italy and Germany provided insightful discussions and presentations, exploring the challenges and opportunities faced by older people with disabilities across Europe. The aim was to explore new care models and service provision focused on enhancing their quality of life.

Read the conference report [here](#).



# ■ Employment

## ■ Working Group Return to Work & Partnerships with Employers

This new working group launched activities in 2023 with three online meetings. The first meeting invited members to explore different thematic areas in EU context, including the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030 and the Disability Employment Package, on the practitioner side the main services and challenges for members in connection with return-to-work programmes and partnerships with employers, and challenges with providing reasonable accommodations. For the September meeting, the working group discussed a wide range of topics and priorities relevant for employment support and partnerships, identified 14 key areas and held a poll on which are considered most relevant for service implementation and development. The last meeting was used to discuss the four most voted topics, green and digital transitions, supported employment incl. IPS, awareness to employers, and job retention for persons who attained a disability while employed. In this meeting, members also reviewed good practices to be included in the EPR study [Skills and jobs for an inclusive green economy](#).

## ■ EPR Toolkit

The EPR Toolkit “[Partnerships with employers: Creating equal opportunities at the workplace for people with disabilities](#)” presents ideas and suggestions for organisations that help people with a disability in finding a job.



## ■ Autism at Work: Overcoming challenges, driving change

Around 80 participants joined the successful webinar "Autism at Work: Overcoming Challenges, Driving Change," co-organised with Autism-Europe on 25th October. The event featured prominent speakers, including Olga Martínez de Briones, from the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion at the European Commission, and Alex Agius Saliba, who serves as the Vice Chair of the European Parliament Committee on Petitions and is a Member of the Disability Intergroup. Attendees had the opportunity to delve into the insightful practices shared by EPR members, Theotokos Foundation (Greece) and Heliomare (The Netherlands), and from other organisation members of Autism-Europe. The webinar aimed to shed light on the challenges faced by persons with autism in the workplace and how to overcome these obstacles.

[Read the report here.](#)



# Quality

## National Awareness Raising Event (NARE): Ensuring Quality Services and Quality of Life

In collaboration with Theotokos Foundation and The Net / To Diktyo, EPR hosted its NARE event on 19 December. Forty-four participants from Greek social and disability sector organisations attended online. Sessions covered quality assurance, measuring service impact on quality of life, and the Greek disability sector's challenges. A highlight was the exchange with the president of The Net / To Diktyo, who discussed the difficulties in maintaining high-quality services amid staff turnover and job insecurity. Participants reaffirmed their commitment to high-quality support for people with disabilities and emphasised the crucial role of service workers. They agreed that platforms like EPR and The Net / To Diktyo, along with experienced organisations like Theotokos Foundation, are vital for sharing knowledge and tools on quality assurance. [Read the report here.](#)



### Certified Organisations

NORWAY 25

9 PORTUGAL

SLOVENIA 6

4 LITHUANIA

GREECE 2

## EQUASS

In 2023, EQUASS continued to promote quality improvement of social services through audits, certifying organisations against our standard, and experts provided consulting to build capacity of providers. EQUASS organised several calibration trainings for existing auditors and consultants to continue the high quality standards. Our National Representative in Lithuania started a 2 year project with capacity building and certifications for 80 service providers in the coming 2 years.

## Workshop: The Quality-of-Life Impact of Disability Services

On December 13th, EPR led an online workshop on the Quality of Life of disability services, organised with PhD Donal McAnaney. About forty people attended, including professionals, service managers, and policymakers in social inclusion and support for people with disabilities. McAnaney guided participants on the meaning and dimensions of Quality of Life, especially for people with disabilities, and presented the Good Practices Guidelines and the Quality of Life Impact Assessment Tool from the [QOLIVET project](#). The workshop included a practical exercise where participants discussed how disability services impact quality of life in their regions. [Read the report here.](#)

# ■ Youth

## ■ EPR Youth Working Group

### 30 March, Esslingen (Germany)

The Youth Working Group Youth met in Germany for a study visit including a seminar “Transitions into vocational training and/or employment for young people with disabilities” held in hybrid format. This event provided a deep insight into projects developed by the hosting organisations in their work with young people, for example Schule des Lebens (school of life), a Mutpol initiative in close collaboration with schools and municipal youth services, Virtuelles Klassenzimmer (virtual classroom) with children with learning difficulties and aged 5-9, or a Mariaberg project offering socio-therapeutic work with young residents at Mariaberg with mental health related issues, illnesses or disabilities. Working Group members of Fundación INTRAS and Theotokos Foundation contributed to the seminar with presentations of Emplea sin barreras (Employ without barriers) and 'Le monde' culinary school.



The Youth Working Group held two further online meetings in October and November, with one meeting taking a closer look at the specific conditions of working with young people in rehabilitation context including an example of Escuelas de Segunda Oportunidad (second chance schools) presented by Fundación Rey Ardid which is offered to people between 18 and 21 years that have not finished their mandatory education. The November meeting included one session with Lisa O'Brian at Focus Ireland and European expert on Housing First and Youth. In previous meetings, the working group had discovered that Housing First appears to have an extraordinarily high level of public acceptance, hence the request to explore further. Lisa shared insights into their work with young homeless people in the southeast of Ireland, and in particular how the organisation finds acceptance and support for the services in the local community and by local authorities.

# Mental Health

## EPR Mental health Working Group

16-17 May, Graz (Austria)

Chance B hosted a study visit of the Mental health Working Group, focusing on new good practices in mental health and soft skills training. Participants explored Chance B's mental health services, including the community-based assistance model used across various service areas. SELBA (mobile social-psychiatric care) offers psychological care and support for clients in their home, thereby supporting their independence. "Trainingswohnen" (temporary residential support and training) is a programme for clients with support needs to prepare for independent living. "Arbeitsassistenz" (Work Assistance Service) provides employment support for clients in various age groups and levels of impairment with adapted pathways to employment.



The Mental Health Working group also held two online meetings. On 21 March, they discussed updates from members, the EU Health Policy Platform, and the European Commission's communication on mental health. The second meeting, on 19 October, focused on EU and WHO activities for 2023 World Mental Health Day and concluded work on the EPR study "Soft Skills Training for People with Mental Health Issues."

## EPR Study: Soft skills training for people with mental health issues

The EPR Study "Soft skills training for people with mental health issues" explains what is intended with soft skills and why it is important to train students and workers on soft skills. The idea of this document is to describe the challenges encountered by service providers in training clients in soft skills, as well as the success factors.





# ■ Digital Skills & Technology

## ■ EPR Digital Skills Working Group

The working group held online meetings in April, September and December, focusing on European projects on digital skills, including “EntR21 – Introduction to Entrepreneurial and 21st Century Skills”, “VOLT – Video Online Learning and Training”, “Digital Invitation project” and “Indico – Increase Digital Competences to Promote Inclusion”. The group also discussed EU initiatives from the 2023 European Year of Skills, such as the European Digital Skills Certificate.

Sessions featured in-depth discussions on national practices in digital skills training and recognition, public-private sector cooperation on digital skills, and the role of big tech. The impact of technology and AI on service provision, particularly in education, training, and work, was highlighted. Members showed considerable interest in exchanging knowledge about AI. The group emphasised that validating competences and skills should be a greater focus of their work.

## ■ INTEREHA Working Group

In 2023, the INTEREHA Working Group was reactivated. In 2023, the INTEREHA Working Group was reactivated. On November 7, EPR held an in-person meeting led by Fondazione Don Gnocchi (FDG). Twelve participants from eight member organisations attended, focusing on relaunching the working group, updates on technology in care and rehabilitation, and recent AI legislation. Discussions included the proposal for a Regulation on the European Health Data Space, the European Parliament's Resolution on AI ethics, the AI Act proposal, and a database developed by FDG. Presentations covered Inkendaal's respiratory device design and FDG's latest robotics and AI projects in healthcare.



# Policy

## EPR Policy Network

The EPR Policy Network (formerly the EPR Policy Working Group) held two online meetings in 2023. The first meeting, focused on updates related to EU initiatives from the European Pillar of Social Rights, including the European Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Social Economy Action Plan, the European Year of Skills, the 2030 Digital Decade, and the European Mental Health Strategy. The second meeting, held on October 18, provided insights into recent EU policy developments, such as updates from the European Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030 and the Employment Package. Alejandro Moledo, EDF Deputy Director & Head of Policy, presented EDF's priorities and manifesto for the upcoming 2024 EU elections. Members discussed the relevance of these activities, emphasising issues like sheltered employment, social and health policies, and the implementation of the UN CRPD at national and EU levels.

## EPR Short Briefings

### EU Disability Employment Package



### Social Economy Action Plan (SEAP)



### EU Care Strategy 2022: One year after the adoption



# ■ European Funded Projects

## ■ Projects concluded in 2023

The logo for 'change4inclusion' features the word 'change' in a light blue font, a stylized '4' in a darker blue, and 'inclusion' in a light green font.

**Change4Inclusion**'s aims to support employers to work towards inclusive workplaces and learn about inclusive organisation culture. The project helps to anchor inclusive job design, including the techniques of job crafting and job carving, in a sustainable way within enterprise or organisation.

[Read the last updates of the project here.](#)

The logo for 'QOLIVET' features the letters 'QOLIVET' in a bold, sans-serif font. The 'Q' is blue, 'O' is green, 'L' is purple, 'I' is blue, 'V' is purple, 'E' is blue, and 'T' is blue.

Enhancing the quality of Vocational Education and Training and Community Care provision across Europe and raising its impact on the Quality of Life of students and end-users is the core objective of the **QOLIVET project**.

[Find out more about it here.](#)

The logo for 'QUASAR' features a stylized 'Q' made of concentric circles in blue and yellow, followed by the letters 'UASAR' in a yellow, sans-serif font.

The **QUASAR project** aims at assuring and improving quality in VET and care services for people with disabilities based on Rights and Quality of Life, by promoting the knowledge about trends and key issues in quality assurance and quality management

[Find out more about it here.](#)

## ■ Ongoing Projects

The logo for 'AUTHERAPIES' features a stylized infinity symbol in red, orange, and blue, with the word 'AUTHERAPIES' in a bold, blue, sans-serif font below it.

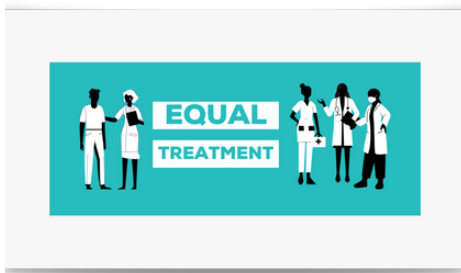
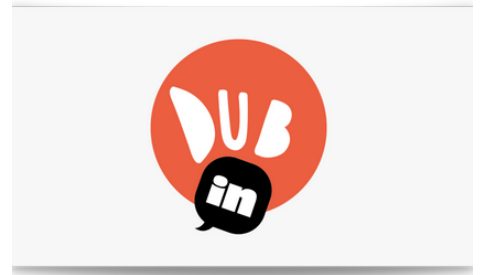
**AUTHERAPIES** aims at improving the competencies of people with autism, their families, and professionals, both in training and in practice, in choosing evidence-based therapies and interventions.

[Find out more about it here.](#)



The **[DUB-IN project](#)** aims to improve the social and interpersonal skills of people with psychosocial disabilities. It provides an innovative training course centred around film dubbing techniques where participants practise scenes portraying daily situations that may be challenging for them.

Find the progress of the project [here](#).



The **[EQUAL TREATMENT project](#)** aims to enhance access to secondary and tertiary healthcare for people with intellectual disabilities through inclusive European policies, staff training on interacting with patients with intellectual disabilities, and collaboration between healthcare staff and professional supporters.

Read last year's updates [here](#).

The **[Helpdesk project](#)** aims to finance the building blocks for a Social Services Helpdesk that will have two main priorities: to support social services in accessing and using EU funds and to help Managing Authorities use EU funds to finance quality interventions in the field of social services.

Find out more about its progress [here](#).

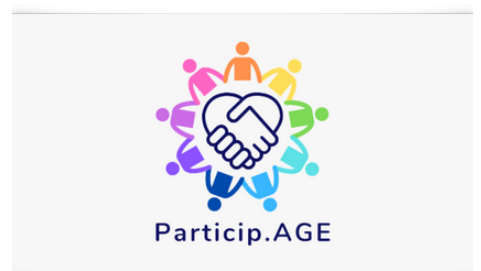


The **[LMI4DIS\\_ABLED project](#)** aims at reducing those factors contributing to the multidimensional exclusion of people with a disability from adequate career opportunities and labour market participation.

Find more information about the project [here](#).

The **[Particip.AGE project](#)** aims to support community participation and social inclusion of Ageing People with Intellectual Disabilities by supporting their rights and fostering a more inclusive approach within the community towards them.

Discover the updates of the project [here](#).





The [Supported Apprenticeship Scheme](#) aims to pilot an innovative and improved supported apprenticeship scheme for young persons with disabilities to enable them to transition and integrate smoothly into the labour market.

[Read more about the project here.](#)

The [Time 2 Outdoor \(T2O\)](#) project aims to enhance sports participation among children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) by developing an educational curriculum featuring outdoor activities tailored to children aged 8-10 on the spectrum.

[Discover more about the project here.](#)



The [VOLT project](#) responds to an ongoing need for inclusive and accessible digital learning opportunities. The project aims at creating training resources for staff and learners in VET services for people with disabilities.

[Read last year's highlights of the project here.](#)

## ■ Project Development Working Group

In 2023, EPR project Development Working Group met three times. The first online meeting in January was focused on relevant calls for members, on participants' experiences in developing mobility projects under the Erasmus Plus – Key Action 1, and on the discussion of project ideas to develop.

In May, the Working Group was hosted in a sunny Valladolid by Fundación INTRAS. The one day meeting was mainly dedicated to present the Erasmus Plus Capacity Building action, the QOLIVET Project deliverables. Also, participants were involved in a workshop to share good practices and tips on how to write a successful impact section for project applications.

The final meeting took place online in November and saw the participation of an external expert, Philippe Ternes (CERV National Contact point in Luxembourg), who presented the CERV funding framework and funding opportunity relevant for the members. Updates on project ideas to be designed and submitted were also further discussed by the participants.

# ■ Communication Highlights

## ■ Social Media Statistics



+77 followers | 886 interactions | 107 posts



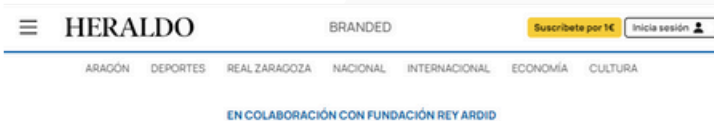
+38 followers | 424 interactions | 113 posts



+175 followers | 1.252 interactions | 86 posts

## ■ Press Highlights

In 2023, EPR was featured in the Spanish news by the local newspaper Heraldo de Aragón and the national press agency EuropaPress!



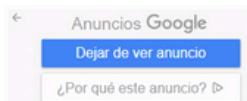
### Una jornada para poner en valor el cuidado de los mayores y la importancia del bienestar mental

La Fundación Rey Ardid organizó el pasado jueves la I Jornada de Personas Mayores con Discapacidad en una Dimensión Europea.

CONTENIDO DE MARCA / ARAGÓN MEDIA LAB NOTICIA / ACTUALIZADA 18/12/2023 A LAS 07:00



### Expertos europeos del sector cuidados abordan en Madrid los retos del futuro de los mayores con discapacidad





## EPR Communications Network

This year's online EPR Communications Network meeting was joined by the **Communications Teams** of: AURA Fundación, Fundación INTRAS, Fundación Rey Ardid, Rehab Group, SIVA, The Cedar Foundation and Theotokos Foundation.

The first session allowed members to exchange practices on external communication tools, awareness and lobbying campaigns, and internal communication strategies. The second part of the session presented participants the potential use of AI tools for social media and other communication activities. Participants were able to make use of these tools and discuss about their benefits. The meeting ended with a discussion about the critical situation of X, former Twitter, and its future in their organisations.

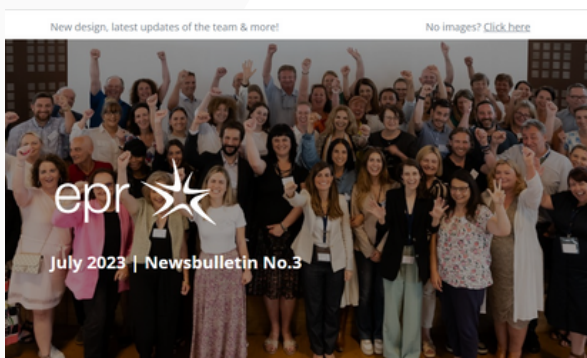


## EPR Newsletter

During 2023, six Newsbulletin were produced and circulated to members. In July, the EPR Secretariat started using 'Campaign Monitor' as their mailing platform with the aim of improving its design and better analyse their impact.

The EPR Newsletter includes the sections: EPR Highlights, TOP EU News, EPR Member News, EU Funded Projects, and the Upcoming Events calendar.

EPR Newsbulletins can be found [here](#).



## EPR Member News TOP Contributions



REHABILITATION CENTER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES AND AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS



# Online Resources

## EPR Knowledge Hub

In 2023, EPR expanded its online resources further by enhancing its [Knowledge Hub](#) website with additional information and topics, including trends, best practices, and other valuable insights. Resources included this year were:

### GOOD PRACTICES

- [EPR 2023 Prize Practices](#)
- [ICF-International Classification of Functioning](#)
- [Youth](#)

### EMPLOYMENT

- [Glossary](#)

### FUNDING & POLICY

- [Employment](#)
- [EU-funded projects](#)
- [EU Policy Instruments and Strategies](#)





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# Thank You!

The EPR Team

