



Brussels, 17 September 2021
Ref: EDF-YV-21-45

To:

Commissioner Stella Kyriakides, Commissioner for Health and Food Safety

Cc:

Commissioner Helena Dalli, Commissioner for Equality

Subject: Request for a meeting on inclusion of persons with disabilities in the EU policies on health

Dear Commissioner,

On behalf of the European Disability Forum (EDF), umbrella organisation of persons with disabilities in Europe, I am writing to you to request a meeting to discuss the inclusion of persons with disabilities in EU policies on health.

While progress has been made in access to health in the European Union, including through the adoption of EU legislation, such as the Directive on the application of patients' rights in cross-border healthcare, we remain concerned by gaps in access for persons with disabilities, including widespread discrimination within health systems, lack of access to information and healthcare services, reasonable accommodation and training of professionals. According to the [Gender Equality Index 2020](#), women and men with disabilities are less likely to perceived themselves in good health, and report more unmet needs to healthcare, than those without disabilities.¹ These gaps were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, as explained in our [Human Rights Report on the impact COVID-19 on persons with disabilities](#), sent to you in March.

Our organisation and our European and national members have since then been particularly active in advocating for inclusive healthcare policies at national and EU levels, including in mental healthcare. In particular, EDF has contributed this year to consultations related to the European Health Union,² the evaluation of patient rights in cross-border healthcare, and digital health data and services.

This week we published a [Report on access to cross-border healthcare by patients with disabilities in the EU](#) to contribute to the evaluation of the Patient

¹ More than three time more women with disabilities and twice more men with disabilities were with unmet needs to medical examination in the EU, according to EIGE's Gender Equality Index 2020.

² Including proposals to reinforce the mandate of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, on serious cross-border health threats, on the European Medical Agency and on the European Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority.

Mobility Directive, which you can find enclosed to this letter, and increased the visibility on health related topics, including EU health policy, [on our website](#).

Another important initiative for our constituency is the **Europe's Beating Cancer Plan**. Unfortunately, persons with disabilities often face a lack of access to health information, public health screening, lack of, or late diagnosis due to inaccessible cancer screening services and overall inequality and discrimination in accessing healthcare services. We are planning to contribute to the upcoming consultations on the topic and would appreciate the opportunity to discuss with you additional ways to actively contribute to this important initiative and other health-related initiatives specifically included in the **Disability Rights Strategy for 2021-2030**.

In particular, we are also interested to know how the Commission will address issues related to health and disability through the Steering Group on Promotion and Prevention (SGPP) for the sharing of validated health-related good practices to support Member States in their health reforms, and how it will support stakeholders in the area of mental healthcare.

Finally, we reiterate our concerns about the trend of involuntary placement and treatment of users of mental health services in Europe, particularly affecting persons with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities, as well as autistic people. Any form of forced or coercive treatment, indeed any treatment without fully informed consent of the person receiving the treatment is a violation of human rights and of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. As you may know EDF has been active in [campaigning against the draft additional protocol to the Oviedo Convention of the Council of Europe](#) that would allow such placement and treatment. Considering the principle of unity and duty to sincere cooperation in mixed agreements, we have called on the EU to take a stand against the draft additional protocol that will be put for adoption by the Council of Europe's Committee of Bioethics in November 2021.

We would like to thank you in advance for your time and consideration, and we look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Yannis Vardakastanis
President of the European Disability Forum

The European Disability Forum

The European Disability Forum (EDF) is an independent NGO that defend the interests of 100 million Europeans with disabilities. EDF is a unique platform which

brings together representative organisation of persons with disabilities from across Europe. EDF is run by persons with disabilities and their families. We are a strong, united voice of persons with disabilities in Europe.