

HELIOSCOPE



QUARTERLY - SPRING 1995 - No. 3

education for all

Human rights: questionnaire on violence and discrimination
European Parliament: the All Party Disablement Group
Newcomers: Austria, Sweden and Finland

EUROPEAN DISABILITY MAGAZINE

e d i t o r i a l

P. Lamoral
*Director
of the HELIOS Team of Experts*

life-long learning

Never has the saying “you never stop learning” rung so true, as education extends its reach beyond the traditional age limits of schooling to encompass pre-school training and life-long learning. This is essential if there is to be a universal guarantee of equal opportunities in terms of developing intellectual, emotional and social capacities.

Research in the social sciences over recent years has revealed that neither age nor a low level of development can justify inaction, and that early intervention and pre-school training are not only possible but in some cases indispensable.

Structural changes in the education system and the use of differentiated teaching methods have enabled a better response to the special needs of students. Experience in adult education has shown the positive effect this can have in helping people to cope with economic and social change.

The development of new communication technologies opens up new prospects for interaction between the individual and the community.

Awareness of progress made in understanding the conditions which favour the development of disabled people is a challenge for all those involved in the education system: disabled people, parents, education professionals and policy-makers alike.

In the Middle Ages, and for a long time thereafter, knowledge was considered a dangerous thing. Now the opposite is true, and will remain so. Ignorance is the real danger. Ignorance breeds prejudice and slows the pace of progress.

The purpose of the HELIOS II programme, like other Community programmes and initiatives such as SOCRATES, LEONARDO and EMPLOYMENT-HORIZON, is to promote the awareness, debate and innovation needed to ensure that the disabled citizens of tomorrow's Europe do not become victims of prejudice and misunderstanding.

The partners in the HELIOS programme undertake various activities designed to complement the work of those involved in a range of other EU programmes and initiatives, with the aim of helping to improve the quality of education.

As is often the case, change comes, directly or indirectly, in response to the practical problems which arise and the solutions required on a day-to-day basis. Educational reform –for example the move towards “education for all”, with suitable facilities for all pupils– is partly the fruit of attempts to find answers to the problems posed by those facing the greatest difficulties.

Note to our readers

As of this issue, *HELIOSCOPE* will be published in the two new official EU languages: Swedish and Finnish. *HELIOSCOPE* is currently available on audio-cassette in English, French, German, Dutch, Danish and Italian, as well as on diskette in English, French, German, Dutch, Danish, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese in the following IBM-compatible wordprocessor formats: ASCII, Word for Windows 2.0, WordPerfect 5.1 and WordStar 5.0. The Greek version is currently available only in WordPerfect 5.1.

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There are two pitfalls to be avoided in our efforts to help improve the quality of education provision for disabled people: firstly the minimalist approach to change, limiting it to ad hoc adjustments, and secondly the maximalist course, which is to galvanise the entire system, putting the emphasis on economic considerations.

Substantial progress has been achieved towards an education system focused on the learning potential and abilities of the individual, rather than on personal difficulties. But it remains a challenge for the various partners involved.

Such a system allows each individual to exercise the right to integration, achieve self-determination and find his or her own means of participation in community development.

It thereby contributes to founding a democracy based on respect and understanding for the fundamental values of universality and diversity.

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Quarterly publication of HELIOS, the Community action programme for disabled people. Available free of charge in the eleven official EU languages. *HELIOSCOPE* is published on behalf of the European Commission, DG V/E/3, Integration of disabled people unit, but does not necessarily reflect its official views. The logos, illustrations and photographs may not be reproduced. **Editorial Coordination and subscriptions: HELIOS Team of Experts/Information Service**, avenue de Cortenberg 79, B-1040 Brussels, Belgium. Tel.: +32.2 738 06 22/23. Fax: +32.2 735 16 71. **Editor:** P. Lamoral. Director of the HELIOS Team of Experts. **Photographs:** M. Mandy. **Translation and graphic design:** CONTEXT LANGUAGE SERVICES and Signé Lazer Printed on non-chlorine-bleached paper.

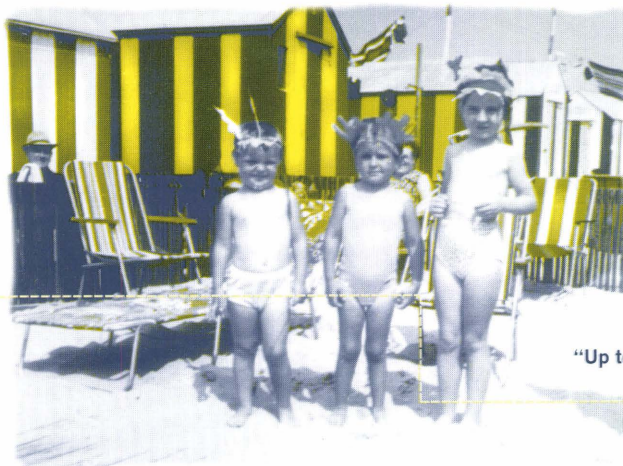


challenges

and obstacles on the long road
towards educational integration

Inge Ranschaert started school in the mainstream education system, subsequently switched to special education and finally obtained her diploma in special needs education from Leuven University, Belgium. This article describes her experiences at school and in her professional life, from the viewpoint of her current work with the association for Catholic special education in Flanders.

challenges



“Up to the age of six, my disability was not a real obstacle”

As a 29-year-old woman with a neuro-muscular disease, I can look back on an exciting academic career which had its fair share of difficulties. Up to the age of six, my disability caused virtually no problems. I may have run slower and with slightly more difficulty than other children, but it was not a real obstacle. There were no special arrangements at the local nursery school, except that the teachers had to make sure that the other children did not push me over and that I was left to sit quietly on my chair watching the other children running around at play time.

After this initial experience, my parents clearly wanted to keep me in the mainstream school system. So I was enrolled just like any other six-year-old in the first year of a nearby primary school. However, during the summer holidays before I was due to start at “big” school my situation changed and I had to start using a wheelchair. My parents spoke to the school to inquire about access to buildings, help with going to the toilet, etc. “But haven’t you heard of special education?” they were told. “We want to help, but you must understand that in the special education sector they are trained for cases like this...”

This was back in the early 1970s, when the special education act (1970) had been in force in Flanders for just a few years. The act was passed to meet the special educational needs of disabled pupils, which the mainstream system frequently failed to cater for. The result was that my parents quite quickly decided to enrol me at a special school. With special education welcoming me with open arms and the mainstream system closing the door in my face, the “choice” was clear.

I remember my time at primary school (between the ages of six and 12) as being quite carefree. Apart from the fact that all the local children went to the big girls’ or boys’ school, while I had a bus ride of about two hours every morning and evening to get to my special school about 20 km away, I did not really feel very “different” at my school.

All that changed when I turned 12 and the time came to choose a secondary school. I opted for the Latin section, and, after assessing my abilities, the PMS (psycho-medical-social centre) and the special education authorities supported me in my choice. The problem was that the Latin option was not available at special schools. We accordingly looked around for a suitable mainstream school. Once again the doors were closed to me, on the pretext that there was no wheelchair access, that my disability could prove progressive and create unforeseen complications, and so on. And once again I found the door of the special school system open to me, this time for the business studies course, which was their “option” for “brighter” pupils.

Adolescence marked the beginning of my revolt, my realisation that I was “different”, and all that meant. It was then that –despite the positive aspects of special education, for instance good friends, small classes, therapy during school hours and the removal of practical barriers – questions arose such as:

- ▶ Why can I not study Latin?
- ▶ Why do all my friends in the neighbourhood go to the ordinary school?
- ▶ Why am I labelled “disabled”?

my personal experience of the Flemish educational system



"The mid-1980s, at Leuven University: a voluntary support system helped disabled students in their daily lives. A revelation for me."



"Adolescence marked the beginning of my revolt –despite the positive aspects of special education. My rebellion was fuelled by the fact that outside school I was integrated in every respect."

"The early 1970s: with special education welcoming me with open arms and the mainstream system closing the door in my face, the 'choice' was clear."

◁ My rebellion was fuelled by the fact that outside school I was well integrated in every respect, and I firmly resolved to go to university. My plans met with a mixed response in special education circles, ranging from an unequivocal "yes" to "it cannot be done". Both reactions further increased my determination to show them that I could do it.

At that time, in 1984, Leuven University was already making considerable efforts to assist disabled students. A voluntary support system involving familiar and unfamiliar faces from all disciplines was set up to help disabled students with everyday tasks in their digs, in class, in their leisure time, etc. This system was a revelation for me. Although it was not always easy, it was a system over which I had control, in which things were not simply done for me, but which I had to make something of. After the positive but very sheltered environment of the special education system, this was a real challenge.

And yet, despite this openness, here too I had to fight to secure equal treatment despite my disability. "No, I am not necessarily going to do my placement at a school for people with motor disabilities just because it is easier to arrange –and yes, of course I am coming on the study trip to Berlin..."

My early years at university were spent rejecting everything and everyone who had anything to do with disabled people. My main aim was to show that I was no different from anyone else, and it was not until the end of my time at university that I was able to appreciate my special education, accept disabled friends, and understand that despite all I had in common with everybody else, I was nevertheless disabled.

Experiences from professional life

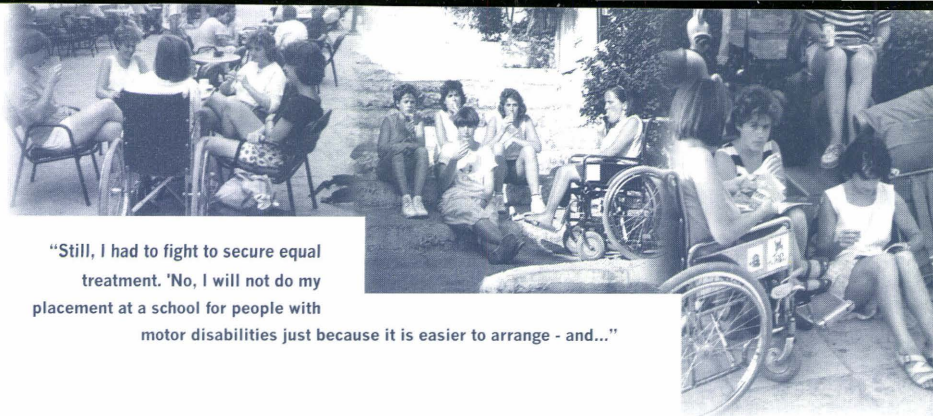
Contrary to expectations, I was quick in finding an extremely rewarding job. It was not, in fact, an easy decision for me to accept the offer, as it involved working to promote integration into mainstream education from within the special schools sector. My past history gave me, on the one hand, mixed feelings about special education and, on the other, inside knowledge of educational integration. This was a new challenge.

For the past four years, I have worked with a team responsible for training special education staff to assist disabled children and young people in mainstream schools, and also the staff in the mainstream system who help them to integrate.

Without going into detail, my experiences can be summarised as follows:

- ▶ Educational integration is clearly influenced by the wider social context. Today's facilities for integration did not exist in my day. Doors which were then firmly closed are now left ajar. Where before there were open arms, there is now also positive action...
- ▶ It all starts with an open mind. Some schools willingly accept disabled children and young people, while others consciously close the door on them. I do not believe censure serves much purpose, however, as ignorance is largely at the root of the problem. Clear, practical information and contact with schools with previous experience in this area are steps in the right direction.
- ▶ Integration is also partly determined by such practical considerations as:
 - Could another classroom be used?
 - Is there enough room?
 - Is there a willingness to make additional investment, even if no special budgets are set aside for it?
 - Is a degree of flexibility possible (e.g. a facility for certain exams to be taken orally)?

My limited experience of HELIOS and time spent in Denmark studying integration in the Danish education system have confirmed the above points. In Italian schools I recognise aspects of the Flemish system of categories and the conditions and options that creates; Ireland showed me that specialised centres are and will remain a necessity; and Denmark prompted critical consideration of who can be regarded as disabled. In other words, Europe presents a very varied landscape. Yet, de-



“Still, I had to fight to secure equal treatment. 'No, I will not do my placement at a school for people with motor disabilities just because it is easier to arrange - and...”

“...yes, of course I am coming on this study trip.”

spite this great diversity, we also share common concerns, the most important in my view being:

- ▶ Integration must be founded on pedagogical arguments. We want to teach children and young people to live together and learn together from a very early age. We want to teach them to accept diversity. On this level, each country is fighting its own battle. Integration, yes –but not as a cost-cutting exercise.
- ▶ Integration implies respecting the individuality of every child and ensuring that provision is commensurate with the rights and needs of each one. On this level too, each country is struggling to find its own way of combining integration and the fulfilment of specific needs.

Conclusion

I believe that the integration process is very much coloured by the wider social context, which is itself in constant evolution. I feel that the greatest problem for integration is the balance between maintaining individual identity and meeting all the student's specific needs. One school in particular comes to mind: after enthusiastically taking on a pupil with a hearing impairment, they were very disappointed that, despite all their efforts, the child still found it difficult to understand speech one month later.

My personal belief is that this is a task for both mainstream and special education. Special education accentuated my “differences” through the separation it involved, to such an extent that I no longer knew who I was. On the other hand, mainstream education stressed my “differences” to such a degree that my sense of belonging disappeared, and at the same time showed complete disregard for my special needs (e.g. “If you cannot do your exam preparation in this classroom –accessible by the staircase only– like everybody else, you will have to sit the exam without”).

Integration must mean more than adapting and fitting in. For me, integration is living together and fully respecting differences and diversity, “sameness” and “otherness”. I would like to appeal for the holistic development of the individual.

Integration which gives the child social acceptance but not the opportunity for full development of intellectual potential has not, to my mind, achieved what it set out to do. Every child should be given maximum opportunity for development at every level. This should take place as far as is appropriate in a mainstream educational environment, with as much specific help as possible and perhaps inclusion in a specific group.

I see the role of HELIOS and its European partners, all with their own specific backgrounds, as being to stimulate new ideas –thereby aiding me in my own process of constant reappraisal, on the basis of those ideas, by which I hope, like Europe, to broaden my horizons...



Inge Ranschaert

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early intervention

the first step towards integration

Intervention measures for children below the age of six who have or are at risk of acquiring a disability or who are behind in their development is attracting increasing interest in many Member States (*).

The aim is to encourage the earliest possible development of aptitudes and abilities, at pre-school age – in particular with a view to the child's participation in community life..

David playing together with his sister.
Family situations are an important basis
for learning and development, and an opportunity for
children to discover their own capacities.



Aims

Early intervention is designed to prevent avoidable disability, provide assistance and guidance for the child from an early age, provide support for the family, and integrate disabled children into school and kindergarten. There is broad consensus on the means by which this should be achieved, although existing provision often varies from one country to another.

Professionals and parents are now united in giving priority to fostering disabled children's confidence in their own abilities, in order to develop their awareness of themselves as independent individuals. Support for independence and the child's individual needs is seen as the key to success. Two wide-ranging surveys into early intervention conducted by the Ludwig-Maximilian University in Munich (Germany) found, inter alia, that 97.6% of parents of disabled children and 96.8% of professionals saw the "well-being" of the child as the primary objective. Further research has also shown that children's development improves when parents and professionals pay particular attention to their needs and interests. They display greater curiosity, more enthusiasm and aptitude for learning, and better social skills.

A holistic approach

Early intervention for disabled children cannot be restricted to treating a "deficiency". It is far more important that it should address the whole person, with all his or her strengths and weaknesses – and the immediate environment too.

Focusing on the family

The natural corollary of the holistic approach is the involvement of the family in the assistance process – and the parents in particular, as they are generally those closest to the child in the early years. A sense of parental acceptance, warmth and security is essential for healthy development. Parents are therefore seen as the key partners in early intervention. Nor do the professionals dominate the partnership. Instead, it is a collaborative process, to which the professional assistants contribute their specialist knowledge and the parents the experience acquired through day-to-day interaction with the child.

Interdisciplinarity

This kind of holistic, family-orientated approach to early intervention requires close collaboration between a range of professionals in the fields of pedagogy, psychology, the social sciences and medicine. The teamwork between professionals from complementary disciplines, and the light it sheds on a range of points, makes it possible to identify a clear direction for the integration process.

Regional and mobile early intervention

Every family with a disabled child should have access to a nearby early intervention centre. Besides avoiding long journeys there and back, this makes it easier to incorporate assistance sessions into usual family life by enabling the professionals to visit the child at home.

higher education

for disabled students not there yet, but on the way



Future tasks

In the future, cross-fertilisation between research and practice should lead to basic research into both the development and guidance process with respect to the disabled child, and cooperation with the parents. The development and application of computerised analysis, education and guidance systems will be a major step forward for early intervention centres and should enable the necessary nationwide and Europe-wide information exchange to take place on all aspects of early intervention. Equally important is the use of new technology, such as multimedia distance learning systems. These can be used to give early intervention centres in every EU country access to details of research results and innovative practice. The new media are set to play an important part in continuing training for professionals and training for parents. In the survey mentioned above, two-thirds of parents expressed an interest in new study media.

To conclude, early intervention in Europe – despite national variations in provision – can be said to be making good progress in terms of the integration of disabled children and support for their families. This was also the general conclusion of the European seminar on early intervention held in Munich in December of last year as part of the HELIOS II programme.

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(*) In Bavaria alone, some 18,000 children receive care from 110 regional early intervention centres every year.

No one who is serious about the integration of disabled people can have any doubts about the importance of higher education. For disabled people, university education paves the way to managerial positions, a say in policy-making and involvement in all kinds of cultural activities. Access to higher education for disabled people is no luxury, but a prerequisite for a society which seeks equal opportunities for all its members.

We are, however, only gradually coming to an awareness of this need. In Europe, the first steps were taken in the early 1970s. But it was not until the 1980s that it became common for disabled students to go on to higher education, and even then it was not the general rule. Most countries still lack specific legislation on access to higher education. Also, budget allocations remain insufficient.

Typical structural obstacles to education for disabled students at post-school level are the sheer number of students, the content and nature of courses and the need for a high degree of physical stamina.

The individual student is often lost amidst a large student body. Students are preselected and largely expected to acquire the necessary learning and social skills for themselves. Personal matters and problems connected with the study method receive comparatively little attention. Finally, the teaching staff is usually also very large and not always very approachable.

Higher education also offers very diverse courses of study, whose specific content and requirements are not always very clear.

One example is laboratory work, where provisions vary greatly according to the subject; students are expected to set up experiments on their own for some courses, and in groups for others. While the latter is possible for a student with a severe motor disability, the former can present problems.

Then there are the high demands on intellectual performance. Studying requires not only considerable intellectual ability, but a robust physical constitution as well. A large number of lectures must be attended, a great deal of material has to be assimilated in a short space of time and exam periods are tiring and stressful. Adjustments to the curriculum and examination arrangements are needed for some disabled students.

The HELIOS II working group on integration into higher education is currently pooling experience on the subject of efficient policy and study systems. They have already concluded that each institution must have a clear contact point, run by an expert member of staff. At present, only insiders find the right channels for information and effective dialogue. At some institutions, this is now the job of the careers guidance and counselling officer, for instance.

A number of countries (including Germany, France, Sweden and the United States) require their higher education establishments to appoint a contact person. This is no doubt a step in the right direction but does not in itself provide sufficient guarantees of effective support. Study and training facilities must also be provided. There is a need to build up real expertise in order to pinpoint problems and seek creative solutions.

Also, this support function should not be left to just one person. The best



higher education



results are achieved by working within a broad network of contact persons within the education sector, including student services and regional and national organisations and service centres. We

must adopt a multidisciplinary approach.

National and regional umbrella organisations also have a crucial part to play in collecting and disseminating information and experience, and providing training. They have already proved their worth in countries such as Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

Recently, particular attention has also been focused on participation in international exchange programmes. FEDORA-HANDI (European federation of careers guidance bureaux, disabled students' section) has developed an EU directory of contact persons and facilities at higher-education guidance centres, intended for disabled people, with financial assistance from the European Commission. This is coupled with a questionnaire in nine languages in which disabled students can describe their needs to a host university. Colleagues from the United States are compiling a similar directory for the USA and Canada, which is due out in mid-1995. Hopefully, the time is approaching when the disabled student population will also be able to benefit from a vast pool of experience from abroad.

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prospects for adult education

1995 is the first year in the history of HELIOS that adult education is on the agenda. One of the events scheduled to mark the occasion was a European conference on adult education/vocational training organised by EASE, the European Association for Special Education, in collaboration with the HELIOS Team of Experts, which was held in Thessaloníki, Greece, at the end of February 1995.

EASE was founded in Sweden in 1968 and has been monitoring developments in special education in Europe for more than 25 years. Over the first few years, the association focused on establishing personal contacts throughout Europe. UNESCO supported the first EASE conference as early as 1970. The next stage of EASE's development was to forge links with other international organisations and bodies, such as the Council of Europe and the Commission of the European Communities. The focus in recent years has been on disseminating information and improving contact with members. The designation of EASE as a coordinating NGO under the HELIOS programme has broadened the association's field of activities still further, resulting in an even wider range of users and increased membership. EASE currently represents around 70,000 teachers throughout Europe, through local and national NGOs.

EASE's primary objective is to help improve education and welfare provision for disabled people and to raise awareness of every issue of relevance for them, with a view to securing their social and economic integration. Information activities and meetings, seminars, conferences, etc. are organised to this end. A significant aspect of EASE's activities is providing opportunities for exchanges of experience and expertise in the field of special education in Europe.

EASE is the coordinating NGO in the field of education within the HELIOS II European Disability Forum and, as such, is committed to monitoring and reporting on developments within the European Union, which it does through EASEC, the association's EU wing. One area to which EASE has devoted particular attention in recent years is adult education. The extension of the HELIOS programme's focus to include adult education does not, of course, imply that there is not already a whole range of adult education activities under way in Europe; it is more a reflection of the fact that, for a number of years, efforts have been –very successfully– concentrated on the integration of children.

In general terms, adult education in Europe can be divided into two categories. On the one hand there are general courses which often do not lead to formal qualifications but have the broader aim of improving students' functional abilities and quality of life with a view to greater social integration. On the other there are vocational courses which do lead to formal qualifications and seek to improve students' chances of economic integration.

However, it must be said that no comprehensive overview of adult education in Europe is available, and a survey of the systems operating in the various countries is therefore urgently needed. Hopefully, this can be achieved over the remaining two years of the HELIOS II programme.

Adult education in Europe can be divided into two categories. On the one hand there are general courses which often do not lead to formal qualifications but have the broader aim of improving students' functional abilities and quality of life with a view to greater social integration. On the other there are vocational courses which do lead to formal qualifications and seek to improve students' chances of economic integration.

Vocational courses for disabled adults have been running for some time now in most countries, with, naturally, variations in organisation and practice from one country to another. The common denominator is that training of this kind enhances the job prospects of disabled people, with the aim of achieving economic integration. One factor that has influenced the impact of these measures is the current long period of high unemployment in every country in Europe: as a result, targeted levels of integration have not been achieved, and unemployment rates among disabled people are higher than for other groups. Another consequence is the need for reassessment of the sheltered job opportunities currently available – an area in which there is plenty of scope for development and innovation.

As regards more general education provision for disabled people, the northern European countries in particular have developed courses with clearly non-vocational aims. For example, all the Scandinavian countries have legislation establishing the right of disabled people to remedial training (to relieve and lessen the impact of the disability) and training of a more general nature (to improve the quality of life). In Denmark, a nationwide system of adult education centres offers special education to people with disabilities of all types. Centres in some areas broadly cover the whole range of disabilities (speech and linguistic difficulties, hearing problems, autism, learning difficulties, brain injury and a range of minor disorders). In others, special education provision is shared between institutions for people with speech, reading, language and sight problems, institutions for people with hearing impairments, and schools for people with other disabilities. This system secures the right to education

and indeed life-long learning for disabled people. Although there is particular emphasis on young people who have completed their compulsory schooling, all disabled adults have genuine opportunities for education throughout their lives.

In addition to the overriding aim of securing access to education for disabled people, we must also seek to exchange experience in order to develop new ideas and teaching methods. Replication of, for example, Denmark's special education system for adults is not an end in itself but, in a multicultural forum such as Europe, such systems may be the inspiration and model for other countries. It is a clear tenet of EASE policy that replication does not produce optimal solutions. Each country must build on its national traditions, cultural background and resources to establish and develop its own system, taking inspiration from models tried elsewhere.

It should also be noted that a differentiated education system offers a wealth of opportunities for gearing teaching to the individual student, and modern technology has broadened the scope for teaching disabled people. In this particular area, technical aids are a real milestone in the history of education, offering an alternative for individuals for whom study in a school or other institution is difficult. Modern technology, new teaching materials and distance learning techniques can create educational opportunities for people who, for a variety of reasons, do not have access to mainstream education.

In a society where the volume of information and the scope for applying the knowledge acquired are vast, educational facilities geared to the needs and wishes of the individual disabled student must be developed further. There will be a need

for short-term refresher courses to update the knowledge acquired through basic schooling, but also, in the longer term, courses of study designed to develop more elementary skills.

Another crucial development is that disabled people are increasingly coming to have a direct say not only as regards the actual content and form of the tuition they receive but also within official bodies with a bearing on schools, such as boards of governors and consumer councils.

Special education for adults cannot be either/or, general or vocational: it must be both. In a society which apparently continues to accept high levels of unemployment, especially among disabled people, provision must be made for vocational training for those willing and able to achieve economic integration on society's general terms; but in a society where most people also have more and more leisure time, provision must also be made for a form of education that aims to promote social integration and enhance the quality of life by imparting a broader range of knowledge and skills.

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Distance learning

Education for all has been a common goal of educational cooperation since the early 1980s in Scandinavia, where the twin approaches of differentiation and provision geared to the individual pupil have paved the way for ever greater integration.

Innovation

The successive HELIOS programmes have helped to define a European goal for integrated education, with a particular focus on areas in the field of special needs education. And Denmark, as a member of both “unions” (the EU and the Nordic Council of Ministers), has derived great benefit from the contrast and inspiration that a diversity of approaches and traditions always provides.

The Danish school system, typified by its emphasis on integrated schooling, the class-teacher principle and the right to pedagogical/psychological counselling, has implemented a reform entitled “School for All”. The reform attaches very great importance to integrated teaching principles, and the student’s right to tuition at a local school and to an education tailored to individual needs. Denmark has gained inspiration from debate within the European Union and in the framework of educational cooperation within the Nordic Council of Ministers.

Distance learning – a dynamic approach

Distance learning is a relatively new application of technology. It opens up new, innovative possibilities for a European school where all children are taught together. By means of networking, teachers in schools across the various countries work together towards a single goal: creating the best school for all children. What form it will take, no one yet knows, but the aim is clear and the diversity of local approaches provides fertile soil for exchanges of experience, bringing teachers closer step by step to Europe’s goal – the best school in the world for all children.

Synergy and transfer

The HELIOS programme’s targeted efforts to develop sound innovative models for teaching pupils in an integrated environment has turned the spotlight full on the alternatives offered by new information technology in the field of education. The programme’s emphasis on exchanges of experience and discussion between professionals in various parts of the European Union makes dynamic data networks an attractive option. In addition, the HORIZON and TIDE Community initiatives’ strategies on technology have enabled the expertise and the technology to be channelled to other areas.

EuroTESS networking – a European model

TESS and EuroTESS networks are dynamic data networks linking schools, educational establishments and information centres in Scandinavia and the EU countries. They were set up under the HORIZON initiative, and the experience gained in distance learning and communications feeds into the four sectors of the HELIOS II exchange and information activities.

The three strands of the TESS and EuroTESS networks cover in-service training, teleconferences on dialogue and dynamic communication.

At present, the data networks link up more than 100 schools, universities and information centres. Teachers in Denmark obtain information in Portugal and attend courses with colleagues from Wales, Ireland, the Faroes and Greece. All of them are working towards their goal of education for all; everyone is searching for the “best” model.



distance learning

impact on a European strategy of education for all

By making transnational exchanges of experience part of daily life for European teachers, we are creating better conditions for the generation now on its way through school. If teachers are open to inspiration and to the challenge of communication, then this will become an everyday occurrence for pupils in 20 years' time. This is a core aspect of the TESS and EuroTESS distance learning projects.

The foreseeable future – Europe-wide

Data transmission networking opens up unimaginable new horizons. Data transmission networks are not bound by national borders. No duties or taxes are levied on knowledge or experience; teachers everywhere will be able to trade experiences with colleagues in other countries and gain inspiration from other cultures.

This is where Europe's future lies. Knowledge will banish prejudice and conscious action will promote cohesion and a sense of community. What is interesting is that many valuable innovative measures have sprung from exchanges of experience under the HELIOS programme, and these can be consolidated through cooperation on data networks such as TESS and EuroTESS.

Ole Hansen

Chief Educational Psychologist

- The Pedagogical Psychological Advisory Service (PPR) of Hadsten, Hinnerup and Rosenholm is a multidisciplinary service run jointly by three independent local authorities. Its task is to provide advice and guidance to schools, teachers, parents and pupils on special needs education.
- The Scandinavian technology project TESS (Teleteaching Education Special needs in the School for everybody) is a network between schools, educational institutions and information centres. EuroTESS was set up as a transnational project under the previous HORIZON initiative.

For further information on TESS and EuroTESS, contact

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New EU education and training programmes offer fresh opportunities

The European Union's former plethora of programmes in the field of education, vocational training and youth policy have run their course. The initiatives planned for the new programming period (1995-1999) – which was due to start on 1.1.1995, but had to be postponed a few months for some measures, owing to differences of opinion at the voting stage – are as follows: **SOCRATES**, the EU's education policy programme; **LEONARDO da Vinci**, the action programme implementing EU vocational training policy (approved in December 1994); and **Youth for Europe III**, the EU's youth programme.

All three programmes are designed to contribute in their various ways to education and training provision for young people, with particular emphasis on promoting the European dimension, i.e. joint implementation of cross-border projects.

SOCRATES, which can be said to follow in the footsteps of ERASMUS, is designed to contribute to the development and renewal of the education systems in the Member States. It comprises three areas of action: a set of measures in the field of higher education, known as ERASMUS, which will account for at least 55 % of the total budget; another concerning school education, known as COMENIUS (at least 10 %); and horizontal activities such as promoting language skills, open and distance education and learning, and exchanges of information and experience (at least 25 %).

In principle, access to the EU programmes to promote education and training for (primarily) young people is open to disabled young people and children, schools and training establishments for disabled students, and disabled people's associations and organisations.

The common position of the Council states that action will be taken to promote the fullest possible participation of disabled children and young people in the SOCRATES programme, but gives little firm commitment on practical steps to facilitate access. The measures in the field of higher education are intended primarily to promote the mobility of students and teaching staff – although the European Parliament's apparently sensible proposal that universities should make greater efforts to resolve the financial and practical problems faced by visiting exchange students, which was rejected by the Council of the European Union, would certainly have smoothed the way for disabled students. In the field of school education, the programme seeks to foster the formation of cross-border school partnerships and joint implementation of projects of "European interest", including projects for children with special pedagogical needs and capacities. Special schools are among those to receive priority treatment. The legislative text states that the grants available for some measures will be adjusted to take account of the special needs of disabled people. This is to ensure that, in line with past practice, a higher level of assistance is available to help meet the additional costs incurred by projects involving disabled people.

The definition of "disadvantaged" people, for whom special provision is made in all the programmes, will be a key factor; but it reflects national values, and consequently varies widely. The principle of subsidiarity will be strengthened in the new programmes, so decisions on project assistance will largely be a matter for national coordination centres in the Member States.

LEONARDO da Vinci is mainly intended to help improve vocational training systems and measures in the Member States, step up cooperation between the partners involved in education, and enhance employment opportunities by raising skills levels. The programme includes among its priority measures action to assist people who are at a disadvantage on the labour market and/or at risk of exclusion as a result of physical or mental disability. Projects range from networks of national initiatives, training for trainers, and transnational exchange schemes during and after vocational training, through to fixed-term work placements in other Member States. This is in line with on-going vocational training exchanges at European level – a key factor in the personal and professional development of young people, and disabled and disadvantaged young people in particular.

Cross-border youth exchanges will also be a focus of the new "Youth for Europe" programme. The European Union wants to contribute to fostering the education of young people, by giving them the opportunity to gain an insight into the cultures of the other Member States and get to know the language and way of life of young people elsewhere in the EU. For example, the programme will provide EU assistance for:

- more youth exchanges in the 15-25 age group;
- Europe-wide and transnational initiatives and innovative projects set up by young people for young people, to promote social recognition, develop an active role in society, and encourage creativity, solidarity and independence; and
- measures to facilitate exchanges with young people from non-EU countries.

In line with practice to date, special provision will be made for disadvantaged young people: a third of the funds for exchange measures will be earmarked for this group.

The brief introduction gives only a small selection of the participation options available. Disabled people are, as indicated, only rarely identified as a specific target group. In principle, access to the EU programmes to promote education and training for (primarily) young people is open to disabled

young people and children, schools and training establishments for disabled students, and disabled people's associations and organisations.

The funds earmarked for the above programmes are, however, less than the Commission had originally proposed. Experts suggest that the resources available for achieving the programmes' ambitious objectives are somewhat limited. And it is apparently not uncommon, in the experience of disabled people and their representatives, for the decision-makers to reject applications on the grounds that there is already a programme for disabled people. Those with experience of the earlier programmes claim that application rejections were often due to a lack of information and awareness; in practice, access to programmes for disabled people in the past was never easy. They advise disabled people to seize the initiative as regards participation in the schemes, with a view to prompting a change of attitude. The definition of "disadvantaged" people, for whom special provision is made in all the programmes, will also be a key factor; but it reflects national values, and consequently varies widely. The principle of subsidiarity will be strengthened in the new programmes, so decisions on project assistance will largely be a matter for national coordination centres in the Member States. The proposals for SOCRATES and Youth for Europe III are expected to be passed in the near future; guidelines on the programmes will then be published and the application process can begin. Intensive, direct dialogue with the national coordinators will doubtless help to secure the increased participation of disabled people in the SOCRATES, LEONARDO and Youth for Europe III programmes in future.

Ulrike Wisser
BBJ Brussels sprl

In a special issue, *HELIOS Flash* (No. 7, October 1994) assessed, on the one hand, the involvement of disabled people in the education, training and youth programmes which came to a close at the end of last year, and, on the other, cooperation between the European Commission's Directorate General V, which has responsibility for the HELIOS programme, and its Task Force for Human Resources, Education, Training and Youth. Please note that this task force became Directorate-General XXII for Education, Training and Youth on 23 January 1995.

Further information on
**SOCRATES, LEONARDO
and YOUTH FOR
EUROPE III,**
write to:

The European
Commission
DG XXII: Education,
Training and Youth
Rue de la Loi 200
B-1049 Brussels
Belgium

School together

As part of the programme Weer Samen Naar School (WSNS – “back to school together”) in Holland, nearly 300 associations are working to remove the barriers between mainstream and special education, and are expanding care for children with difficulties in mainstream elementary schools.

One of these associations is proposing organised debates between schools for (further) special education and elementary schools. The process involves pooling experience, ideas and expertise.

Practical cooperation is pursued in the following areas in particular:

1. pupil monitoring systems
2. group discussions about the children
3. internal guidance of the pupils

The association has developed a care plan outlining the forms of pupil guidance sought. Summed up, the aim is to achieve the participation of a greater number of pupils in primary education, in a well-considered manner. Dutch policy is geared initially to stabilising the number of special education referrals, and reducing it in the short term. By European standards, the Netherlands have a high percentage of children whose education is lagging behind. The Dutch average is 5%, compared with less than 2% in most other countries.

Decentralisation

Within one country, and even within a single region, there can be huge differences in the number of child referrals to special education. There are marked disparities between large cities and rural areas, for instance. A decentralised policy might make it possible to monitor this trend more accurately and allow better adjustment to local conditions.

Michaelshoeve school – a brief outline

Michaelshoeve school is what is known in the Netherlands as a “district school”. It caters for all those who have a development disorder and therefore warrant special care, irrespective of whether they have brain damage, behavioural problems, or a disability stemming from their social environment. The school has ties with an institution which provides care for disabled children.

Current developments

Our aim is to strike a balance, both by seeking pupil integration within mainstream elementary education, and by endeavouring to serve as a focal point for individualised special care for each child, through mutual cooperation between the special education and the mainstream primary education systems. At the same time, we are attempting to build up know-how with the intention of eventually making it available in a “service centre for children with difficulties” open to parents, schools and public authorities. Projects for mobile preventive assistance and peer group consulting are also being developed.

Working together through remedial teaching classes

A start has been made on developing the means to provide teacher support for children with certain learning difficulties for a set part of the day. The scheme offers an effective opportunity to help children overcome their difficulties during a given period. The pupils remain with their class for all other subjects and activities.

With the ever greater complexity of social life and the break-up of the “traditional” family unit, a rise can also be expected in the number of children who have, for social reasons, fewer opportunities and who will require special care. In this context, there must be some doubt as to whether the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) can achieve its aim of bringing about a drastic reduction in special education by the year 2000.

Jac Net

*Headmaster of Michaelshoeve school,
Bosch en Duin, Netherlands*

Functional rehabilitation

Priority themes for 1995:

- ▶ **Multidisciplinary actions within the framework of functional rehabilitation, including industrial medicine**
- ▶ **Involvement of disabled people in the identification of objectives, the choice of means and the assessment of functional rehabilitation measures**

- 1 Ethical questions, legal and social problems, also in relation to the possibilities of employment
- 2 Standardisation and evaluation of treatments in relation to quality of life
- 3 Improvement of the quality of life and of the independence of mentally handicapped people
- 4 Independence of people suffering from a psychiatric handicap
- 5 Ways to independent living for deaf people and people who are hard of hearing, including the use of technical means
- 6 Use and efficiency of technical aids for people with visual impairments
- 7 Rehabilitation of children and early intervention
- 8 The function of sports in the rehabilitation process
- 9 Preparation of the family and the home environment for the return of the disabled person
- 10 From the rehabilitation centre to independent living
- 11 Rehabilitation of people with brain injuries
- 12 Programmes for psychosocial rehabilitation
- 13 Preparing a possible return to work

Education

Priority themes for 1995:

- ▶ **Early educational attention**
- ▶ **Educational work at all levels of education**
- ▶ **Education of disabled adults**
- ▶ **Training of teaching staff**

- 1 Early intervention – information – orientation and guidance of families
- 2 Early intervention in mainstream education. Provision of resources required.
- 3 Multidisciplinary nature of integration: cooperation of all the services involved.
- 4 New technologies, training and long distance learning.
- 5 Role and training of the ordinary teacher, the role of support teachers

Exchange and information activities :

Following consultation with the European Disability Forum and the Advisory Committee, the Commission has approved the 1995 working themes proposed by the participants in the HELIOS II exchange and information activities (EIAs). They have been drawn up on the basis of the annual priority themes for each of the four EIA sectors, as follows :

1995 working themes

- 6 Education of deaf and hearing impaired students.
Role and training of peripatetic teachers in the mainstream education of deaf and hearing-impaired children
 - 7 Individualisation of educational projects: elaboration of individual educational projects tailored to the needs and abilities of the pupil.
 - 8 Role of resource centres and services. Adaptation, research and assessment of teaching material and curricula. Special centres as a resource for the mainstream system.
 - 9 Special education: cooperation and transition to an open environment
 - 10 Preparation for the transition through the various levels of education.
 - 11 Educational follow-up in professional secondary education: cooperation with enterprises. Vocational guidance: choice, impact of unemployment. Involvement of disabled people (*replaces previous theme-based group 11+13*)
 - 12 Vocational training and education of disabled adults
Socialisation and preparation for independent living (*replaces previous theme-based group 12+16*)
 - 13 Structure and role of guidance services for disabled students in higher education level.
Role and training of tutorial and individual monitoring services for disabled students (*replaces previous theme-based group 14+15*)
-
- 2 Empowering disabled people to make the transition into economic life
 - transition from special education to vocational training
 - individual assessment plans
 - transition from vocational training to employment
 - 3 Vocational training and the individual dimension
 - self-esteem, confidence, social competence training of vocational training staff
 - 4 Labour market developments and their implications for vocational training – training of vocational training staff
 - 5 Vocational training and placement in employment for specific target groups. Special attention will be given to associated learning difficulties – training of vocational training staff
 - people with severe motor handicaps
 - people with visual impairment; specific focus: overcoming barriers to employment
 - people with hearing impairments
 - 6 Information and advice on assessment and guidance services for employers and trade unions
 - 8 Identification of opportunities and difficulties on the open labour market
 - 9 Developing links with employers, and associated public services for better collaboration/Young disabled people looking for a first job on the open labour market
 - 10 Supported employment
 - 11 Preparation of disabled people for the open labour market, including need for particular qualifications
 - 12 New technologies (including telework) and opportunities on the open labour market
 - 13 Creation of competitive small or medium sized companies and cooperatives (social firms) and transition towards open employment
 - 14 Employment of mentally ill people on the open labour market
-
- 15 Employment of autistic people on the open labour market
 - 17 Preparation of disabled people for transition from sheltered towards open employment
 - Application of the principles of transition to open employment to different disability groups
 - Staff training for transition towards open employment
 - Transition to different sectors of employment, including new technologies
 - 18 The integration of traditional sheltered workshops into the open market
 - 19 Strategies for transition from sheltered towards open employment including the needs and aspirations of disabled people
The themes N° 7 and 16 were dropped owing to the low number of participants
-
- Social integration-Independent living**
Priorities for 1995:
- ▶ **Elimination of technical barriers - accessibility**
 - ▶ **Transport**
 - ▶ **Elimination of socio-psychological barriers - preparation of the user, family members, and professionals in the integration process**
 - ▶ **Sports, leisure and cultural activities**
 - ▶ **Staff training**
- 1 Preparation of disabled people in the process of independent living: self-assessment, assessment in general, peer counselling (*theme-based group 1 in 1994*)
 - 2 Policies and technical requirements for the accessibility of the built environment (*this combines the 1994 theme-based groups 2 and 8*)
 - 3 Elimination of socio-psychological barriers for people with learning difficulties: main principles, housing, daily life, evaluation (*theme-based group 3 in 1994*)
 - 4 Elimination of socio-psychological barriers for people with learning difficulties or multihandicapped: quality of life, involvement of families, technical assistance (*this combines the 1994 theme-based groups 4 and 11*)
 - 5 Elimination of socio-psychological barriers: Assistance in daily living (training: disabled people, assistants) (*theme-based group 5 in 1994*)
 - 6 Elimination of technical barriers: the role of technological aids in promoting autonomy – channelling of information and technical aids to the end user (*theme-based group 6 in 1994*)
 - 7 Ways to reduce the socio-psychological difficulties experienced by people with a sensorial disability (*theme-based group 7 in 1994*)
 - 8 Policies and technical requirements for the adaptation of transport (*a new theme-based group*)
 - 9 Elimination of psychological and social barriers concerning children and families: information, involvement, support available (*theme-based group 9 in 1994*)
 - 10 Tourism · leisure · cultural activities (*theme-based group 10 in 1994*)
 - 11 Training of professionals working with people with learning difficulties (*theme-based group 13 in 1994*)
 - 12 Elimination of social and psychological barriers: raising awareness and changing attitudes · creating the right image, development of methods (*theme-based group 14 in 1994*)
 - 13 Strategies for promoting integration policies (*theme-based group 15+17 in 1994*)
 - 14 Re-integrating people with mental health problems (*theme-based group 16 in 1994*)

A list of the coordinators of each theme-based working group is available from the HELIOS Team of Experts.

Since 1 January 1995, the European Union numbers three new Member States: Austria, Sweden and Finland. An outline of their national disability policies, and their expectations of and contribution to EU action for disabled people.



newcomers

Austria

integration in the sense of full participation

The principles of Austrian policy on disability as a task for the whole of society were set out for the first time in a single, comprehensive document in 1992. The Austrian federal government's disability programme takes a holistic view of the individual and addresses all areas of life, from childhood, school and working life through leisure, housing and mobility to health and the provision of care.

Integration – in the sense of optimal participation in the life of society – is the central aim of Austrian disability policy. It calls for a package of complementary measures, including educational, occupational, social and medical rehabilitation, backed up by communication support and advice, and an appropriate public policy framework. The Austrian government has stated its intention to step up cooperation with international organisations, and in particular to take part in European Union programmes and initiatives in this field. Austria is a participant in the HELIOS programme's exchange and information activities as of 1995. The expectations of public services and associations of disabled people are that this will result in more exchanges of information and experience with the other EU Member States, increased cooperation with foreign and pan-European organisations of disabled people, dissemination of innovative ideas and practices in the field of disability policy, and better information for disabled people, in particular via the HANDYNET system.

The HANDYNET data base and the Community initiative TIDE should contribute towards the dissemination of information on technical aids and technological innovation, and the transparency of the technical aids market, at European level. As a result, technical aids are expected to become more accessible and cheaper in the longer term, and disabled people in Austria are set to share in the benefits.

Within the framework of EU structural policy, one of the focuses for European Social Fund (ESF) assistance in Austria will be the economic integration of disabled people. The objectives set out in the government's disability programme will form the basis of measures to promote job opportunities for disabled people on the open labour market, on self-help projects, in social enterprises and in self-employment. The key instruments will be qualification measures, recruitment aids, and advice and guidance, including job coaches. Alongside the Structural Fund objectives, assistance for the economic integration of disabled people is available under the Community initia-

tive EMPLOYMENT-HORIZON (*). In view of this, the groundwork for transnational projects is also under way in Austria – for instance, with project promoters in southern Tirol and in Bavaria, who are currently exploring ways of collaborating on training for guidance assistants to provide disabled people with help finding a job and support in their professional lives.

Austria trusts that participation in European programmes and initiatives will enable it to further develop its activities in the field of disability policy and implement new, innovative ideas.

Max Rubisch

Head of Department at the Austrian Federal Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs; member of the HELIOS II Advisory Committee

(*) The new Community initiative EMPLOYMENT was profiled in *HELIOSCOPE* No. 2, winter 1994.

Sweden

continued reform work for disabled people is vital

Swedish disability policy is founded on Sweden's general welfare policy, individualised measures for disabled people, an active disability movement and the concept of disability as a relationship between the individual and his or her environment. Its central philosophy is that all human beings have the same value and equal rights.

Consequently, measures for disabled people target their full participation in society, equal opportunities and the right to education, employment, housing, culture and meaningful recreation. Disabled children attend day care centres and nursery schools together with non-disabled children. Most disabled students are integrated into the public education system. Children with severe disabilities are now brought up by their parents, and adults live in their own homes or in group accommodation in their home district.

On 1 January 1994, a major legal reform furthering disabled people's opportunities of leading an independent life came into force. The act concerns support and service for people with certain functional impairments. It also gives people with intellectual impairments and severe disabilities legal rights to benefits, including counselling and individual support, individual assistance, an escort service, a relief facility for carers, and housing with special service provision. An equally important element of the act is the right for disabled people to their own budget for personal assistance, which is provided at local level.

In July 1994, the Swedish government appointed a "Handicapombudsman", whose work is to be governed by the UN Standard Rules for the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities. Continued reform work for disabled people is of great importance. In its Statement of Government Policy for its term of office, the government stressed the need for measures to improve access for disabled people in society.

Sweden is looking forward to taking part in the HELIOS exchange and information activities and expects the programme to become, in certain areas, a powerful instrument for influencing the Member States' actions. Also, we feel that HELIOS should keep an eye on issues, programmes and initiatives involving other directorates-general of the European Commission, which are of direct or indirect interest to disabled people, and put relevant subjects of debate on the agenda. With regard to the White Paper on European social policy, we commend the mention of the need to build the fundamental right to equal opportunities into Union policies for disabled people, and presume that HELIOS will play a key role in implementing these policies.

As to the impact of disability organisations: through their participation in public debate and their influence on social developments, they make a substantial contribution to shaping disability policy in Sweden. We expect that disabled people and their organisations will play a similar, strongly proactive role within the HELIOS programme.

Birgitta Magnusson
*Swedish Ministry for Health and
Social Affairs, Department
of the Disabled
and the Elderly
Stockholm*



As of 1995, the new EU Member States are full members of the HELIOS programme and will be gradually integrated into the programme's various activities. In accordance with the results of the negotiations under Protocol 31 (Art. 5 on social policy) of the agreement on the European Economic Area (EEA), **Norway** and **Iceland** are expected to take part in the programme as of 1996. Both the three new Member States and the two EEA countries have been participating in the Handynet system since the beginning of this year. See *HELIOS Flash* No. 8, November-December 1994.



Disability strategies in Finland

The aim of Finnish policy for disabled people is to create a society in which they can enjoy equality, full participation and supported self-sufficiency. These principles are expressed in the 1988 Services and Assistance for Disabled People Act as follows: "The purpose of this act is to improve opportunities for disabled people to live and act as equal members of society, and to prevent and eliminate the disadvantages and obstacles caused by disability".

Disabled people's integration into society is central to Finnish social policy, as stated in health and welfare legislation and the National Plan for Social Welfare and Health 1995-98. Services and economic support for disabled people and their families are provided as a means to this end. The integration principle also calls for sectoral legislation and decentralised responsibility for services. Service provision has to target the whole population, including disabled people. For example, responsibility for access to infrastructure lies with the relevant ministry.

Finland is divided into 455 municipalities, which, under the present legislation, are responsible for organising the appropriate welfare and health services for disabled people and their families. They receive principally the same services as the rest of the population; special services are always secondary and are used only when general provision is not appropriate. A major change in the service structure from an institutional to an open system of care is under way and will run until the year 2000.

It goes without saying that the conditions actually experienced by disabled people fall short of the good intentions expressed in acts and decrees. Municipalities have shown particular concern for very costly services, e.g. transport services, whereas in times of recession disability organisations focus on the right to services and clients' fees. Much of the implementation of services for disabled people is arranged by non-governmental organisations. In Finland there are about 70 national disability organisations, which influence policy and implementation strategies on disability matters.

A National Disability Council attached to the Ministry for Social Affairs and Health was set up in 1985. The council is a cooperative body comprising government officials and disability organisations. Another State body, the Advisory Committee for Rehabilitation Affairs, coordinates rehabilitation and employment services for disabled people. The National Disability Council is currently preparing a national policy document on disability strategies, based on the UN standard rules.

The disability sector's expectations of EU membership

How do independent living centres function in Germany? How are cooperatives run in Italy?

Finland is a country with a large surface area and five million inhabitants, up in the north between Russia and Sweden. We have modern cities as well as stretches of natural wilderness. Our main language, Finnish, will also be a new experience for you.

Finland has a long tradition of cooperation with the other Scandinavian countries, Russia and Estonia. Now we hope to get to know people in continental Europe as well. Up to now we have had too little information on actual living conditions and services for disabled people in the other EU Member States. We want to take an active part in the HELIOS information and exchange activities.

Finland is known for its many active disability organisations. Disabled people want to take the initiative and become actively involved. We hope that the HELIOS programme will also provide an opportunity for participation by disabled people themselves.

Viveca Arrhenius
Senior Adviser
Ministry for
Social Affairs and Health

disability

is a feminist issue

Discriminated against as women and discriminated against as disabled people, disabled women are now uniting at European level to counter what they term "double discrimination". The photograph above – disabled women challenging pejorative imagery used by the media in the UK – is a good illustration of this new dynamic.

In the wake of significant progress with regard to the empowerment and self-determination of disabled people, and the strengthening of the European disability movement, it is perhaps not surprising that disabled women are mobilising – posing gender-specific questions about disability both within the movement itself and in a broader context. Also under debate and review is disabled women's contribution to the women's movement generally.

Several European non-governmental organisations have set up women's committees. FIMITIC, for example, established a special commission which organised a women's conference in Bonn in October 1994. The conference culminated in a resolution entitled "disabled women want self-determined lives", setting out demands for vocational training, child care provision, flexible and part-time posts at all levels, rights regarding parenthood and protection from sexual violence – all too prevalent among disabled women and until recently largely a taboo subject among the disability community and professionals alike.

Disabled Peoples' International has also formed a women's network at European level, which originated from discussions at the Eur'Able meeting (Maastricht, August 1993). A founding meeting took place in Frankfurt in September 1994, which focused on three main themes: sexual violence against disabled girls and women, pre-natal diagnosis and new eugenics and independent living for disabled women, and the women's committee was formed at a follow-up meeting in Germany last year.

A DPI women's conference which will address these subjects in more depth is now under discussion for mid-1996, and particular emphasis will be placed on the participation of disabled women from southern European countries. The main priorities of the women's committee are to strengthen networks throughout Europe and to encourage greater representation of women within DPI. Plans are under way for a meeting in April in the United Kingdom, which new members are very welcome to attend.

Other European non-governmental organisations are also addressing women's issues through specific commissions – notable examples being the European Blind Union (EBU), the European Union of the Deaf (EUD) and the European Regional Council of the World Federation of Mental Health (ERC-WFMH). ERC-WFMH will be organising a seminar in London in April to address good practice for women with mental health needs. For further details of their work on women's issues, please write to the respective secretariats (see issue 1 of *HELIOSCOPE*).

Photo: Brenda Prince/Format, London, UK



Protest by disabled women against a *Guardian* advert depicting a helpless elderly woman in a wheelchair.

Further information can also be obtained from

Patricia Rock, Chair,
British Disabled Women's
Committee
(DPI-EC Women's Committee),
78 Kilda Rd, Ealing,
UK-London W13 9DE

or Dinah Radtke, Chair,
European Disabled Women's
Committee, ISL Büro Erlangen,
Luitpoldstr. 42,
D-91052 Erlangen
(1996 conference)

For further details concerning FIMITIC's Women's Commission, please write to

Maria Stiglic, FIMITIC
(Fédération internationale des mutilés,
des invalides du travail et des
invalides civils), c/o Reichsbund,
Beethovenallee 56-58,
D-53173 Bonn,
tel.: +49.228 36 30 71,
fax: +49.228 36 15 50

NGO activities in central and eastern Europe

Study on employment in central and eastern Europe

Rehabilitation International-European Communities Association and the Centre for Vocational and Functional Rehabilitation of Nanteau-sur-Lunain have been commissioned by DG V/E/3 to undertake a study focusing on the situation of disabled people in four countries in central and eastern Europe: Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary. The study, launched in September 1994, will address the institutional, legal and social context of disability policy in these countries and will also examine existing facilities and provision in the field of vocational training and employment. A preliminary report will be presented to the European Commission in March 1995.

Erratum

European day 1994 – Human rights

We would like to point out a major error which occurred in the last issue of *HELIOSCOPE*.

The introduction to the Human Rights article was misleading in its implication that the text which followed constituted the resolutions of the Human Rights meeting held in Brussels in October 1994. This was not the case. This text was in fact a preparatory document distributed prior to the meeting which provided a brief outline of the four topics of discussion: Definition of Disabled Person, Bio-Ethics, Independent Living and Sexuality. It was not an agreed text or an opinion.

A report has been prepared which incorporates the conclusions and statements resulting from the meeting and this was presented to the European Parliament at a highly positive and successful meeting on December 1. Copies of the synopsis and the report are available from DPI, 11 Belgrave Road, London SW1V 1RB (English tape and print only). For copies of the synopsis in other languages or on alternate media, please apply to your national disability council.

Questionnaire

In a resolution adopted on 22 April 1993, the European Parliament expressed concern at events suggesting that, in some EU countries, disabled people are increasingly becoming the target of violence and discrimination. Parliament accordingly called upon the Commission to set up a forum of disabled people from all the Member States, to examine the scale of the violence inflicted upon disabled people and study the possibility of introducing legislation to combat discrimination against this section of the population.

At first sight, it may seem that the European Parliament's request went far beyond the Commission's present powers, since the issue relates essentially to human rights. Although the Commission is responsible for ensuring implementation of the treaties establishing the European Communities –and the directives and regulations which derive from them– within the Member States, Community law does not give exhaustive details of every aspect of the rights and freedoms attendant on European citizenship. The European Commission's task is therefore very different from that of the European Commission of Human Rights and the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, whose role it is to ensure respect for the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, signed in Rome on 4 November 1950, within the member countries of the Council of Europe.

Nevertheless, a great many judgments of the Court of Justice of the European Communities refer to the European convention on human rights, and the court has on numerous occasions ruled on the need to safeguard the fundamental rights set out in the convention and in United Nations agreements. It has, for example, stated on a number of occasions that respect for fundamental human rights is one of the underlying principles of Community law, which it is the court's duty to uphold. The protection of fundamental freedoms in European and national regulations within the scope of Community law is thus a matter for the EU institutions directly.

In addition, the White Paper on Social Policy, recently adopted by the Commission on the initiative of Commissioner Flynn, speaks of proposing the introduction of an explicit reference to the principle of non-discrimination on the grounds of disability at the next review of the treaties. The principle would then have to be observed by any initiative at Union or national level with direct or indirect implications for the participation of disabled people in socio-professional life.

on violence and discrimination

Viewed from this angle, the European Parliament's request paves the way for the preliminaries required for any serious study of such a complex problem, namely comparative observation and fact-finding on the ground, based, moreover, on the experience of the people concerned.

The Commission decided that Parliament's request, and, indirectly, the concerns voiced in the White Paper, could best be dealt with by the European Disability Forum set up under the HELIOS II programme.

After protracted debate on how this vast topic should be approached, the forum opted to send out a questionnaire to every national disability council in every Member State. The questions focus on the fundamental rights to which every EU citizen is entitled: the right to privacy, the right of access to information, the right to medical, sanitary and social protection, the right to education, the right to work, etc. They are an attempt to pinpoint areas where disabled people in the Member States experience differentiation, exclusion, preference or inaction which might prevent them from enjoying the same fundamental rights as other citizens.

The questionnaire is still being studied by the various disability councils, so no conclusions are yet available. However, two general issues which arose at the drafting stage are worth mentioning briefly.

The European Parliament's resolution has touched upon a complex but essential question for society today, namely the role of the legislature in combatting social exclusion. It is often said that the founding and guiding values of a civilisation are most apparent in the legal provisions established for its marginalised members. A society which enshrines the special needs of certain groups as legal rights is one where social attitudes are moving away from charity towards civic values. There can therefore be no doubt about the importance of the debate on legislation relating to the fundamental freedoms of disabled people and the practical relevance of the protection such measures provide.

The second key point raised is whether specific norms should be established for disabled people, or whether those aspects of general norms and laws which help safeguard the rights and freedoms of all citizens, disabled people included, should instead be strengthened. In other words, do laws which apply to the whole of society not afford disabled people better protection, as subjects of law, on condition that their special needs are taken into account? If we subscribe to the general policy of avoiding segregation on the grounds of disability, then it cannot in principle be acceptable to dissociate legal protection for disabled people from existing and planned provisions for society as a whole. For this reason, the questionnaire suggests that the general provisions for civic rights and freedoms should be examined, as the cornerstone of legal protection for disabled people. Nonetheless, the document does maintain that the existence or otherwise of certain special provisions is a factor in the degree of equality and respect for rights and freedoms enjoyed by people whose special needs (functional requirements), rather than their disability as such, call for such measures.

But, although legal provisions are essential, it would be unrealistic to suppose that legislation alone is sufficient to ensure respect for the rights of disabled people. Legal instruments to combat discrimination can be effective only if they are supported by other forms of action in the field of education and information. This is the rationale underpinning the United Nations' Standard Rules for the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, and the motivation behind the White Paper's proposal for Community action in this field.

André GUBBELS
*Consultant
 to the European Commission*

The White Paper on Social Policy speaks of proposing the introduction of an explicit reference to the principle of non-discrimination on the grounds of disability at the next review of the treaties. The principle would then have to be observed by any initiative at Union or national level with direct or indirect implications for the participation of disabled people in socio-professional life. Viewed from this angle, Parliament's request paves the way for the preliminaries required for any serious study of such a complex problem, namely comparative observation and fact-finding on the ground, based, moreover, on the experience of the people concerned.

the All Party Disablement Group

To many people outside Brussels, Europe seems a maze of faceless institutions. The European Parliament, the only one of the three European institutions to be democratically elected, is one disabled people cannot afford to ignore. Increasingly, non-governmental organisations and private industry are ensuring that their voices are heard in Parliament. Disabled people must do the same.

Maastricht has increased the European Parliament's powers. As well as having the final say on the budget, and thus a direct influence on the amount of money spent on disabled people and their organisations, the Parliament has new powers to request and scrutinise legislation and can veto the Commission.

The Parliament has an informal grouping of MEPs who work on disability issues, called the All Party Disablement Group. The Chair is Barbara Schmidbauer, the Vice Chair is Mary Banotti, other members of the bureau are Bartho Pronk, Richard Howitt, Concepció Ferrer, Tom Megahy, Gerard Caudron, Lucciano Vecchi and Brian Crowley. There are about 100 MEPs from various groups and nationalities in the All Party Disablement Group, about 20 of whom are very active.

The group exists as an informal ad hoc pressure group for disabled people. It has a monitoring and campaigning role on disability issues, examining proposals from the Commission and attempting to strengthen the position of disabled people. Groups such as the All Party Disablement Group are informal and not part of the Parliament's structures – they exist so that MEPs can work together on issues of common concern such as promoting the rights of disabled people.

The group meets to discuss legislation and programmes and their implications for disabled people, for example the White Paper on social policy, anti-discrimination legislation, HANDYNET, HORIZON, enlargement, and transport. It then follows that up by writing to Commissioners, tabling parliamentary questions and amending Parliament reports.

The group has had a number of key successes. It was instrumental in ensuring that HELIOS II was voted through Parliament when the programme was nearly lost, and in doubling the HELIOS budget. This year, it amended the programme to ensure that NGOs can produce their own newsletters. It has also established additional resources for the European Day of Disabled Persons and has stated that there must be greater involvement of disabled people both in the exchange and information activities and in the evaluation of the programme.

The group recently amended the Commission's text on HORIZON II to ensure that 65% of the resources are allocated to disabled people. The Commission's original text contained no reference to disabled people as a priority for resources, despite the fact that HORIZON began as a programme for disabled people.

Similarly, the Parliament, in giving its opinion on the Commission's proposal to continue the HANDYNET system, was unconvinced of the value of extending the database and recommended no extension, more evaluation and no increase in the budget.

The group also secured the use of Parliament's hemicycle, its debating chamber, for the first ever European Day of Disabled Persons in 1993. 518 disabled people from all over Europe came to take part in the debates, and Parliament tabled a resolution calling for full anti-discrimination legislation. The group's highest priority in 1995 is to ensure that the review of the treaty affords disabled people protection against discrimination, bringing anti-discrimination legislation into the EU's sphere of competence. The group will also work to improve the successor to the HELIOS programme.

The group recently established its secretariat permanently in Brussels, with funding from seven pan-European disability organisations. These are the European Union of the Deaf, the European Regional Council – World Federation for Mental Health, Mobility International, the International League of Societies for People with a Mental Handicap, the European Blind Union, the Fédération internationale des mutilés, des invalides du travail et des invalides civils, and Disabled Peoples' International. This is an exciting new development which will strengthen the voice of disabled people in the Parliament and enable vital close collaboration in the run up to revision of the Maastricht treaty.

Diana Sutton,
*Secretariat to the All Party
Disablement Group*

You can obtain further information

on the all party group by contacting the Chair, Barbara Schmidbauer MEP, or Diana Sutton at the Secretariat, tel.: +32.2 284 75 29/55 29, fax: +32.2 284 95 29, at MAE 429, European Parliament, rue Belliard 97-113, 1047 Brussels, Belgium.

handynet

The Council of the European Union, at its meeting of 6 December 1994 (Official Journal of 9 December 1994), decided to prolong the HELIOS II programme's HANDYNET information and documentation system for the period from 1 January 1995 to 31 December 1996, in the framework of the activities undertaken to date on the first module, which focuses on technical aids.