



European
Commission

EUROPEAN DAY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

30 NOVEMBER - 1 DECEMBER 2023



ACCESS
CITY
AWARD
2024

#EDPD2023
#EUDisabilityRights
#UnionOfEquality
#EUAccessCity

CONFERENCE
PROGRAMME



Social Europe



CONFERENCE
PROGRAMME

CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

DAY 1, 30 NOVEMBER 2023

08:30-09:30 **Registration and welcome coffee**

09:30-10:00 **Opening session**

Welcome by **Katarina Ivankovic-Knezevic**, Social Rights and Inclusion Director, DG EMPL, European Commission

- **Helena Dalli**, European Commissioner for Equality (video message)
 - **Stefan Olsson**, Deputy Director general, DG EMPL, European Commission
 - **Ana Pelaez**, Secretary General, European Disability Forum (EDF)
 - **Jesús Martín Blanco**, Director General on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Spanish Presidency of the Council of the European Union
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10:00-10:45 **Panel 1: Right to vote and to stand for elections - Removing barriers for persons with disabilities in the EU parliament elections**

Moderator: Alejandro Moledo, Deputy Director and Head of Policy of the European Disability Forum (EDF)

Panel discussion:

- **Armin Rabitsch**, Election Watch EU
 - **Susanna van Tonder**, Luxembourg national champion of the European Commission's communication campaign on the Disability Rights Strategy
 - **Marie-Helene Boulanger**, Deputy Director on Rule of Law, Democracy and Fundamental Rights, DG JUST, European Commission
 - **Tom Rützel**, Estonian employer counsellor
 - **Domènec Ruiz Devesa**, Member of the European Parliament and lead negotiator of the Electoral law reform
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10:45-11:15 **Coffee Break**

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11:15-12:30 **Panel 1: Right to vote and to stand for elections - Removing barriers for persons with disabilities in the EU parliament elections (continued)**

Q&A and discussion

12:30-14:00 **Lunch**

14:00-15:15 **Panel 2: Skills and employment of persons with disabilities**

Moderator: Dana-Carmen Bachmann, Social protection Head of unit, DG EMPL, European Commission

Panel discussion:

- **Monika Chaba**, Disability policy officer, DG EMPL, European Commission
- **Virginia Carcedo**, Secretary General of ONCE Foundation
- **Patrick Ruppel**, Counsellor at the Flemish Employment Agency (VDAB)
- **Claudia Coveney**, School of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Leeds
- **Martine Eliasson**, Political adviser at Uloba Independent Living Norway.

Q&A and discussion

15:15-15:45 **Coffee Break**

15:45-17:00 **Skills and employment of persons with disabilities (continued)**

Q&A and discussion

19:30-21:30 **Dinner**

CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

DAY 2, 1 DECEMBER 2023

09:00-09:30 **Registration and welcome coffee**

09:30-10:30 **Access City Award Ceremony**

- **Helena Dalli**, European Commissioner for Equality
 - **Joost Korte**, Director General, DG EMPL, European Commission
 - **Mayors of winning cities**
 - **Amir Alibabić**, Member of EDF Youth Committee
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10:30-11:00 **Coffee Break**

11:00-12:30 **Panel 3: Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: achievements, challenges, and next steps**

Moderator: Lucie Davoine, Acting Head of Disability and Inclusion unit, DG EMPL, European Commission

Panel discussion:

- Testimonies of **Charlotte Aelbrechts** (European Disability card), and **Paul Alford** (independent living): how do the actions of the Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities impact the lives of the citizens?
- **Jakub Hrkal**, Statistical officer, DG ESTAT, European Commission
- **Maria Montefusco**, Analyst, Swedish Agency for Participation
- **Nadia Hadad**, Executive member, European Disability Forum (EDF)

Q&A and discussion

12:30-13:00 **Conclusions**

- **Katarina Ivankovic-Knezevic**, Social Rights and Inclusion Director, DG EMPL, European Commission
 - **John Patrick Clarke**, Vice-President of the European Disability Forum (EDF)
 - **Gerard Quinn**, Former UN Special Rapporteur on Disability
 - **Peter Samyn**, President, Federal Public Service Social Security, Belgium
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13:00-14:30 **Lunch**



SPEAKERS' BIOGRAPHIES **DAY 1**

SPEAKERS' BIOGRAPHIES

Opening session



Katarina Ivankovic-Knezevic

Social Rights and Inclusion Director, DG EMPL, European Commission

Since September 2018 Katarina Ivanković Knežević is a Director for Social Rights and Inclusion in the Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. Her area of activity is modernisation of social protection systems and wider social policies fostering social and labour market inclusion, through the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and other relevant social policies of the European Union. She is leading a work on disability and inclusion and is also DG EMPL Equality Coordinator. Before joining the European Commission she was a State Secretary in

the Ministry of Labour and the Pension System of the Republic of Croatia, in which she was responsible for the management and implementation of the European Social Fund and other EU instruments aiming at human resources development. For the last 20 years her professional interests are human rights and gender equality, social and employment policies.



Helena Dalli

European Commissioner for Equality

Helena Dalli is the first EU Commissioner for Equality since December 2019. Her role is to deliver on the Union of Equality chapter within the Political Guidelines of President von der Leyen, by strengthening Europe's commitment to equality and inclusion in all of its senses. Prior to taking her role as Commissioner, Dalli held various political roles in Malta including Member of Parliament (1996 to 2019), Minister for European Affairs and Equality (2017 to 2019), and Minister for Social Dialogue, Consumer Affairs and Civil Liberties (2013-2017). She was also opposition Shadow

Minister for public administration, equality, public broadcasting and national investments (1998-2013) and Junior Minister for Women's Rights in the Office of Prime Minister (1996-1998). Dalli holds a PhD in Political Sociology from the University of Nottingham, and lectured in Economic and Political Sociology, Public Policy, and Sociology of Law at the University of Malta.



Stefan Olsson

Deputy Director-General "Jobs, Skills and Social Policies", Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission

Stefan Olsson is a Swedish lawyer with degrees in international and tax law. Having joined the European Commission in 1996, he dealt with fundamental rights issues as well as social dialogue. He was assistant to the Director General for Employment and Social Affairs (2000-2005) before leading units dealing with social and employment law and policy as well as administrative affairs. As from 1 November 2015, he took up the position of Director in DG

Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. He was responsible for the management of the European Social Fund in Romania, Bulgaria, Malta and Spain, for the implementation of the Employment Strategy through tools such as the Youth Guarantee, the Long-term Unemployment Recommendation and the network of Public Employment Services, as well as legislative and policy issues relating to working conditions including health and safety at work. From 1 September 2022, he serves as Deputy Director-General responsible for policy issues in DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion.



Ana Pelaez

Secretary General, European Disability Forum (EDF)

Ms Peláez has served as an expert on the CEDAW Committee since 2019 and was Vice-Chair of the Committee for 2021-2022. She is now Secretary General of the European Disability Forum and chair of its Women's Committee. In addition, she is an Executive Vice-President at CERMI Women's Foundation, the umbrella organisation for women with disabilities in Spain. She also has roles at the ONCE (Spanish National Organisation of the Blind) as High Commissioner for Solidarity and International Co-operation.



Jesús Martín Blanco

Director General on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Spanish Presidency of the Council of the European Union

Born in Eljas, a village in the Sierra de Gata in Cáceres, he holds a degree in Documentation from the University of Salamanca, a Master in Cultural Management from the University of Alcalá de Henares, a Master in Organisational Communication from the Complutense University of Madrid, a Master in Disability, Personal Autonomy and Dependency Care from the Menéndez Pelayo International University and a Master in Human Rights (Disability Specialty) from the National University of Distance Education (UNED), where he is currently working on his Master's thesis. His professional career has been linked, since 1998, to the disability associative movement, within the CNSE and its Foundation, where he has held different responsibilities in terms of political advocacy, defence of rights, communication, institutional relations, management of alliances and project management. He has also held the position of Delegate for Human Rights and Disability and for the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in CERMI. He has participated in and coordinated different publications and studies on the human rights of persons with disabilities, universal accessibility, corporate social responsibility and inclusive culture and Agenda 2030. Jesús Martín is a person with a disability, a human rights activist, feminist, environmentalist and an inveterate reader and tireless traveller.

SPEAKERS' BIOGRAPHIES

Panel 1: Right to vote and to stand for elections - Removing barriers for persons with disabilities in the EU parliament elections



Alejandro Moledo

Deputy Director and Head of Policy of the European Disability Forum (EDF)

Alejandro leads and coordinates EDF's advocacy and policy work at EU level and supports the work of the European Parliament Disability Intergroup. Among other areas, Alejandro has developed policy positions and recommendations regarding political participation of persons with disabilities, accessible Information and Communication Technologies, Assistive Technologies and different standardisation activities.



Armin Rabitsch

Chairperson, Election-Watch.EU

Armin Rabitsch is an elections and democracy expert and has worked with the UN, the EU, IFES, and OSCE/ODIHR. He has managed electoral assistance programmes, and participated in various functions in election observation activities. Armin Rabitsch is the chairperson and co-founder of Election-Watch.EU (wahlbeobachtung.org), a non-partisan civil society organisation advocating for participatory electoral reforms and young voter education within the EU and its Member States. Together with 70 colleagues of the Election-Watch.EU network he conducted the first comprehensive Election Assessment Mission to the 2019 European Parliament elections and presented its recommendations to the Constitutional Committee of the European Parliament. Armin coordinated the comparative research on persons with disabilities' suffrage and accessibility rights in European elections across 27 EU Member States for the European Disability Forum's annual Human Rights Handbook. With Election-Watch.EU he recently co-authored and co-published the SEEEDS Policy Paper on European Parliament Elections together with EPD, DRI and EPDE, and chaired a High-Level Event on Enhancing the Integrity of the European Parliament Elections in the European Parliament. He holds a PhD in international relations and an LL.M. in international Human Rights Law. Armin Rabitsch co-authored the UNESCO Practitioners Handbook on Elections in Digital Times, the OSCE RfOM policy paper on AI's impact on freedom of expression in political competition and elections, as well as the UNDP elicitive peace and conflict monitoring research study in Iraq.



Susanna van Tonder

Disability Rights Activist, Together For Rights

Susanna van Tonder is an organizational psychologist and disability rights activist. As a patient leader she is the Vice President of the Luxembourgish MS Society "Multiple Sclérose Lëtzebuerg", a member of the Board of EDS Lëtzebuerg, and part of the Executive Committee of the European Multiple Sclerosis Platform. Moreover, Susanna is a member of the Luxembourg Higher Council for People with Disabilities and a board member of Info Handicap. Susanna's lived experience of a person living with multiple chronic health conditions and disabilities has paved her way to

her life purpose : Creating a more just and inclusive society - free from prejudices, biases and discrimination. This also shapes her political perspective. In 2023, she was a candidate for both the municipal as well as the parliament elections in Luxembourg.

SPEAKERS' BIOGRAPHIES



Marie-Helene Boulanger

Acting Director, European Commission - DG Justice and Consumers

After working at university and at the Belgian Data Protection Authority including as its secretary, Marie-Hélène Boulanger joined the European Commission. Between 2009 and 2014, she headed the unit in charge of the reform of the European data protection rules. Since 2014, she has headed the unit responsible for European citizenship and free movement of persons. She is responsible among others for policy and legislative proposals on EU citizenship and to strengthen our democracies, such as greater transparency in political advertising. She has been acting Director on

equality and citizenship and acting Director on Rule of Law, Democracy and Fundamental Rights She is now deputy Director on Rule of Law, Democracy and Fundamental Rights.



Tom Rüütel

Estonian employer counsellor

Tom has a very good social nerve and sees solutions in obstacles. He has worked all my life in the social system and of course, on the other hand as a client too. He has been working as a case manager in the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund and his clients were those who had reduced work capability; his goal was to help them find work and fill work ability assessments. After, he decided to turn his attention towards employers, with the goal of supporting them to keep or hire employees who have a disability or any other health condition. Besides work, Tom likes to go to sauna

and enjoy live rock concerts as much as quiet stays in nature. Putting himself outside of his comfort zone has become a daily hobby!



Domènec Ruiz Devesa

Member of the European Parliament and lead negociator of the Electoral law reform

Domènec Ruiz Devesa is Member of the European Parliament where he is the spokesperson for the Constitutional Affairs Committee and a member of the Culture and Education Committee. He also carries out his parliamentary responsibilities from the Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs Committee, as well as in the inter-parliamentary delegations with the Republic of Iraq, of which he is Vice-President, beside the delegations of Mashreq and Palestine. He is the EP Rapporteur on the new

European electoral law adopted the 3 May 2023 and the Co-Rapporteur on the INI on European Elections 2024. In the XXVIII Congress of the Union of European Federalists (UEF) celebrated in Brussels on 25-26 November he was elected President of UEF.

SPEAKERS' BIOGRAPHIES

Panel 2: Skills and employment of persons with disabilities



Dana-Carmen Bachmann

Social protection Head of unit, European Commission, DG EMPL

Dana-Carmen Bachmann is currently Head of Unit in Directorate General Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion at the European Commission, being responsible for the modernisation of social protection policies, including access and adequacy of pensions, long-term care and health. Prior to this, Dana was Head of Unit in DG EMPL and DG EAC responsible for Vocational Education and Training, Apprenticeships and Adult Learning. Dana also worked as a lawyer at the European Court of Human Rights. She has a bachelor degree in law from the Faculty of Law in Bucharest, a bachelor

degree in European Law from University Paris I, and masters and postgraduate studies in International law and International relations and conflict resolution.



Monika Chaba

Disability policy officer, European Commission, DG EMPL

Monika Chaba works for the Disability and Inclusion Unit in the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion of the European Commission. She deals with disability employment and coordinates the work on the Disability Employment Package. Previously, she worked on active inclusion policies. Prior to joining the European Commission, she worked in the private sector as European affairs communication consultant. She holds a MA in European Studies of University of Exeter, UK and Jagiellonian University, Poland.



Virginia Carcedo

Secretary General of ONCE Foundation

Virginia Carcedo is a strong defender of the inclusion of people with disabilities. From her role as General Counsel of Inserta Empleo, she advocates for their inclusion in the labor market, defending that the inclusion of diversity is profitable for companies. From her position as Director of Transformación y Excelencia at Fundación ONCE, Virginia works not only in favor of equal employment opportunities, but also in favor of the inclusion of people with disabilities in the reality we live in, marked by a rapid and undeniable social-technological transformation. As Director of Equality

(Fundación ONCE), Virginia works with programs such as 'Mujeres en modo ON VG' that seek to empower through job placement and support women with disabilities who are victims of gender violence. Her unwavering commitment to the inclusion of people with disabilities has led her to participate in large International Forums to promote the labor mobility of people with disabilities and thus be able to guarantee one of the four freedoms of the EU, that of movement.

SPEAKERS' BIOGRAPHIES



Patrick Ruppel

Counsellor at the Flemish Employment Agency (VDAB)

Patrick Ruppel (°1961) is master in Adult Education and master in Hospital Management (KU-Leuven/Belgium). Since 2014 he works for GTB, Specialized Team Mediation NGO. GTB is a structural partner of the VDAB (Public Employment Service) and this for the target group 'job seekers with a large distance from the labor market due to a health problem or limitation. Within GTB he is an expert and manages the domains 'innovative projects' and 'the policy advisory group work and health'. In each job, he paid particular attention to the working capacity of people with

disabilities. He was co-founder of the local employment agencies in Limburg, the Flemish Assisted Work platform, the promotor of the tenders for care activation in Limburg. In order to bring this focus on work for disadvantaged groups into organizations, he has shaped various reorganization trajectories and was strongly involved with the reform of the disabled sector by transferring the sheltered workshops, the specialized vocational training and the Consultation Services on Disability to the policy area of work. Expert in realizing innovative projects in which health and work play a role. Chairperson of the European Platform of Rehabilitation, EPR.eu.



Claudia Coveney

School of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Leeds

Dr. Claudia Coveney completed her Ph.D. in February 2023. The project was part of the Disability Advocacy Research in Europe (DARE) project, focusing on the evolving role of the European Disability Forum in response to the shift towards 'co-production' of policy, analysing their strategies for influencing EU decision-making over 25 years. Her findings resulted in a collective action framework that she is continuing to develop. Dr. Coveney's main academic interests lie in understanding the opportunities that changing government structures, particularly the emergence of new actors in

decision-making processes, offer to civil society groups like disabled people's organisations. Presently, she is involved in teaching and developing the Disability Studies, Rights & Inclusion MSc at the University of Leeds, launched in September 2023.



Martine Eliasson

Political adviser at Uloba Independent Living Norway

I'm Martine Eliasson from Norway, and I'm passionate about fighting for the rights of people with disabilities. Currently, I work as a political adviser at Uloba Independent Living Norway. I've spent a lot of time learning about discriminated minorities in the society, studying social work, and even earning a master's degree in disability studies. This means I really understand the challenges that people with disabilities can face. At Uloba, I focus on changing the laws and policies to make life better for people with disabilities. My goal is to ensure that we have the same opportunities and

independence as everyone else. I'm dedicated to this cause and work hard to make a positive impact.

A close-up photograph of a person's hand, wearing a white sleeve with black polka dots, interacting with a control panel. The panel includes a large screen and several buttons, including a directional pad and a gear icon. The background is blurred, suggesting an indoor setting. A large purple circle with white text is overlaid on the left side of the image, surrounded by a pattern of smaller purple dots of varying sizes.

SPEAKERS'
BIOGRAPHIES
DAY 2

SPEAKERS' BIOGRAPHIES

Access City Award Ceremony



Helena Dalli

European Commissioner for Equality

Helena Dalli is the first EU Commissioner for Equality since December 2019. Her role is to deliver on the Union of Equality chapter within the Political Guidelines of President von der Leyen, by strengthening Europe's commitment to equality and inclusion in all of its senses. Prior to taking her role as Commissioner, Dalli held various political roles in Malta including Member of Parliament (1996 to 2019), Minister for European Affairs and Equality (2017 to 2019), and Minister for Social Dialogue, Consumer Affairs and Civil Liberties (2013-2017). She was also opposition Shadow

Minister for public administration, equality, public broadcasting and national investments (1998-2013) and Junior Minister for Women's Rights in the Office of Prime Minister (1996-1998). Dalli holds a PhD in Political Sociology from the University of Nottingham, and lectured in Economic and Political Sociology, Public Policy, and Sociology of Law at the University of Malta.



Joost Korte

Director General, DG EMPL, European Commission

Joost Korte was appointed Director-General of Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion on the 16 March 2018. Previously, the Dutch national served as Deputy Director-General in the European Commission's Trade Department, in the Agriculture and Rural Development Department as well as in the Enlargement Department. Furthermore, Mr. Korte spent several years in the Commission's Secretariat General as Director responsible for the relations with the Council of Ministers and gained extensive experience in the Private offices of Sir Leon Brittan,

Chris Patten and Danuta Hübner. These professional experiences within the European institutions allowed him to develop a profound understanding of EU decision-making. A lawyer by training, Joost Korte joined the Commission in 1991, following eight years of academic work on European law at the Universities of Utrecht and Edinburgh.



Amir Alibabić

Member of EDF Youth Committee

Helena Dalli is the first EU Commissioner for Equality since December 2019. Her role is to deliver on the Union of Equality chapter within the Political Guidelines of President von der Leyen, by strengthening Europe's commitment to equality and inclusion in all of its senses. Prior to taking her role as Commissioner, Dalli held various political roles in Malta including Member of Parliament (1996 to 2019), Minister for European Affairs and Equality (2017 to 2019), and Minister for Social Dialogue, Consumer Affairs and Civil Liberties (2013-2017). She was also opposition Shadow

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Panel 3: Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: achievements, challenges, and next steps



Lucie Davoine

Acting Head of Disability and Inclusion unit, DG EMPL, European Commission

Lucie Davoine is Deputy Head of the Unit “Disability and Inclusion” in Directorate-General for Employment, Social affairs and Inclusion of the European Commission since 2021. In this capacity, she contributes to the elaboration and coordination of policies on social inclusion and on the rights of persons with disabilities. Prior to this, she worked as policy officer in different departments of the European Commission, where she was successively responsible for initiatives on gender equality, access to social protection and the future of work, as well as education and training. She holds a PhD and a master in economics from University Panthéon-Sorbonne and a master in political sciences from the ‘Institut d’Etudes politiques de Paris’. She wrote academic articles on job quality in Europe and a book on the economics of happiness.



Charlotte Aelbrechts

Board Member Bdf

Charlotte Aelbrecht was born in 1997 in Belgium. Her motto is ‘Everything happens for a reason.’ After becoming paralysed at the age of 17, she therefore believes that becoming an advocate for people with disabilities is her purpose. She works as a teamleader for Dito, an organisation by and for people with disabilities and chronic illnesses as well as their families. Besides playing wheelchair tennis and going out with friends she loves to travel and explore the world, always searching for a piece of untouched nature, a new culture and a new story to tell.



Paul Alford

Advocacy Worker, Inclusion Ireland

Paul Alford is a self-advocacy project worker with Inclusion Ireland for the last 18 years. Paul speaks to people about his own experience of finding his voice and using this to make decisions about his own life and how this has led to him fighting for equal rights for all people with an intellectual disability.

SPEAKERS' BIOGRAPHIES

Jakub Hrkal

Statistical officer, DG ESTAT, European Commission

Jakub Hrkal is a statistical officer in Eurostat (European Commission), currently working on the production and dissemination of household budget survey data and on the development of a new presentation of disability statistics. He has a broad knowledge of various domains of social statistics and demography. He started his career in the Czech public sector where he worked on the implementation of international data collections and methodologies in health statistics. He then worked in Eurostat, on methodological development and dissemination of survey-based health statistics and poverty statistics. Following on from this, he gained a deeper knowledge of disability statistics followed including work to develop a new disability data portal in the United Nations Statistics Division. He later supported the implementation of the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health and related tools in the Czech Republic. He holds a master's degree in Statistics and Insurance from the University of Economics in Prague.



Maria Montefusco

Analyst, Swedish Agency for Participation

Since 2021 Maria Montefusco works as an analyst at the Swedish Agency for participation, a governmental expert agency that promotes the implementation of and monitors disability policy in Sweden. 2013-2021 she worked as a Senior adviser at the Nordic Welfare Center and was the Secretary and project manager of the Disability Council of the Nordic Council of ministers. Maria also has a background in the disability movement and rare disease community. She holds two Bachelor degrees in Political Science and Social Anthropology from Stockholm university and

has studied strategic project management and strategic communication at Berghs School of Communication.



Nadia Hadad

Executive member, European Disability Forum (EDF)

Nadia Hadad, a human right activist from young age. She worked as an engineer from water related projects to training of craftsmen and young people excluded from education, to training and supporting local women's groups in technical issues in many countries. Later on, she became a Disability Inclusion Policy Officer in the field of development cooperation, with ngo PHOS. She's Individual member of the International Disability and Development Consortium (IDDC). She gives lectures and

trainings on inclusive cooperation, the UN CRPD and SDGs, inclusive Climate Justice & Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) at universities, ministries, NGOs, DPOs and more. Nadia is the Vice President of the Brussels City Advisory Council of Persons with Disabilities, a member of the Brussels Region Advisory Panel and member of the Belgian Supervising Commission of the independent mechanism for the implementation and monitoring of the UN CRPD in Belgium, for GRIP. She is a Co-chair of the Board of the European Network on Independent Living (ENIL) and a member of the Executive Committee of the European Disability Forum (EDF), advisory panel of European Disability Expert (previously ANED), the EC Disability Platform, Co chair off the IDDC OPD Taskgroup and previously also of the Advisory Panel of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency's Fundamental Rights Platform. Nadia has a degree in Electromechanical Engineering, specialising in "Mechanical conception", water resources engineering, human ecology, environment coordination, and Philosophy.

Conclusions



Katarina Ivankovic-Knezevic

Social Rights and Inclusion Director, DG EMPL, European Commission

Since September 2018 Katarina Ivanković Knežević is a Director for Social Rights and Inclusion in the Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. Her area of activity is modernisation of social protection systems and wider social policies fostering social and labour market inclusion, through the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and other relevant social policies of the European Union. She is leading a work on disability and inclusion and is also DG EMPL Equality Coordinator. Before joining the European Commission she was a State Secretary in the Ministry of Labour and the Pension System of the Republic of Croatia, in which she was responsible for the management and implementation of the European Social Fund and other EU instruments aiming at human resources development. For the last 20 years her professional interests are human rights and gender equality, social and employment policies.



John Patrick Clarke

Vice-President of the European Disability Forum (EDF)

Pat Clarke, the Vice President of the European Disability Forum, retired as the Chief Executive of Down Syndrome Ireland served as the former President of Down Syndrome International. Pat's extensive experience includes being a former Chair of the Disability Federation of Ireland and serving on the boards of organisations such as the Children's Rights Alliance Ireland and the International Disability Alliance. He was also a member of the Council of Europe Committee that investigated the involvement of persons with disabilities in political and public life. With a pan-disability perspective gained through his involvement with various disability-focused organisations, Pat has been a longstanding advocate for the full inclusion of people with Down syndrome and all persons with disabilities in society at every level.



Peter Samyn

President, Federal Public Service Social Security, Belgium

Peter Samyn has been the Chairman of the Management Committee of the Belgian Federal Public Service (FPS) Social Security since 2021. His ambition, together with the competent ministers, is to revitalise social security and make it resilient to the many challenges it faces. He obtained a master's degree in clinical psychology at the University of Ghent in 1986 and subsequently reoriented himself in Human Resources Management and Government Management at IPSOC Kortrijk (1990) and the University of Antwerp (1994). Contributions to a quality public service and to an innovative organisational culture in the government run like a thread through his career.