

How can Disabled People's Organisations use media to improve the perception of people with disabilities within society?

Relevant articles of the CRPD: 8, 9

Country: Macedonia

Region: South East Europe

Good practices available in: English (full report available in Albanian and Serbian)

Awareness-raising campaign – Polio Plus, Macedonia

Description of the practice and the process involved

Polio Plus is a DPO in Macedonia with a strong competency in **media awareness-raising and lobbying**.

One of their most provocative public campaigns was '**Nobody's Perfect**' which depicts icons of beauty and celebrity such as Venus de Milo, Spider Man and Marilyn Monroe with prostheses. These images were placed on billboards throughout the city of Skopje with the words 'Nobody's Perfect' accompanying the images.

Nobody's Perfect is the second in a trilogy of campaigns that Polio Plus created **to raise awareness of the general population as to the existence of people with disabilities in the wider community and their equal rights to full citizenship**. The aim of this campaign was to challenge the social representations of disability. At the core of the 'Nobody's Perfect' campaign is a shift in the perception of disability from viewing people with disabilities as defective individuals to **viewing disability as a part of the human experience**.

At the same time, Polio Plus placed the images on billboards in **strategic parts of the city to emphasise as well the need for media recognition of disability issues**. Their actions refer to the European Congress on Disability declaration on disability and media which states: "*The **Media should improve the portrayal of disabled people in mass media. More information on disabled people should be included in the media in recognition of the existence of human diversity. When referring to disability issues, the media should avoid any patronising or humiliating approaches but focus instead on the barriers disabled people face and the positive contribution to society***"

disabled people can make once these barriers have been overcome"
(European Congress on Disability, Madrid. March 2002)

Polio Plus received funding for this initiative from **a cross-section of donors** ranging from the private sector to the state, from local firms to multinational companies and international stakeholders including the World Bank, Price Waterhouse, the city municipality, Share-SEE, Open Society Institute, Macedonian Telecom, and Skopska Beer Brewery. Therefore, not only international agencies are stakeholders in this awareness campaign but **also the local municipality, multinational and local businesses, as well as civil society** have a vested interest in the project.



'Nobody's perfect' accessibility campaign and billboards

Polio Plus also did awareness-raising within the government: the formation of the Inter-Party Parliamentary Lobby Group (IPPLG) Polio Plus not only targets the public in their campaigns, they launched an awareness-raising initiative specifically targeted to the Macedonian parliament on the **need to address disability issues on a state level**. After successfully mobilising members of parliament, Polio Plus secured the **commitment of 17 members** of Parliament from different political parties to form the first inter-parliamentary lobby group in Macedonia based on disability rights. The goal of this group is **improvement and promotion of the rights of persons with disability through lobbying**. It will focus on disability rights and the introduction of a **Disability Discrimination Act**, a legal instrument that will lie 'Nobody's Perfect' accessibility campaign poster and billboards across the whole of the legislature and serve as the reference point for disability issues.

The effects / impact of the practice

While it is too early to judge the success of the campaigns, some indications that the initiative has achieved visibility include:

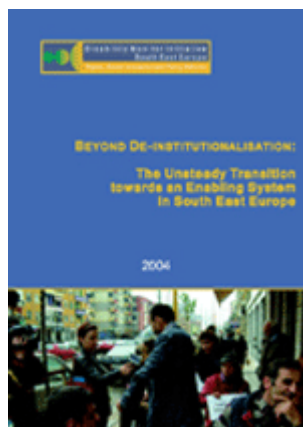
- **Media interest** - Radio Free Europe interviewed Polio Plus regarding the "Nobody's Perfect" campaign as part overall review of initiatives made in the field of disability rights,
- **NGO and DPO interest** - Various local NGOs requested campaign media to use as part of their awareness raising initiatives,
- **Professional interest** - the Director of St. Erasmus, a rehabilitation orthopaedic hospital operating under the medical model, asked for sets of the campaign posters so as to display them in the hospital.

Of the many legal initiatives submitted by the IPPLG one important declaration was **unanimously adopted** by parliament in July 2003, which morally committed it to **work henceforth with reference and regard to the human rights of people with disabilities**, drawing on international conventions and agreements, together with reference to EU legislation.

On a broader scale, the IPPLG has served as a **useful role model for how state, government and parliamentary entities can and should work with NGOs** on the overall aim of achieving **harmonisation with the EU**. In addition to promoting **relevant examples of anti-discrimination and comprehensive laws** from Europe such as the UK Disability Discrimination Act (1995), and international legal standards, the lobby group succeeded in **raising awareness within the Macedonian parliament** resulting in a "declaration for protection of the rights and dignity of people with disabilities".

Background and context

Full project report: [Beyond De-Institutionalisation: The Unsteady Transition towards an Enabling System in South East Europe \(DMI SEE, 2004\)](#)



Criteria for the good practices: see page 21 of the full report.

Recommendations from the good practices: see page 91 of the full report.

Links to further resources:

[Full text on article 8 – Awareness-raising](#)

[Full text on article 9 – Accessibility](#)