

Committee/Council: Special Conference

Issue: Fostering the integration of disabled persons in social life

Student Officer: Vasiliki Aivatidou

Position: Deputy President

Introduction

The term disabled applies to all individuals who have (or have had) impairments caused by changes in various subsystems of the body or mental health. These impairments affect their ability to function and prevent them from performing tasks in the manner considered normal for a human being. There are several types of disability: Mobility and Physical Impairments, Spinal Cord Disability, Brain Disability, Vision Disability, Hearing Disability, Cognitive Disabilities and Psychological Disorders. The degree of disability might be mild, moderate, severe, or profound and impairments can be present from birth or they can occur during a person's life. According to the WHO, about 15% of the world's population have some form of disability and this number will most probably rise in the following years due to the emergence of new diseases, road traffic injuries, poor working conditions and other factors.



Although the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has provided human beings with equal rights since the mid-20th century and disabled people were also granted the same rights, still disabled people struggle for access to education and employment and for the right to live in the community instead of being locked up in institutions. They can't be easily integrated in the society, they don't have equal opportunities as the able people, they face racism and according to a British study they are more likely to become victims of violence or even rape.

- **Ninety per cent of children with disabilities in developing countries do not attend school.**(UNESCO)
- **An estimated 386 million of the world's working-age people have some kind of disability.** (ILO)

- **Unemployment among the persons with disabilities is as high as 80 per cent in some countries. Often employers assume that persons with disabilities are unable to work. (ILO)**

Definition of Key-Terms

Disability: Any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being.

Handicap: A disadvantage for a given individual, resulting from an impairment or disability, that limits or prevents the fulfilment of a role that is normal, depending on age, sex, social and cultural factors for that individual.

Impairment: Any loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological, or anatomical structure or function.

Inclusion: In case of disability, this term is used for the idea that all people should freely, openly and without pity accommodate any person with a disability without restrictions or limitations of any kind.

Rehabilitation: a goal-oriented and time-limited process aimed at enabling an impaired person to reach an optimum mental, physical and/or social functional level, thus providing her or him with the tools to change her or his own life. It can involve measures intended to compensate for a loss of function or a functional limitation (for example by technical aids) and other measures intended to facilitate social adjustment or readjustment.

Discrimination: the unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people, especially on the grounds of race, age, or sex.

Social exclusion: the failure of society to provide certain individuals and groups with those rights and benefits normally available to its members, such as employment, adequate housing, health care, education and training, etc.

Equalization of opportunities: the process through which the general system of society, such as the physical and cultural environment, housing and transportation, social and health services, educational and work opportunities, cultural and social life, including sports and recreational facilities, are made accessible to all.

(<http://www.independentliving.org/files/WPACDP.pdf>

<http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=23>)

Background Information

History of their social exclusion

In order to understand disability today, we have to look into the past and get to know the way that humanity treated disabled people. Disabled people had always been in society but not a part of it and their unclear social standing can be seen throughout the years.

Ancient Greece and Rome

In ancient Greece people strongly believed in many perceptions about the ideal human body (without impairments), perceptions which were presented and admired through art (sculptures). A Greek philosopher named Aristotle urged people to get rid of all children that were imperfect/ disabled as it was believed that they weren't useful for the society. There was also a Greek law stating that no baby could be considered a child until seven days after birth, so that all imperfect children would be detected until then. From these beliefs, it is evident that disabled people were considered as a social burden, that they weren't a part of the society and therefore they were sentenced to death.

Renaissance

The Renaissance was also based on these Greek and Roman ideas about the perfect and flawless body. Many paintings in that era showed and promoted the idealised human body even though one part of the population was disabled.

The 19th Century

This is the era when disabled people's social exclusion was at its height. Disabled people were considered to be useless for the society as well as unqualified for the workforce. Although they were given a Poor Law Relief, they were totally secluded from society and they became even more depended on medical treatments which they could not afford. After investigations on Darwin's theories of evolution, scientists came to the conclusion that people with disabilities should be either locked up in institutions or they should be sterilised so as not to make children and weaken the gene of the nation.

The Third Reich

During the Third Reich, Germany made some serious violations of human rights as well as the unstoppable use of propaganda. As far as disabled people are concerned, there were many films promoting the idea that people with disabilities were useless

for the society. At that time, films like these were very influential and people started to believe in this kind of prejudices. Hitler also launched a euthanasia program with the aim to kill disabled people and people that were sick, as they were nothing but a burden for him. Circa 1940 a massive number of disabled people were executed and until 1945 over 100.000 people with disabilities were killed.

The 20th century

This is when disabled people actually started to campaign for their rights. After the First World War, veterans who were injured and had acquired some kind of impairments protested for their rights and especially for the Right to Work. They campaigned all over the UK and at the end they achieved their aim and employers were forced to reserve 3% of the available working positions for disabled people. Furthermore, in the U.S.A. activists campaigned against the euthanasia of disabled people (1999). It is evident that a great progress has been made in the last 30 years, but none of the disability's movement or attempts have fallen under media's attention.

To sum up, it goes without saying that **diversity couldn't be tolerated** in the past. Disabled people had no rights, they were considered to be useless for the society, they were sterilised as well as forced to death and even governments campaigned against them. As far as their social life is concerned, there was none. They were either locked up in institutions and rehabilitation centres or they lived in the society, totally excluded from any social activity.

Social life of disabled people

Nowadays, persons with disabilities are one of the most vulnerable minorities of our population. After numerous attempts to be integrated in the society and obtain equal opportunities, not much has changed. They are still treated differently and they still face discrimination, since there are many prejudices and stereotypes against them. They can't be part of social groups as people avoid contact and personal relationships with them and this leads to their social exclusion. They struggle to find friends and marriage as well as parenthood is sometimes out of the question for them. It is evident that they don't have equal opportunities not only in the workforce but also in their social life, despite the fact that the right to equality of opportunity is stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for all people.

A large percentage of the disabled people are confined in institutions which makes it slightly impossible for them to have social interactions. They are excluded from social life and the professionals and the other personnel who are in contact with them fail to contribute to their integration in society and in social groups, once they are out of the institution.

Another reason why disabled people are excluded from their participation in society has to be the fact that some of them are physically handicapped and there aren't the required facilities (ramps, elevators) to ease their transport.

All in all, the lives of disabled people are handicapped by physical and social barriers, which prevent them from fully participating in society. It is also very difficult for persons with disabilities to keep close relationships with others and this might lead to depression as well as loneliness.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

United States of America - Americans with Disability Act (1990)

The ADA is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination based on disability. It protects Americans with disabilities against discrimination as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which condemned discrimination based on race, religion, sex, national origin, and other characteristics. ADA also asks for reasonable adjustments to the workplaces for employees with disabilities as well as adjustments to public accommodations.

Australia - Disability Discrimination Act (1992)

The Disability Discrimination Act (D.D.A) condemns all acts of discrimination in Australia towards disabled people. Its aim is to promote the rights of people with disabilities and to ensure that disabled people will have the same rights as well as equal opportunities as the rest of the people. The DDA was amended in August 2009 under the Disability Discrimination and other Human Rights Legislation Amendment Act, 2009.

United Kingdom - Equality Act 2010

This act brings together more than 116 separate pieces of legislation into one Act. In case of disability, this law also prohibits discrimination towards disabled people and their families. Concerning the employment, employers are asked to adjust their workplaces in the needs of disabled people and to adopt new policies so as to prevent discrimination. Last but not least, under this law disabled employees are protected from harassment at work.

Disabled People's International (DPI)

DPI is an international non-governmental organization that was established in 1981 with the aim to promote the human rights of disabled people through full participation, equalization of opportunity and development.

European Disability Forum (EDF)

EDF is an NGO aiming to protect all disabled people while promoting disabled people's rights in Europe. Furthermore, it is the only organisation that is ruled by persons with disabilities and their families.

Handicap International

Handicap International is a non- governmental organisation that was created in 1982 so as to provide help in refugee camps in Cambodia and Thailand. It currently helps people with disabilities and vulnerable populations by improving their living conditions and by promoting respect to them.

Human Rights Watch (HRW)

Human Rights Watch is an international non-governmental organization that conducts research on human rights. Concerning disabled people, human rights watch has launched many campaigns throughout the years so as to ameliorate people's lives and to achieve their integration in education and employment.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1804	Creation of the Braille System enabling blind people to read and write.
1883	USA- Following the eugenics movement, many laws were created to prevent disabled people from marrying and having children. In some states disabled people were forcibly sterilised so that they couldn't weaken the gene of the nation.
1918	The Smith-Sears Veterans Rehabilitation Act (also referred to as the Soldier's Rehabilitation Act): professional rehabilitation programs for disabled veteran soldiers.
1920	The Fess-Smith Civilian Vocational Rehabilitation Act: professional rehabilitation programs for disabled civilians.
1927	According to the ruling of the Supreme Court of the United States, the sterilisation of disabled people isn't recognised as a human rights violation.
1933	Despite his disability, Franklin D. Roosevelt was the first disabled person to be elected as a head of government.
1939	Hitler put into force the Nazi euthanasia program, which targeted all sick and disabled people.
1940	The political organisation, American Federation of the Physically Handicapped, was the first one to stand up and urge countries to put an end to job discrimination.
1968	The Architectural Barriers Act stated that all federally owned buildings should be designed in a way to be accessible to disabled people.

1981	International Year of Disabled Persons.
1982	The World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons was adopted by the UN General Assembly.
1994	The equalisation of opportunities of persons with disabilities was set as a goal in the International Conference on Population and Development.
1999	According to the ruling of the Supreme Court, all individuals whose impairments don't limit their life activity, are not considered to be disabled and won't be protected by the A.D.A (Americans with Disabilities Act) as far as the employment discrimination is concerned.
2006	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Relevant UN Treaties, Resolutions and Events

- The World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons (1981)
- The Principles for the Protection of Persons with Mental Illness and the Improvement of Mental Health Care (1991)
- The Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1993)
- The Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons (1975)
- Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities (2006)

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

The international community has made several efforts throughout the years to achieve the integration of disabled persons in society and in social life. It took action

so as to ameliorate disabled people's lives, to safeguard their rights and to combat discrimination against them. To begin with, in 1975 the Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons was introduced to the General Assembly. The aim of this declaration was to clarify and define each and every right of the persons with disabilities but it cannot be considered as a legally binding document since it is a resolution of the Assembly. Furthermore, in 1981, the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons was adopted was a great step in solving the issue. It was the major outcome of the International Year of Disabled Persons and some of its main objectives were to increase the social role of disabled people in the community, to decrease the amount of discrimination, to provide them with necessary living conditions and to achieve the equalization of opportunities. In 1993, the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities were adopted by the UN, containing 22 rules that summarize the message of the World Programme of Action. Despite these actions that were already taken the problem still exists and it needs to be combated immediately.

Possible Solutions

Although some countries have enacted legislation and campaigns to face it, the problem remains a crucial one. People with disabilities face numerous problems in their everyday lives, they cannot be easily integrated in society, they don't have equal opportunities as non-disabled persons in the fields of employment and education and despite all these they still have problems concerning their transport and the way people treat them. It's our duty to protect them from discrimination and promote their human rights.

First and foremost, countries should reconsider their own legislation about disabled people in order to safeguard their rights and protect them from discrimination. We are all human beings who deserve the same opportunities and the same rights. Well, it's the 21st century and still some people face discrimination because of impairments or a chronic illness and we must put an end to this.

Another solution would be to provide physically disabled people with accessible infrastructures, facilities and public transportation by equipping them with ramps, elevators accessible toilets etc.

Workplaces also need to be adjusted properly in the needs of disabled people so as to avoid any accident. That will not only help people with disabilities find jobs more quickly, but it will also enable them rapid adaptation to the new work environment.

Countries should also sign and ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in case they haven't done so.

Furthermore, the inclusion of all disabled people in public schools is recommended in order to avoid discrimination in the school environment. In cases of complete inability to follow the regular educational system there should be a section for these persons so as to avoid locking them in institutions.

Last but not least, public awareness is of vital importance in order to sensitise people about the situation of persons with disabilities and make their integration in social life much easier.

Bibliography

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disability>

<http://www.unescap.org/our-work/social-development/disability/about>

<http://www.disabled-world.com/disability/statistics/>

<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs352/en/>

<https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/disability-rights/guides/brief-guide-disability-discrimination-act>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disability_Discrimination_Act_1995

<http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1859>

http://www.yodisabledproud.org/organize/docs/PRIDE/5_High_School/Unit_3_High/3_1h-History_Timeline.pdf

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Year_of_Disabled_Persons

http://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2012/ted_20120612.htm

<http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=23>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Principles_for_the_Protection_of_Persons_with_Mental_Illness

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Declaration_on_the_Rights_of_Disabled_Persons

<http://www.dpi.org/>

<http://www.disabled-world.com/disability/types/>

<http://www.un-documents.net/a31r123.htm>

<http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/cases/summary.faces/en/3611/html.bookmark>
