

Inclusion of persons with disabilities in European Union development cooperation mechanisms

A preliminary study of call for proposals in
geographic and thematic instruments

Country report - Paraguay

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Bridging  the
GAP

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Editor

Bridging the Gap project: Inclusive Policies and Services for Equal Rights of Persons with Disabilities

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Abbreviations and acronyms

AECID	Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo (Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation)
CONADIS	Comisión Nacional de Discapacidad
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSO-LA	Civil Society Organisations and Local Authorities
EC	European Commission
EIDHR	European Instrument for Human Rights and Democracy
EU	European Union
EU Delegation	European Union Delegation
DPO	Organisation of Persons with Disabilities
MIP	Multiannual Indicative Programme
SENADIS	Secretaria Nacional por los Derechos Humanos de las Personas con Discapacidad

1. Introduction

European Union Delegation (EU Delegation) to Paraguay's strategy is laid out in the Multiannual Indicative Programme (MIP) 2014-2020[1]. The overall strategic objective of the EU in its relation with Paraguay is to “contribute to its social, economic and institutional development, to promote regional integration on the South American continent and to develop partnerships with the country for bilateral and global issues of common interest”.

The programme was allocated a total budget of €168 million and the Government of Paraguay and the EU together decided to focus this joint work on four priority sectors, in line with the National Development Plan 2030 Paraguay.

- **Education** (€85 m): Programmes will be focused on improving access to and the quality of education in order to strengthen human capital and reduce inequality and poverty.
- **Development of the private sector** (€20 m): Improve the business climate so that it is favourable to trade and investments, enhance the capabilities of organisations to prepare and execute policies, and improve the private sector's involvement in policy design.
- **Social protection** (€48 m): A Paraguay that is stable and socially inclusive. Programmes in this sector will focus on the design and implementation of policies that promote a fairer distribution of wealth, increase social cohesion and reduce poverty.
- **Democracy, participation and strengthening institutions** (€10 m): Strengthen democratic institutions in Paraguay by means of, among other initiative, implementing recommendations made by the 2013 EU election observation mission.

Paraguay developed the Plan Nacional de Desarrollo Paraguay 2030 (National Development Plan Paraguay 2030) in 2014 and even though it was developed ahead of Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals; the plan has been adjusted to reflect the SDGs. The plan has three key strategic objectives:

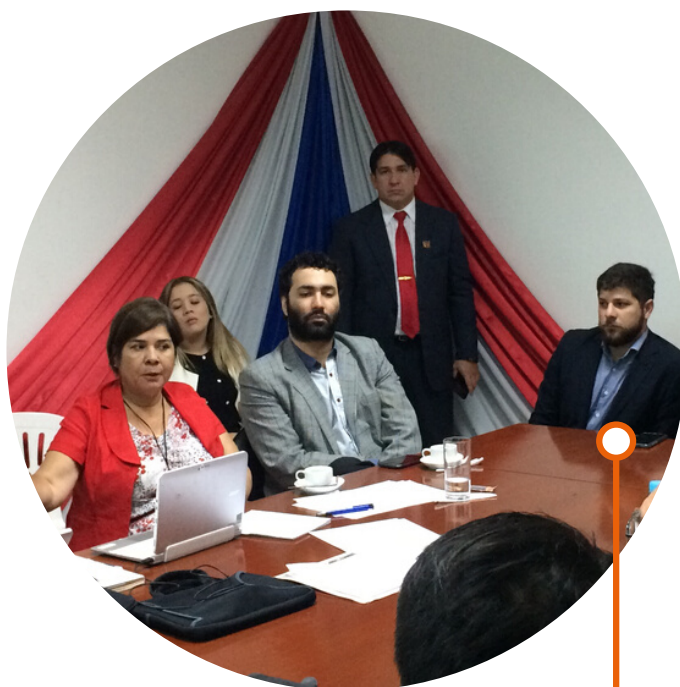
[1] https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/multi-annual-indicative-programm-mip-2014-2020-paraguay_en

1. Poverty reduction and social development,
2. Inclusive economic growth,
3. Integration of Paraguay in the world.

Each strategic objective integrates four transversal approaches:

1. Equal opportunities,
2. Efficient and transparent governance,
3. Territorial ordering and development,
4. Environmental sustainability.

Paraguay has experienced a decade of quite robust economic growth, averaging 4,5% annually. However, the improvement in the Human Development Index have been moderate, though extreme poverty decreased from 18% in 2011 to 10% in 2013. Despite this, inequalities in income distribution remain high, which indicates that the poorest part of the population have not proportionally benefited from this economic growth.



Meeting among SENADIS, AECID Paraguay, Paraguayan Government representatives and CONADIS-Civil Society. Held in Asunción on 2 March 2018.

Situation of persons with disabilities

According to the baseline assessment made by the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID) in the frame of Bridging the Gap-II, Paraguay is increasingly committed to promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities. Paraguay ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2008, and in 2012, the government created the National Secretariat for Human Rights of Persons with Disabilities, (Secretaria Nacional por los Derechos Humanos de las Personas con Discapacidad – SENADIS), with the aim to improve the mainstreaming of the rights of persons with disabilities into public policy. SENADIS has the mission of guaranteeing equal opportunities, social inclusion, respect for human rights, accessibility and social participation of persons with disabilities - with a view to improving their quality of life and consequently that of their families and the environment.

Paraguay submitted its first State report to the CRPD Committee in 2011, which was reviewed in 2013[2]. Several concluding recommendations were made across most articles, which indicates that the country is doing much progress but that more efforts are needed, particularly around accessibility, non-discrimination and access to education, health and employment. In 2015, the report of the Special Rapporteur on Paraguay further confirmed these progresses and challenges[3].

Paraguay does not yet have demographic or administrative information on persons with disabilities, disaggregated by age, gender, or other parameters. Although the 2012 National Population and Housing Census incorporated the list of questions from the Washington Group on Disability Statistics, the low overall coverage achieved by the census has impeded the use and dissemination of its results. There is also a great shortage of information on disability in administrative records.

A National Action Plan for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2015-2030 was adopted in 2015, which designed inline with the CRPD and the international recommendations on Human Rights that Paraguay has ratified. It is also in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", and articulates the Paraguay 2030 National Plan for Development, under which the Paraguayan Executive Branch coordinates sectoral actions with different governmental institutions, as well as with the various levels of government, civil society, private sector, and Legislative and Judicial Powers.

[2] https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Countries.aspx?CountryCode=PRY&Lang=EN

[3] <http://acnudh.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/G1643745.pdf>

Objective of the country assessment

The three country snapshots in the overall study are aiming to get an initial understanding of how EU Delegations contribute to the implementation of the CRPD and promote disability inclusion across their implementing partners of projects granted through call for proposals.

Methodology

The methodology applied in getting a picture of the EU Delegation to Paraguay in supporting the rights of persons with disabilities reflects the overall methodology of the study. A desk review of EU Delegation MIP and main country development plans were made, and complemented by a review of the disability policies and relevant CRPD reports. A number of call for proposals from EU were selected to have been made to collect secondary qualitative data, which was complemented with primary data collected through key informant interviews with Delegation staff, implementing partners and DPOs.

A number of granted project proposals were also assessed to understand if and how disability inclusion was understood and designed by implementing partners.



First National Meeting
of Bridging the Gap.
Held in Encarnación on
26-27 October 2018.

2. Disability inclusion

EU Delegation commitment to disability inclusion

The EU Delegation in Paraguay is guided by the MIP 2014-2020, which defines the strategic collaboration with the government of Paraguay. There is a strong commitment to both economic growth and to support the public sector, primarily in education and social protection. In parallel, the Delegation also provides support to civil society and governance through the CSO-LA and EIDHR programmes. A human rights based approach should underpin the implementation of the MIP.

The MIP 2014-2020 does not make specific reference to the rights of persons with disabilities; it refers to vulnerable groups or the most vulnerable but does not disentangle some of the diversity of the needs and requirements of these groups. Information gathered from the Delegation show that staff is committed to promote disability inclusion and provides support to a few large NGO disability service providers, particularly during the previous DCI programming. In the previous MIP there were specific calls for capacity building and improving services for persons with disabilities, while the on-going MIP focus more on governance and youth. There is room for strengthening and making disability inclusion more systematic across all programmes and funding mechanisms in order to reflect a twin-track approach and better ensure persons with disabilities benefit from the Delegation cooperation programmes.

The Delegation is supporting the Paraguay government in the education sector through budget support to improve access to primary and secondary education and to reduce inequalities in access and increase completion of education. The support has also a component to enhancing quality of education and strengthening the overall education system. While the focus on inequalities is key for inclusive education, there are limited findings that show how the Delegation promotes a disability inclusive education system to ensure access to education for children with disabilities. There are estimations that only 36% of children with disabilities between 6 and 18 years of age go to school in Paraguay, in comparison with 82% of children without disabilities[4]. At the moment the Delegation does not request the government to

[4] Secretaría Nacional por los Derechos Humanos de las Personas con Discapacidad (SENADIS). Resumen del documento: Aproximación a la realidad de las personas con discapacidad, 2014, Asunción.

disaggregate data on disability or develop other inclusive education indicators due to limited baseline data and disability indicators which makes it challenging to introduce this in addition to more basic education data that the country is already collecting. Reports from civil society in 2018 highlight the lack of data on children with disabilities access and inclusion into school an important obstacle to improve educational outcomes for this group. Fundación Saraki estimates that more than 85% of children with disabilities in school age did not attend any school in 2012[5].

Capacities and resources for disability inclusion

The EU Delegation is coordinating with Bridging the Gap-I and II in Paraguay and there is a focal point on disability since several years back with experience and knowledge on disability. The EU Delegation consults with civil society ahead of calls for proposals in the EIDHR and CSO-LA, and includes organisations that works with persons with disabilities but could strengthen their consultations and relationship with of persons with disabilities (DPOs).

There is an interest among the EU Delegation staff to build internal capacity on disability inclusive development but there are competing priorities and limited resources to realise this. Until now the roll out of the Human Rights Based Approach capacity building Staff would prefer training that is accessible in country and adapted to their specific situation and challenges as a small delegation and welcome support from Bridging the Gap-II project.

Inclusion of persons with disabilities in calls for proposals

Among the six calls for proposals targeting grants (CSO-LA and EIDHR) accessed for Paraguay between 2014-2018, one call was specifically designed to promote the participation and access of marginalised and discriminated populations (including persons with disabilities) to the 2018 national elections. Another CSO-LA call in 2018

[5] CRPD Committee evaluation on Paraguay alternative report. Situation of persons with disabilities in Paraguay 2013/2017. Submitted by Fundación Saraki. https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Countries.aspx?CountryCode=PRY&Lang=EN

analysis, and description of target group or in the indicators or suggested data disaggregation in the logical framework.

Discussions with organisations implementing EU grants reflected this finding but also showed various initiatives towards improving disability inclusion. These were not driven by requirements of donors though but internal strategic commitments. For example, Plan International Paraguay, that has implemented EU grants, recently initiated a process of mainstreaming disability in its programmes as a result of an international strategy review, which highlighted the lack of participation of children and youth with disabilities. One example that further encouraged them in this direction was a recent contract with AECID on vocational training. AECID had requested them to ensure the inclusion of youth with disabilities. None of the organisations interviewed for the study had been requested or encouraged by EU grant mechanisms to provide disaggregated information on the access of persons with disabilities to their programmes or other inclusion indicators.

This was further echoed by organisations working with persons with disabilities and DPOs. While some of the organisations were consulted ahead of the calls for proposals issued by the EU Delegation and did receive grants, they all would like to see that EU funding mechanisms better reflect the rights of persons with disabilities. The DPOs consulted in the study further highlighted that the requirements to obtain funds from the EU were often difficult to meet.

Empowerment of persons with disabilities

There are several positive developments in Paraguay in the disability sector, such as the adoption of the National Disability Plan 2015-2020. What DPOs and other civil society tell however is the lack of translating policies into concrete actions and improvement in service delivery level. To ensure accountability of policy implementation, there is a need for empowered persons with disabilities represented by well-organised DPOs, rights holders that can claim their rights towards decision makers. While there are a few strong organisations that work for the rights of persons with disabilities, the voice and representation of persons with disabilities themselves, particularly at local level remains limited. So far, the EU grants for CSO-LA as well as EIDHR are not accessible to most collectives of DPOs; they do not have sufficient organisational capacity to implement such large grants.

Some of the bigger civil society organisations work closely with, and also employ persons with disabilities, such as Fundación Saraki, who is also a strong voice when it comes to advocate for the rights of persons with disabilities, particularly those with

intellectual disabilities. There is also a National Commission on Disability (Comisión Nacional de Discapacidad – CONADIS), which group together organisations of, and for persons with disabilities and key government ministries, to improve the participation of persons with disabilities in public policy development and implementation. According to information gathered from DPOs consulted in this study, CONADIS could work more on ensuring inclusion of diverse DPOs and also build mechanisms to strengthen capacities of self-representation at local levels.

Accessibility policies

The EU Delegation in Paraguay is situated in a newly constructed building that has a good physical access to its offices. There is so far no accessibility policy or plan in place, and according to staff there is room for improvement when it comes to accessibility of information and consultation mechanisms.

Among some of the DPOs consulted, their main difficulty to access the EU Delegation is mostly due to transportation challenges in the city. They also mentioned not being aware or knowing how to access information about events or call for proposals being issued by the delegation.

Workshop 'Guidelines for inclusive cooperation', organised in collaboration of AECID and the European Union delegation in Paraguay. Held in Asunción on 2 and 3 July 2019.



3. EU implementing partners

During the assessment of EU Delegation in Paraguay, representatives of three DPOs were interviewed together with eight organisations who either were currently receiving EU funds or had received funds previously.

Organisations' policies and strategies

Among the eight organisations that had received funds through EU grants, four mentioned to have policy that included persons with disabilities, Fundación Paraguaya, Fundación Sarakí, Plan International and AECID. The other four had not developed any explicit tools or strategies on disability inclusion; however they did occasionally have specific activities that would target persons with disabilities.

The Organización de Estados Iberoamericanos para la Educación, la Ciencia y la Cultura (OEI) just recently published a guide on equity in education in Ibero-America, which comprehensively addresses inclusive education, including for children with disabilities[6]. The OEI also provides technical Assistance to the Ministry of Education in Paraguay supported by EU funds, and they have a few actions linked to inclusive education.

The organisations that so far had not mainstreamed disability raised challenges such as budget constraints, project based income, and lack of human resources or being prepared to work on this issue. They all welcomed capacity building and could foresee to develop partnership with DPOs, acknowledging that DPOs need more organisational capacities and support to overcome internal difficulties and divisions. None of the implementing partner organisations had been requested by donors to mainstream disability. Some organisations considered that other civil society organisations, with more disability specific services, were better placed to provide support to persons with disabilities.

Opportunities and challenges for disability inclusion

The study showed a few good examples of civil society working towards the inclusion of persons with disabilities. Both Plan International and Fundación Paraguaya

[6] <https://www.oei.es/uploads/files/news/Education/1213/guia-inclusiva-ingles-5.pdf>

presented institutional changes to systematically ensure the inclusion of persons with disabilities in their programmes and projects. AECID, through encouraging Plan International to ensure that a certain percentage of the vocational training students should be young people with disabilities, shows that there is both willingness and resources available to learn and improve.

Fundación Paraguaya works on poverty elimination through supporting schools to be self-sustainable and build capacity of families to get out of poverty. Five years ago, the organisation realised that they did not reach all marginalised groups and that particularly persons with disabilities did not access their programmes. Step by step they adapted their Poverty Stoplight, a tool that allows families to be protagonists of their own stories of elimination of poverty, to be accessible to persons with disabilities[7]. In addition to empowering people, the data collected through the Poverty Stoplight has proven to be useful for communities, organisations, companies, projects and governments. By testing ways to adapt their microcredit programmes and simplifying some procedures they now have regular applications also from persons with disabilities. They also trained what they call 'impulsores' that were responsible to raise awareness among their own offices and those involved in providing microcredits, on how to ensure inclusion. Internally, Fundación Paraguaya has also put in place specific targets for each office to encourage them to reach and include more persons with disabilities.

AECID, though its technical office in Asunción, is the implementing partner of Bridging the Gap-II in Paraguay. AECID has recently included disability in its fifth plan on development cooperation 2018-2020 and the head of cooperation in Paraguay is committed to promote disability inclusion in the new bilateral agreement with the government. The implementation of the EU funded Bridging the Gap project has had a positive effect on the technical office where several of the staff has engaged in capacity building through online training offered by AECID. The commitment is further reflected in that some of the grants to civil society encourages disability inclusion (see earlier on Plan International) and in a closer relationship with DPOs.

[7] <https://www.povertystoplight.org>

4. Organisations of persons with disabilities

There are various NGOs that are working for the rights of persons with disabilities in Paraguay, or who are disability service providers. Self-representative organisations of persons with disabilities are, particularly outside of the capital, struggling to build a unified voice. Information from discussions with DPOs suggests a need for long-term capacity development to support these DPOs. Particularly at local level there seems to be very limited self-representation and an absence of programmes and funds implemented for this purpose. The civil society and EIDHR grants provided by the EU are not accessible for these collectives and DPOs at this stage. Another type of mechanisms and funding, perhaps initially managed by other civil society organisations or human rights network could be developed in close coordination with SENADIS and CONADIS.

Participation to EU programming and planning

Organisations working for the rights of persons with disabilities and disability service providers reported to be invited to consultations together with the wider civil society at the EU Delegation in the planning of new calls for proposal. The EU Delegation has the intention to consult with as much diversity of civil society as possible and therefore invites larger civil society networks or organisations that can represent smaller organisations to be more efficient. There is a risk though when it comes to persons with disabilities as they might be less formally organised, particularly women with disabilities or people from more marginalised collectives, such as deaf persons or those with psychosocial or intellectual disabilities. This was raised in discussion with the DPOs, and they recommended the EU Delegation to pay more attention and wider promotion of information to reach also DPOs that might not access consultations.

Competition for scarce funding among DPOs as well as among wider NGOs sector can exclude those smaller organisations that are not as visible or that do not have resources to take part in meetings organised in the capital. Persons with disabilities face additional barriers in terms of transportation costs, accompaniment and above all organisational capacities to succeed in obtaining funds from the EU. Other funding mechanisms and/or capacity development resources could be developed in order to support DPOs to be empowered and equal participants in the development of an inclusive society in Paraguay.

5. Conclusion

While being limited in its scope, the analysis of the EU Delegation to Paraguay's contribution to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in funding mechanisms has both opportunities and challenges. The analysis suggests that a more systematic approach to disability inclusion could be applied, in order to encourage and support implementing partners to better mainstream the rights of persons with disabilities. There is a good momentum in Paraguay, but limited capacity and organisation of DPOs is a concern that should be addressed among the donor community in coordination with SENADIS and CONADIS. Evidence show that when DPOs are organised and have the capacity to claim their rights and start holding the government to account, wider systemic changes can happen. This require the EU to look at ways of empowering DPOs across their funding mechanisms and ensure that all funding streams address disability inclusion.

There were strong recommendations from most organisations included in the study that all relevant EU funding should require disaggregation of data on women, men and children with disabilities and that persons with disabilities should equally benefit from all projects and funding provided by all development donors. There should also be better monitoring of disability inclusion among both donors and organisation receiving funds, with transparent reporting on progress.



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