

**European lawyers and judges address legislation, policies and best practices regarding access to justice for persons with disabilities during a workshop**

On March 24th, over 80 lawyers and judges from various European Union Member States joined the Just4All project’s workshop which is co-funded by the EU Justice Programme (2014-2020) “BRIDGING THE GAPS: Disability legislation, policies and best practices. The role of lawyers and judges in the access to justice for persons with disabilities” in order to share experiences, compare theory and practice and find issues that need to be improved for persons with disabilities.

Victoria Ortega (President of the Spanish National Bar), Juan Manuel Fernández (Member of the General Council of the Judiciary and President of the Justice and Disability Forum), Filippo Donatti (President of European Network of Councils for the Judiciary) and Panagiotis Perakis (Vice President of the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE) opened the training session and highlighted the importance of this type of meetings and the commitment of Lawyers and Judges with inclusive justice, equal justice for all and in particular people with disabilities.

After the opening, the session was organized in three sections.

The first one was called ‘The international and European legal framework on disability’. Catherine Naughton (Director of the European Disability Forum) proposed to address access to justice considering an aspect that should be essential when working on and with disabilities: discrimination, barriers and accessibility. Within the international framework, she underlined the importance of the International Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (art. 12, art. 13) and, within the European framework, she mentioned some of the regulations that should be used as reference, such as the Fundamental Rights Charter, the European Union Treaty, the regulation on victims and the new European Strategy on Disability 2021-2030. In her intervention, she also mentioned the relevance of international principles and guidelines about access to justice and she mentioned a few challenges that we are still facing in the field of the rights of people with disabilities, such as limitations to legal capacity, accessibility issues or involuntary committals.

**The second section was focused on guaranteeing access to justice to people with disabilities in the exercise of Lawyers and Judges profession in Europe. The following speakers intervened: Juan Manuel Fernández (**Member of the General Council of the Judiciary and President of the Justice and Disability Forum **) and Torcuato Recover (**Lawyer, Coordinator of the Plena Inclusión National Network of Legal Professionals**). The starting point for both presentations** was to consider justice as an achievement by which all justice professionals should abide. The role of Lawyers and Judges to protect the Law and as agents who should eliminate barriers to access justice was underlined. In particular, the role both professions play to make justice understandable was highlighted. To this aim, training and raising awareness among these Law professionals and including the disability approach in their work is essential.

The third section, “Best practices”, began with Héctor Melero’s testimony. Héctor is the first blind prosecutor in Spain, and his case goes to show a special kind of access to justice for people with disabilities, where they actively participate in the justice system.

Afterwards, Tereza Bartová (Kvalita v Praxi) shared best practices in Check Republic, mainly linked with the elimination of guardianship and the set in motion of a system to support people with disabilities in decision making. Finally, Sanja Jovičić (Senior Lawyer, Academy of European Law-ERA) explained the academy’s work in the field of practical and inclusive training on the Convention addressed to legal professionals.

Rafael de Asís (Professor of Philosophy of Law, UC3M) was in charge of closing this workshop and presented its final conclusion. He pointed at the strength of the medical model in our society and our justice system as one of our main obstacles and he also pointed at a new challenge: technology. “We need to be aware of changes in the legal world and in the legal services provision so that this is no longer a barrier for people with disabilities”.

This training session is part of a series of online workshops through which we aim at training legal operators in the European Union on disability and access to justice. They are organized under the Just4All Project, which is led by the Fundación ONCE and whose partners are **Thomson Reuters**, European Disability Forum (EDF), European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD) and the “Gregorio Peces Barba” Human Rights Institute, Universidad Carlos III de Madrid. This project aims at promoting access to justice for people with disabilities through the awareness and training of Law professionals on the needs of people with disabilities.