

## **Balancing Work and Benefits: Challenges in Disability Support**

Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguished guests, and colleagues,

It is an honor to address you today at the ENSA General Assembly, as we gather to discuss on poverty and disability in Europe. The theme of this assembly “Poverty’s Frontline: Local Authorities Driving Disability Inclusion in the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy” resonates deeply with the mission of Disabled Peoples’ International (DPI) Europe. Our goals are clear, we want build a world where disabilities are not only wounds that needs to be treated, but a tank of knowledge that enriches our communities, we have the ambition to strengthen the skills and capacities of persons with disabilities by fostering joint partnerships between organizations of persons with disabilities (DPOs) and professional training institutions in the personal care and social care sectors.

For decades, we have been encouraged to participate and work, yet our lived experience tells a different story. Medical classifications, administrative penalties for those attempting to work even part-time, and policies are struggling to achieve objectives despite quotas and massive investment. Beyond laws and intentions, there remains a profound structural problem when policy is made about persons with disabilities, not with them.

Our experiences reveal that, after years of receiving disability pensions, we are still discouraged from pursuing entrepreneurial or professional activities due to the risk of losing financial support with loss of employment for “inaptitude”, humiliating medical commissions, and fear of losing acquired rights. These mechanisms discourage participation rather than support it.

To correct this, persons with disabilities must be recognized not merely as beneficiaries but as co-creators of policies, training, and services. Participation is not symbolic, it is essential for efficiency, justice, and trust. Participation needs first empowerment, competencies, advocacy, communication, co-training, analysis of public policy, accessibility assessment, peer expertise, and project development. Without structured opportunities to develop these capabilities, participation remains theoretical.

At the same time, professionals need to learn directly from lived experience to transform practices, attitudes, and assumptions, and joint partnerships between DPOs and training institutions provide the structural mechanism for such change:

- Co-designed curricula integrating lived expertise.
- Peer-led modules in professional schools.
- Capacity-building programs for persons with disabilities.
- A shared culture of equality, collaboration, and respect.
- A new generation of professionals shaped from the beginning by inclusive practice.

This is the most efficient path to eliminate the “dictate of working or not working”, the fear of losing rights, the limited outcomes of quota systems, and outdated cultural representations. Believing that by forging strong alliances between organizations representing people with disabilities and training organizations for professionals in the personal care sector, DPI Europe wants create pathways to empowerment.

European States invest heavily in disability inclusion, yet much of the funding benefits structures rather than the people concerned. Joint partnerships allow resources to strengthen DPO capacities, create new roles (peer experts, co-trainers), and improve the quality of professional intervention at its foundation.

This is not an additional cost, it is **a smarter allocation of existing investments**.

We must:

- Invest in inclusive training programs that recognize the diverse abilities and aspirations of people with disabilities.
- Advocate for policy reforms that allow individuals to work without fear of losing their benefits.
- Promote success stories to inspire others and challenge stereotypes about what people with disabilities can achieve.

It appears that training institutions are becoming increasingly aware of the need to transform their pedagogical models. When DPOs are ready to professionalize their participation, these two dynamics could be integrated through structured, long-term partnerships.

It seems that a shift in perspective is underway, with a growing recognition that collaboration through joint partnerships can be a valuable tool for enhancing skills. It goes beyond charity, beyond protective discrimination, and beyond symbolic participation. It seeks to foster an environment that enables individuals with disabilities to fully participate in society, contribute as educators, and play a role in shaping the systems that impact their lives.

This is related to today's theme of “*allowing people with disabilities to keep their disability benefits while working.*” We believe that workers with disabilities are creating opportunities every day. We support a process that will help us be effective in helping our peers be independent. We also support training all personal assistance and care professionals. To prepare and teach people as experts, and to identify the skills they have developed, we need to create clear educational tools and methods that are open to everyone and improve education as a whole.

We want to create partnerships that are focused on sharing practical skills and knowledge with people with the most limited abilities. To do this, we need a protected status that allows peer counselors and experts to develop their skills without worrying about their income being questioned.

To make big changes, DPI Europe asks DPOs, training bodies, governments, and professionals to work together. Inclusion becomes real only when it is built together. We have been saying for decades that “Nothing for us can be designed, decided, and implemented without us.”

Thank you.