**ECE Regional Forum for Sustainable Development 2019: More and more visibility for persons with disabilities!**

For the third year in the row, EDF attended the [Regional Forum on Sustainable Development](https://www.unece.org/sustainable-development/rfsd2019.html) in Geneva, on the 21st and 22nd March 2019. EDF Board Member Thorkild Olesen was present with Marion Steff, EDF SDGs Coordinator and Monica Loland from Disabled People's Organisations Denmark (DPOD). The forum was organised by the [United Nations Economic Commission for Europe](http://www.unece.org/info/ece-homepage.html) (ECE) and focused on monitoring the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the [ECE region](http://www.unece.org/oes/nutshell/region.html).

The Forum was well attended with more than 850 participants, from 50 countries. The theme was very relevant for persons with disabilities: “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality in the UNECE region”. Participants from governments, civil society, academia and the private sector engaged in intense discussions, learning and exchange across a range of key sustainability priorities.

EDF is the coordinator of the UN ECE Constituency of Persons with Disabilities. For the first time this year, our coordination is done in collaboration with the Swiss Federation of the Deaf. We work very closely with [the other constituencies](https://unece-rcem.eu/) to ensure the voices of persons with disabilities are included in the SDGs work of the UN ECE and the outcomes of the regional forum. Our efforts in Geneva were very successful: we managed to have our representatives in various sessions, notably on education and employment. We met with various organisations working in our field and we successfully organised the first and only accessible side-event of the Forum.

The theme of our side-event was “[The labor inclusion of persons with disabilities](https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/RCM_Website/Inclusion_of_persons_with_disabilities.pdf)”. It was extremely well attended, with great speakers including Thorkild Olesen, EDF Board Member; Alicia Goya de Anca, Disability Hub Europe; Dr. Tatjana Binggeli, President of Swiss Federation of the Deaf; Jürgen Menze, International Labour Organisation (ILO), Emmanuelle Grosclaude, L’Oréal Switzerland as well as Daniel Aristi-Gaztelumendi, EU Delegation to UN in Geneva and Edouard Jay, Permanent Mission of Switzerland. The event was moderated by Oliver Wenczel, Platform Agenda 2030 Switzerland, co-hosted by the Swiss government and the EU, while organised by the Constituency of Persons with Disabilities, EDF and the Swiss Federation of the Deaf.

The [unedited outcome document](https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/RCM_Website/ECE_Report_RFSD2019_unedited.pdf) of the Regional Forum was just published in May, and persons with disabilities are mentioned 7 times:

1. Page 6, round tables – First Set: The growth we want – Solutions for sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, Case studies presented or submitted by: **Disability Hub Europe** (Spain).
2. Page 6, round tables – Second Set: The future of work – Productive employment and decent work for all, Case studies presented or submitted by: Federation of Organisations **Persons with Disability** (Malta).
3. Page 11, focus events – Technology, digitalization, artificial intelligence: curse or blessing for sustainable development “ICTs can reduce inequalities by offering new opportunities for youth, older persons and **persons with disabilities** and helping to close the gender and rural/urban gaps.”
4. Page 12, round table SDG 4, First set. Learning without limits: lifelong learning and inclusive education: “33. While the region has achieved high rates of participation in basic education, disparities based on wealth, location, gender, age and **disability** remain. Inclusive education systems require the reorganization of specialized education and the inclusion of all learners in regular schools to replace segregation of children with special needs.”
5. Page 12, round table SDG 4, First set. Learning without limits: lifelong learning and inclusive education: “Vulnerable groups, **specifically children with disabilities** and from ethnic minorities, are often left behind; suffering from social attitudes that stigmatize, restrict opportunity and lower self-esteem. It is crucial to mobilize and engage all parts of society to overcome resistance towards inclusion.”
6. Page 15, round table SDG 8, Second set. The future of work: productive employment and decent work for all: “58. Addressing discrimination in the labour market, in particular all forms of gender biases and those that concern **persons with disabilities** and older workers, remains a major concern.”
7. Page 17, round table SDG 10, Second set. Towards a world of equal opportunity: tackling inequality caused by exclusion and discrimination: “70 (…) Discrimination has many faces and may relate to gender, ethnicity, origin, age, sexual orientation, **disability** or other factors, which may at times intersect.”

Overall, EDF is pleased to see the growing involvement of persons with disabilities in the Forum. It is essential to continue our advocacy work to ensure the UN ECE and its Member States include persons with disabilities in the SDGs.

Marion Steff, SDGs Coordinator: marion.steff@edf-feph.org