

<b>Institution:</b> The University of Leeds		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 21 Sociology		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Mainstreaming disability equality in the European Union		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> December 2007 – May 2019		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Mark Priestley	Professor of Disability Policy	1997 – Present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2014–2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> No		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>		
<p>An international research programme led at Leeds, over a decade, by <b>Professor Mark Priestley</b> helped to embed and strengthen disability equality across the work of the EU institutions with consequential benefits for 80 million disabled citizens. The findings enabled civil servants and politicians: (a) to make disability equality more visible in EU co-ordination of Member States' employment and social policies; (b) to adopt new disability equality monitoring methods and indicators; (c) to justify political support for new policies of mutual recognition and harmonization among the Member States, including new legislation.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b>		
<p>More than 80 million disabled people live in the European Union and up to one quarter of the adult population say they feel in some way limited in the activities of their everyday lives. Research led at Leeds has been at the forefront in showing the EU institutions how they can challenge this exclusion by revealing disabling barriers in society and acting to remove them.</p> <p>The impact is based on a decade-long programme of research, as a core activity of the Centre for Disability Studies, comprising projects with a total award value above EUR10,000,000. The aim was to mainstream disability equality in EU policy making, thereby supporting commitments made in the European Disability Strategy 2010–2020 and EU efforts to implement the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Projects were conducted for three EU institutions (the European Commission, European Parliament and European Agency for Fundamental Rights).</p> <p>The main research effort stems from the establishment of an Academic Network of European Disability experts (ANED), under <b>Priestley's</b> scientific directorship, from 2008 until the UK's withdrawal from the EU in 2019. The core research team included Professors Lawson (Leeds), Waddington (Maastricht), Grammenos (Brussels), and Pinto (Lisbon), managed by Human European Consultancy (Utrecht) with research teams in 35 countries. This network mapped disability policies at the EU and national level, analysed disability issues thematically, made policy recommendations and developed new monitoring indicators and tools. For example:</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One key work package focused on the 'European Semester' which, since 2013, is the process by which the EU co-ordinates core strategy among the Member States. <b>Priestley</b> led this task, commissioning annual country reports on employment and social inclusion (from national experts) and data reports from EU social surveys (Grammenos). These were analysed, along with EU and national policy documents, to produce synthesis reports and policy messages <b>[1]</b>. The findings showed where attention to disability was missing in the Semester process, identified areas of concern and prioritised country-specific interventions. The evidence was provided to Commission staff to use in the policy process (e.g. to insert selected findings in high level EU analyses and recommendations to national governments).</li> <li>• Projects were conducted for other EU institutions too, such as the European Parliament in 2015, in which <b>Priestley</b> analysed its role in protecting human rights under the UN Convention, and evidenced the extent of disability mainstreaming across the Parliament's work. Through research reports and briefings, these findings showed where and how the EU institutions could give greater prominence to disability equality in their work <b>[2]</b>.</li> </ul>		

- Research on disability equality indicators was also applied in projects commissioned by the Fundamental Rights Agency, on political participation in 2013 [3] and independent living in 2016 [4]. Combined with ANED's work on indicators supporting the European Semester, the findings demonstrated how new measures of disability equality in Europe could be conceptualised (Priestley) and operationalised (Grammenos), evidencing patterns of social exclusion and injustice across 28 countries and demanding attention from policy makers.
- The research network also undertook one-off studies, in consultation with the European Commission, to target policy initiatives where evidence could make a difference, such as the European Pillar of Social Rights or proposals for a European Accessibility Act. For example, in a 2013 report Priestley demonstrated national inconsistencies in accessibility standards for common products and services (such as banking, ticketing and public information) [5]. Similar inconsistencies were evidenced in national disability benefit entitlements in 2016, and in disability assessment methods in 2017 (with Waddington) [6].

In summary, the research sought to promote and to increase disability equality mainstreaming in the work of the EU institutions. It used mixed methods to equip policy makers with evidence and tools to intervene in relevant policy debates and processes. The findings revealed:

- (a) A lack of attention to disability equality in the European Semester analyses of employment and social policies (e.g. compared to gender mainstreaming). The research showed how the EU and its Member States could make disability equality more visible.
- (b) A lack of systematic disability equality monitoring by the EU institutions. The research showed how new data, indicators and tools could be used to remedy this.
- (c) A lack of consistency, or mutual recognition, in the rights and entitlements afforded to disabled people in EU Member States. The research evidenced a need to harmonise disability status entitlements and product accessibility standards.

### 3. References to the research

1. Priestley, M. (2018) *Mainstreaming Disability Equality in the European Semester 2018–19: Policy Issues and Questions*, Academic Network of European Disability experts [138-page research report reviewed for publication by the European Commission] <https://www.disability-europe.net/downloads/1041-task-eu2020-year-4-synthesis-report>.
2. Priestley, M. (2016) *The Protection Role of the Committee on Petitions in the Context of the Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, European Parliament Policy Department C: Citizens' Rights And Constitutional Affairs, PE 571.384 [90-page research report reviewed for publication by the Parliament secretariat] [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/571384/IPOL\\_STU%282016%29571384\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/571384/IPOL_STU%282016%29571384_EN.pdf).
3. Priestley, M., Stickings, M., Loja, E., Grammenos, S., Lawson, A., Waddington, L. and Fridriksdottir B. (2016) 'The political participation of disabled people in Europe: rights, accessibility and representation', *Electoral Studies* 42:1-9. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2016.01.009> [submitted as output to REF2020].
4. Priestley, M., Grammenos, S., Zwamborn, M. and Groenendijk, I. (2016) *From Institutions to Community Living: Development of Statistical Outcome Indicators*, Human European Consultancy for the European Union Agency on Fundamental Rights. [141-page research report peer-reviewed for publication by the FRA scientific board] [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/independent-living-development-statistical-outcomeindicators\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/independent-living-development-statistical-outcomeindicators_en.pdf).
5. Priestley, M. (2013) *National Accessibility Requirements and Standards for Products and Services in the European Single Market: Overview and Examples* [117-page research report reviewed for publication by the European Commission] <https://www.disability-europe.net/downloads/128-aned-2012-accessibility-additional-survey-report-final>.
6. Waddington, L. and Priestley, M. (2020) 'A human rights approach to disability assessment', *Journal of International and Comparative Social Policy*, 1-15, <http://doi.org/10.1017/ics.2020.21> [submitted as output to REF2020].

**Example grant awards associated with Priestley:**

- *Academic Network of European Disability experts (ANED)* European Commission competitive tender VT/2007/005, EUR2m, 2008–2011 (scientific director, with HEC).
- *Establishment and maintenance of a European network of academic experts in the field of disability*, European Commission competitive tender JUST/2011/PROG/PR/01/D3 EUR1.95m, 2012–2014 (scientific director, with HEC).
- *Indicators on political participation of persons with disabilities*, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, EUR6k (PI, with E. Loja).
- *European network of academic experts in the field of disability*, European Commission competitive tender VC/2015/0255 EUR2.6m, 2015–2019 (scientific director, with HEC).
- *The protection role of the Committee on Petitions in the context of the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, European Parliament negotiated procedure IP/C/PET/IC/2015-136 and subsequent updates EUR20k (PI).
- *The right to independent living of persons with disabilities: statistical analysis for outcome indicators*, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, F-SE-14-T01-C02 (Lot 29), EUR60k (Co-I, with M. Zwamborn).

**4. Details of the impact**

The impact evidence shows how different EU institutions used the research to: (a) make disability equality more visible in the European Semester, (b) implement new disability equality monitoring methods and indicators, and (c) justify support for new policies of mutual recognition and harmonisation among the Member States, including new legislation.

***Mainstreaming disability equality in EU analyses of Member States' social policies***

European Commission staff used the research on employment and social policies to mainstream disability equality in the European Semester (the process co-ordinating the Europe 2020 strategy).

- They used the findings to raise disability issues in their annual Country Reports and in Recommendations to Member States. Consequently, by 2019, all 28 of their country analyses raised disability issues, twice as many as in 2012. The number of Country-Specific Recommendation fiches referring to disability increased from three in 2012 to 18 in 2019. As a result, visibility in the EU's high-level Joint Employment Report also rose, from just seven references to disability in 2013 to 57 in 2019 (increasing each year).
- As the responsible civil servant affirmed, '*Through mainstreaming, for the first time, we managed to make disability issues more visible in the main European policy, in Europe 2020*' [A]. The Commission's 2017 Progress Report on the European Disability Strategy identified this '*Mainstreaming of disability issues in the European Semester process and policy publications*' as one of its 'Main progress' achievements, citing the research as its evidence-base. Its final evaluation in 2020 confirmed that '*the European Semester has increasingly aligned its provisions with the aims of the [Disability] Strategy*', because of this [B].

***Adopting new monitoring mechanisms and indicators***

The EU institutions adopted new methods of monitoring disability equality arising from the research, either qualitative or quantitative. Three examples since 2013 evidence this.

- The EU statistical office (Eurostat) launched a disability database, including measures piloted in the research to demonstrate the feasibility of disability equality indicators in Europe (proposed by **Priestley** and Lawson, populated by Grammenos). In 2018 the EU Social Protection Committee adopted a disability indicator in its Social Protection Performance Monitor (SPPM) and Eurostat agreed to include a disability variable in all of its major social surveys. The methods shaped national disability indicators too. For example, the Danish Institute for Human Rights acknowledged in 2015 that their Gold Indicators were '*inspired by...the proposals for Indicators of Disability Equality in Europe developed by the Academic Network of European Disability experts (ANED) [and] have also drawn inspiration from the Disability Online Tool of the Commission (DOTCOM) published by ANED in 2012*' [C].
- The European Parliament began to monitor disability issues in citizens' petitions. The Petitions Committee held a televised public hearing in 2015, at which the European Ombudsman, EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, European Disability Forum, European Commission, and a

member of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities were invited to respond to **Priestley's** report [D]. A consequent Resolution of the European Parliament, drew 'attention to the importance of the findings' and resolved that: 'the Committee on Petitions continues to organise events focusing on petitions in the field of disability; calls for the capacity of the Committee on Petitions and its Secretariat to be enhanced ...; calls for the establishment of a designated officer responsible for the processing of disabilities-related issues', and noted 'the Committee's significant follow-up action' to the research [E].

- The EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) used the indicators on political participation to frame Opinions, for example that, 'EU Member States should amend national legislation depriving people of the right to vote based on a disability' [F]. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) also referred to this research in developing new international electoral participation guidance [G]. Such Opinions added weight to existing civil rights claims by disabled people denied the right to vote. The combination of research evidence, political influence and citizens' voice achieved significant change. For example, in the 2019 European Parliament elections, 85,000 disabled people in Germany, and 350,000 in France, gained voting rights for the first time.

#### **New policies for mutual recognition and harmonisation of rights:**

Finally, the research strengthened the case for new EU policy initiatives, both in soft and hard law. Two examples illustrate its impact on harmonising standards among European countries:

- The European Commission used the research on mutual recognition of disability benefits (Waddington and **Priestley**) to propose a new 'European Disability Card'. This allows persons recognised as disabled in one country to access selected rights in reciprocating countries, without reassessment. The card was launched in eight countries in 2016, targeting access to cultural, sports and leisure services and consumer discounts. For example, Finland reported that 'during the first 6 months around 5000 persons have applied for the card. We have around 150 committed partners, for example the national railway company, a nation-wide cinema company, museums, theatres, local bus companies and many more' [H]. In 2020, the European Parliament called for its extension to disability benefits in all EU Member States.
- **Priestley's** findings on accessibility standards were key to the Commission's 2015 business case for a new 'European Accessibility Act'. This EU Directive improves access for disabled people through design standards for computers and operating systems, ATMs, ticketing and check-in machines, smartphones, digital TV equipment, television broadcasting, transport services, banking services, e-books and e-commerce (regulating standards throughout the European single market and global imports to that market). The Impact Assessment justifying this legislation contained 22 references to the research, evidencing how 'differences in national legal requirements and the variety of practices used by contracting authorities, including on accessibility, constitute a barrier to cross-border public procurement'. Consequently, the primary case for legislation, adopted by the EU in 2019, was that, 'economic operators are confronted with divergent, and often contradictory, national accessibility requirements' [I].

In both cases, change arose from sustained lobbying by civil society but decisions required an evidential business case, in which the research proved instrumental. According to EU data, '7 in 10 Europeans believe better accessibility of products and services would very much improve the lives of people with disabilities, the elderly and others with accessibility needs'. The market costs of divergent accessibility requirements were estimated at EUR20,000,000,000 in 2020 and the Act was estimated to reduce this by 45-50% [J].

In summary, as attested by the European Commission, 'ANED has been an important resource for us. It really made an additional contribution to our work level and data collection and the intelligence that we can use as an input to policy. ANED has been instrumental to achieve the disability mainstreaming, both in policy and legal matters' [A].

#### **5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

- A. Corroborating letter from European Commission DG for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion Unit C.3, dated 3 December 2019.
- B. European Commission Staff Working Documents: *Progress Report on the implementation of the European Disability Strategy (2010 -2020)*, SWD(2017) 29 final (pp. 9, 18, 71-72)

- <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=16995&langId=en>; *Evaluation of the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020*, SWD(2020) 289 final/2  
<https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=23191&langId=en>.
- C. Danish Institute for Human Rights (2015) *Gold Indicators* (p.11)  
[https://www.humanrights.dk/files/media/dokumenter/udgivelser/equal\\_treatment\\_2015/the\\_gold\\_indicators\\_2015.pdf](https://www.humanrights.dk/files/media/dokumenter/udgivelser/equal_treatment_2015/the_gold_indicators_2015.pdf).
- D. Web stream recording of the Public Hearing of the Petitions Committee of the European Parliament, 15 October 2015 (introduction of the research starts at 09:24:15) at:  
[https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/committee-on-petitions\\_20151015-0900-COMMITTEE-PETI\\_vd](https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/committee-on-petitions_20151015-0900-COMMITTEE-PETI_vd).
- E. Report on the activities of the Committee on Petitions 2015 (2016/2146(INI))  
[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2016-0366\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2016-0366_EN.html), which refers to the public hearing on 15 October 2015 and the presentation by Professor Priestley (p. 26). This was adopted in European Parliament resolution of 15 December 2016 on the activities of the Committee on Petitions 2015 (2016/2146(INI)) (quotation from para. 23).  
[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2016-0512\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2016-0512_EN.html).
- F. The FRA report on *Indicators on the right to political participation of people with disabilities* includes the Opinion and explains the co-production with ANED  
<https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/indicators-right-political-participation-people-disabilities>; a FRA briefing note on the right to vote in the 2019 elections highlights the findings on lack of progress in voting rights (p. 2).  
[https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2019-right-vote-ep-elections-legal-capacity\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2019-right-vote-ep-elections-legal-capacity_en.pdf).
- G. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (2017) *Handbook on Observing and Promoting the Electoral Participation of Persons with Disabilities*, (pp. 28-29).  
<https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/339571>.
- H. Details of the European Disability Card pilot scheme, as implemented in Belgium, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Italy, Malta, Slovenia and Romania during 2018-19.  
<https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1139>; Quotation from published statement to the European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD) by the Partnership Director at The Service Foundation for People with an Intellectual Disability (KVPS, lead agency for the Disability Card in Finland).  
<https://www.easpd.eu/en/content/members-voice-eu-disability-card-promoting-inclusion-and-active-european-citizenship>. The European Commission's 2017 Progress Report on the implementation of the European Disability Strategy identifies the link to the underpinning research (see Source B, p. 56).
- I. The *Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the approximation of the laws, regulations and administrative provisions of the Member States as regards the accessibility requirements for products and services*, COM/2015/0615 final - 2015/0278 (COD) refers to the supporting research on page 7 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2015:0615:FIN>; the annex, Legislative Impact Assessment for the Act, includes 21 references to the ANED research (11 in Part 1, and 10 in Part 2), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52015SC0264>. (Quotation from executive summary.  
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52015SC0265&from=EN>).
- J. European Commission, *European Accessibility Act: improving the accessibility of products and services in the single market*, Factsheet  
<http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=14869> (evidencing the consequential beneficiary impact of the Act).