
Realising the Participation Rights of the Disabled Child: realistic goal or wishful thinking?

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Abstract

The right of disabled persons to participation does not stop at being included in mainstream education, in open employment, in services and facilities open to the general public, and in the community at large. This right also includes the right of the disabled person to participate in decision-making processes. Furthermore, it is a right granted to all disabled persons, including children. This paper first sets out what the participation rights of the disabled child are according to the CRC and the CRPD. It then considers to what extent these are realised in practice. The data used is taken from extant empirical research carried out in European countries about the participation rights of the disabled child in health, education, home life and relationships. An analysis of this research indicates that, while there are plenty of examples of good practice, we are still far from a situation where we can claim that disabled children's participation rights are being comprehensively realised. The factors contributing to this situation are identified, among them the fact that the creation of opportunities for the disabled child to exercise their participation rights effectively depends on the adults' awareness of how to go about creating such opportunities, on the extent to which they believe that disabled children can exercise their participation rights, and ultimately on what these adults understand to be participation rights. Based on this analysis, the paper contends that for the participation rights of the disabled child to become a realistic goal across the board, rather than remaining mostly a case of wishful thinking, we must first of all reach a consensus as to what these rights actually are. This paper therefore concludes with a proposed definition of the participation rights of the disabled child.

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