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DFI Abstract- CISCOs Learning Connections

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CISCOS (Connecting Inclusive Social Planning, Community Development and Service Provisions for Persons with Disabilities), is an Erasmus+ Project, run by the University of Siegen in Germany. The goal of CISCOS is to create a course that can be used throughout the EU, to address the challenges in the local implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD). This includes the development of a Massive Online Open Course (MOOC) in English, and course documents that can be used in several languages. The goal of this work is to improve the implementation of the UN CRPD at the local level.

The project targets local authority staff, service providers, students, and disability activists. Individually each of these groups can play an important role in the local implementation of the UN CRPD. In addition, by bringing these groups together in a course, knowledge exchange between universities, government, and service providers is enhanced. Sharing, creating, and building knowledge among these groups could have many benefits for society. Shared knowledge and collaboration between universities, service providers, and local authorities will provide those implementing the UN CRPD with access to expert academic knowledge that can improve the implementation process. At the same time, universities can learn from the on-the-ground experience of the local authorities and service providers, which can in turn inform research priorities and foster collaboration.

CISCOS began in 2018 and will run for three years. The project has partners in Germany, Ireland, Belgium, Sweden, Poland, Spain, Hungary, Greece and Slovenia. Partners include universities, service providers and advocacy organisations. A diverse number of partners helps to ensure that the content of the course is relevant throughout the EU. This is a real challenge, as the focus is on local implementation and local services. Local government structures, powers, and service delivery vary widely throughout the EU, which must be considered in any course that discusses the local level. Service delivery models also vary across the EU, and this must also be considered in this work.

In addition to working across diverse cultures and legal traditions across the EU, the project also works with a wide diversity of participants in the training. The training targets students, local authority staff, service providers

and disability activists. It is important to have these groups together, as it allows for knowledge exchange, which can lead to innovation. Many of these different people individually may not have much contact outside of the course, or they may meet in very different circumstances. In the context of the course, these groups can share knowledge in a relaxed environment, without the political context that they might often meet in.

So far, two years of pilot courses have been run. In the first year, the importance of using the UN CRPD at the local level was discussed, as well as how sustainable change is created at the local level. In the second year, rights-based community development was discussed. The third year will focus on inclusive service delivery. The goal of these pilot courses is to test the course material across the different countries, and with all the target groups. Feedback from the pilots will shape the final course.

Several important learnings have been identified in the first year of the project and these will be used to inform the project as it develops. First, the amount of material that is used per course was found to be too ambitious. Second, in order not alienate learners it is important that language of the course not be too academic. While students might be comfortable with large amounts of academic material, many of the other target groups found it difficult to take in. On the other hand, participants mostly found the material useful, and particularly enjoyed the group discussions.

For the second year, the amount of material was cut, and the language was changed so that fewer academic terms were used. The goal was to make the material more accessible to all target groups, and easier to teach in the space of the pilot seminar. Early results suggest that this was successful.

CISCO aims to develop a blueprint to support local implementation of the UN CRPD across the EU. It will have developed and tested a course that will have the capacity to imbed human rights principles into local practices. It will have the capacity to upskill several key sectors in terms of supporting the empowerment and participation of people with disabilities, ensuring that the UNCRPD becomes a lived reality for people with disabilities and communities across Europe.