

DISABILITY RIGHTS DEFENDERS

know your rights, use them

DISABILITY RIGHTS DEFENDERS Six Year Impact Report



Independent
Living Institute
independentliving.org



Disability Rights Defenders Impact Report

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Preamble

This six year impact report offers insight on the work carried out by the Disability Rights Defenders (DRD) project 2018 to 2024. The purpose of this document is to explain the background, current focuses, and anticipated future goals for DRD. Ultimately, spreading information on the DRD project will create greater opportunity for this project to expand and continue supporting disabled people.

Background

What is DRD?

Disability Rights Defenders (DRD) is an ongoing project started by the Independent Living Institute (ILI) in May 2018. The project has been funded by the Bente Skansgårds Independent Living-fond since 2019. The foundation of DRD is built upon the notion of using the law as a tool for social change and derived from the Independent Living Institute's project and an international conference in May 2018 Using the law as a tool. See this webpage: <https://lagensomverket.se/category/projektinfo/> . DRD focuses on two main ideas: know your rights, and use them.

The overall purpose of DRD is to spread information that promotes the Independent Living Philosophy regarding legal expertise about disability rights among disabled people, disabled people's organizations, and lawyers. By creating an international network of individuals and organizations with an interest in disability rights and disability law, people can engage in reciprocal empowerment by providing support, and sharing advice and expertise amongst one another. The DRD project allows disabled people to learn about their rights, how to advocate for them, and how to use them in court. The main contributions made to the DRD network are: brief descriptions of legal cases; court decisions; references to disability rights legislation; relevant publications and reports; and announcements of events, education, and funding opportunities.

DRD acknowledges the fact that legislation protecting disability rights doesn't automatically guarantee change within the greater community. Even though most countries have adopted national laws protecting disability rights, disabled people continue to experience discrimination. DRD aims to promote strategic litigation, rather than lobbying, and advocate for the proper implementation of these laws.

The knowledge spread within the DRD network can bring awareness to existing laws that may not be invoked to their full extent. When disabled people, disabled people's organizations, and lawyers use the law as a tool, they're allowed the opportunity to advocate for proper implementation of the law, defend the rights of disabled people, and have access to justice.

Current Focus

The DRD project consists of four main activities: the Disability Rights Defenders Facebook group, newsletters, annual meetings and webinars.

Facebook Group

The DRD Facebook group is the main platform for disabled people, disability organizations, and lawyers to share their experiences, methods, and advice regarding disability rights and law. The working language is English. This platform enables DRD to be a decentralized global Independent Living network, allowing people with diverse backgrounds to collaborate and work towards using the law as a tool to live independently. This is where the main contributions to the DRD network are initially shared.

The Facebook group is closed; members requesting to join and posts must be approved by an administrator/moderator. Membership questions and rules were implemented in order to maintain the quality and relevance of the content posted in the group.

The Facebook group rules are: only post relevant topics (disability rights, laws, legal cases and strategies); do not violate others' personal rights with your post; create accessible posts; acknowledge Data Privacy Protection requirements.

There are four membership questions. Why do you want to join the group? What are you willing and capable to contribute to the group? What is your background regarding disability and law? Do you agree to the group rules from the admin? The first question is mandatory, to ensure whether or not the prospective member has positive intentions (to the best of the moderator's ability). The last question is mandatory per Facebook group rules.

Newsletters

The content and resources from the DRD Facebook group are summarized in newsletters. Relevant information posted after the last newsletter is collected, categorized, and briefly described. Links to relevant court cases and decisions are included. These newsletters are sent directly to subscribers. There is no cost associated with subscribing to the newsletter; the link to subscribe is found on the

DRD website. In order to increase accessibility and reach a wider audience, the newsletters are also published on the DRD website in English.

Annual Meetings

Each year there is a digital meeting or face-to-face if possible for the DRD network in the northern region. This includes the Scandinavian and Baltic countries with Poland sometimes attending. There is an exchange on what is on the actual country agendas and common topics are discussed. In November 2024 there will be a meeting between the European Network on Independent Living's northern region and the DRD network during the STIL/ILI jubilee. During this meeting there will also be a memorial event in the name of Adolf Ratzka who was a founder of STIL, ILI, ENIL and DRD.

Webinars

The DRD project has offered several webinars on how to use the law as a tool for social change. These webinars are open to anybody. Each webinar focuses on specific topics regarding disability law and disability rights; DRD Facebook group members help determine these topics through polls, ensuring that webinar topics are interesting, useful, and relevant to those involved. Webinars are organized by the Independent Living Institute (ILI); the European Network on Independent Living (ENIL) has collaborated on several of these webinars. A recording of the webinar taking place on 20 May 2019 can be found on YouTube.

The webinars are moderated, and often delegate time specifically for Q&A. Experts—lawyers, members of disability rights organizations, researchers—in relevant fields present information, resources, and advice. These webinars have covered a range of topics, including comparison of global anti-discrimination legislation, information about the European Accessibility Act (EAA) and the Americans with Disability Act (ADA), and resources available for older people with disabilities.

DRD Impact and Accomplishments

Since its inception in 2018, the Disability Rights Defenders (DRD) Network and ILI have collaborated with ENIL, as well as numerous experts with experience in disability law and disability rights, to spread and deepen knowledge on how to use the law as a tool. In 2019, a year after the DRD network was established, there were 780 Facebook group members from more than 100 countries.

As of August 2024, the Facebook group has more than 2600 members. This growth in number of participants makes it clear that the DRD network continuously reaches a wider audience in need of the support and resources it provides.

Key Areas of Impact:

Advocacy and Awareness-Raising:

- **Newsletter Publications:** DRD consistently published newsletters throughout the period, disseminating information on disability rights issues, legal developments, and success stories.
- **Webinar Series:** A series of webinars covered crucial topics such as accessibility law, legal clinics, aging with disabilities, and legal remedies through litigation, enhancing the knowledge and capacity of disability rights defenders.

Promoting Legal Remedies:

- **Survey Report on Remedies:** This report provided valuable insights into the effectiveness of different legal remedies in advancing disability rights, informing future advocacy strategies.
- **Webinar on Legal Remedies:** This webinar specifically focused on utilizing litigation as a tool to secure the rights of disabled people.

Key Achievements:

- **Disseminated Knowledge:** Newsletters and webinars effectively disseminated information on disability rights issues to a wide audience, including disability rights defenders, legal professionals, and the general public.
- **Enhanced Capacity:** Webinars provided valuable training and capacity-building opportunities for disability rights defenders, equipping them with the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively advocate for the rights of disabled people.
- **Informed Policy and Practice:** The survey report on remedies contributed to a better understanding of the effectiveness of different legal mechanisms, informing policy discussions and advocacy strategies.

Looking Ahead

Current and Ongoing Projects

The DRD Facebook group must continuously be moderated by an administrator in order to accept/decline membership requests, approve relevant posts, and maintain the quality and relevance of content. The administrator should also seek out and invite relevant organizations to join the group. Additionally, it would be beneficial for DRD staff to research and post interesting news, event announcements, and job/education opportunities.

DRD staff compiled in 2019 a database containing relevant court cases, court decisions, and analyses based on their own research and the content posted in the Facebook group. Additionally, DRD staff created another database consisting of human rights and disability rights organizations with expertise and resources regarding disability laws and rights. Both of these databases should be updated and maintained.

Expectations Moving Forward

Looking forward, it would be beneficial to continue to publish newsletters and host webinars as regularly as possible. The most recent newsletter was published in November 2023 on the topic of personal assistance. Planning is ongoing on the topic of migrants with disability to be published in 2024/25. There have been many relevant updates in legislation, disability rights, and other related topics since then. Additionally, future topic ideas for webinars have already been identified. These include addressing resources for those with cognitive disabilities, global systemic issues (for example: institutionalization of youth and elderly people with disabilities, judicial incarceration of people with disabilities), inclusive education strategies, personal assistance, and the cultural transition towards a social model of disability.

Resources

DRD website: <https://www.independentliving.org/drd>

DRD newsletter subscription:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfa1NWy-Uq5k2veQxM3oTeMqPXJqMNI0eDheO96P0Pi8BDi3g/viewform>

Past DRD newsletters: <https://www.independentliving.org/library.html>

DRD Facebook group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/203219673640270/>

20 May 2019 DRD webinar:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nb1ka-8Q9hI&feature=youtu.be>

Photos from May 2018 international conference, where Disability Rights Defenders was established.



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