Questions and Answers: Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021 - 2030

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Why does the European Union need a new Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities?

Despite all efforts, persons with disabilities are still at a higher risk of poverty and social exclusion than persons without disabilities. Access to healthcare, lifelong learning, employment, and leisure remains difficult, participation in political life is limited, and persons with disabilities are still discriminated against. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities.

Over the past ten years, the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 placed support for persons with disabilities high on the agenda, and it brought improvement in the areas of accessibility, awareness-raising, education and training, social protection and health, among others. In line with the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union which establish equality and non-discrimination as cornerstones of EU policies, the strategy was the main instrument for the European Union to implement the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), to which the European Union as well as all EU Member States are parties.

To achieve further progress in ensuring the full participation of persons with disabilities, the new and strengthened Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 will guide the action of Member States as well as EU institutions, building on the achievements of the previous ten years and offering solutions to the challenges ahead. The new strategy will help to deliver on President von der Leyen's priorities of building a Union of Equality and delivering on the European Pillar of Social Pillar.

What is the aim of the strategy?

The Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 intends to tackle the diverse challenges that persons with disabilities face. It aims to progress on all areas of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, both at EU and Member State level.

The goal is to ensure that persons with disabilities in Europe, regardless of their sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, age or sexual orientation:

- enjoy their human rights,
- have equal opportunities,
- have equal access to participate in society and economy,
- are able to decide where, how and with whom they live,
- can move freely in the EU regardless of their support needs,
- no longer experience discrimination.

Why is accessibility important for the inclusion of people with disabilities and what is the Commission doing to achieve it?

It is impossible to participate in society on an equal basis with others when your environment – physical or virtual – is not accessible.

Today, thanks to a solid EU legal framework (e.g. the European Accessibility Act, Web Accessibility Directive, Passenger rights) persons with disabilities have better access to transport, buildings, paper and online information, audio-visual media and communications, including electronic ones, as well as to other products and services.

Yet, many areas are still not covered by EU rules, and there are differences in the accessibility of buildings, public spaces, and some modes of transport. Inaccessible information and services can lead to isolation for persons with disabilities. Therefore, the European Commission will launch a European resource centre 'AccessibleEU' in 2022, to build a knowledge base of information and good
practices on accessibility across sectors.

**How will the strategy help persons with disabilities enjoy their EU rights?**

Persons with disabilities have the same right as others to move to another EU country or participate in political life. However, when moving to another EU country, the disability status of persons with disabilities is not always recognised, causing problems regarding access to benefits or services. Building on the experience gained with the ongoing EU Disability Card pilot project in eight countries and with the European Parking Card, the European Commission will propose creating a European Disability Card with a view to facilitating mutual recognition of disability status across all 27 Member States.

Full political participation as required by the UN Convention means that persons with disabilities can vote and stand as a candidate in political elections on an equal basis with others. In practice, many persons with disabilities face difficulties in exercising their rights due to limited accessibility (including a lack of information and communication in sign language), or due to restrictions in their legal capacity. As announced in the 2020 Citizenship Report, the Commission will work with Member States, including through dedicated discussions in the European Cooperation Network on Elections and the European Parliament, to guarantee political rights of persons with disabilities on equal basis with others. In 2023, the European Commission will issue guidance on the participation of persons with disabilities in the electoral process. It will also support inclusive democratic participation, including for persons with a disability, through the new Citizenship, Equalities, Rights and Values programme.

**How will the strategy improve quality of life and autonomy?**

The European Commission will issue guidance to Member States on independent living and inclusion in the community by 2023. In 2024, the Commission will work with Member States to introduce a European quality framework for social services of excellence for persons with disabilities.

Only 50% of persons with disabilities has a job, compared to 75% of persons without disabilities. The Commission calls on Member States to unlock the potential of persons with disabilities and improve their position on the labour market. The Commission will seek cooperation with organisations representing persons with disabilities to develop a package for better labour market outcomes of persons with disabilities. Furthermore, the strategy will put forward actions to improve social protection for persons with disabilities and to support (potential) social entrepreneurs with disabilities.

**How will the strategy enhance equal participation and non-discrimination?**

Persons with disabilities have the right to equal opportunities and to be free from discrimination and violence. Yet, 52% of persons with disabilities feel discriminated against and persons with disabilities have a higher risk of becoming victims of violence and abuse in their home environment and in institutions. 20% of young people with disabilities leave school early, compared to 10% of those without disabilities.

The strategy aims to protect persons with disabilities from any form of discrimination and violence. It will include actions on access to justice and healthcare and strengthening the participation of persons with disabilities in arts and culture, recreation, leisure, sport and tourism. The European Commission calls on Member States to establish inclusive schools setting that can become a reference in inclusive and innovative teaching and learning across the EU. The Commission will also issue guidance on access to healthcare based on inclusive, accessible, person-centred healthcare, and free and informed consent.

**How will the strategy enhance the rights of persons with disabilities around the world?**

According to the World report on disability, about 15% of the world’s population lives with some form of disability. The European Commission promotes the rights of persons with disabilities in its international policies. In 2021, the Commission will update its Toolbox on the “Rights Based Approach, encompassing all human rights for EU development cooperation” to address all inequalities, including discrimination against persons with disabilities, in external actions.

The EU will develop a strategic dialogue with other State Parties and signatories of the UN Convention, as well as with other regional organisations. Under this strategy, structured dialogues will be organised and cooperation on accessibility and employment will be enhanced.

**How will disability matters be integrated into EU policies?**

The European Commission calls on all EU institutions and agencies to include disability matters in their policies and actions, and to consult persons with disabilities and their representative
organisations throughout the policy making process.

In addition, the European Commission will strengthen coordination at EU level of the implementation of the UN Convention. The European Commission calls on all EU institutions and bodies, agencies and delegations to designate disability coordinators and it will organise high-level meetings and work with the rotating Council Presidencies to ensure that disability is kept high on the EU policy agenda.

To reach the strategy's goals, the strong commitment of Member States is indispensable. The strategy steps up cooperation between Member States and stakeholders through the establishment of a Disability Platform in 2021.

EU funding is available to support countries' inclusion measures through the Recovery and Resilience Facility and the long-term EU budget.

How will the EU institutions lead by example?

The Commission will adopt a renewed human resources (HR) strategy to boost diversity and inclusion, including as regards disability, and calls on other EU institutions to do the same. In addition, the European Commission will continue improving the accessibility of its buildings, digital environments and communications.

For more information

Easy-to-read version: Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities 2021-2030
Factsheet: Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030
News in easy-to-read: The European Commission puts out a new strategy to protect the rights of persons with disabilities
More information on EU initiatives for persons with disabilities