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#### COVER NOTE

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From:	Secretary-General of the European Commission, signed by Ms Martine DEPREZ, Director
date of receipt:	6 May 2026
To:	Ms Thérèse BLANCHET, Secretary-General of the Council of the European Union

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Subject:	COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS Enhancing the strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities up to 2030
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Delegations will find attached document COM(2026) 541 final.

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Brussels, 6.5.2026  
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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN  
PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL  
COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

**Enhancing the strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities up to 2030**

{SWD(2026) 773 final}

## INTRODUCTION

**Around 90 million people in the EU live with a [disability](#) <sup>(1)</sup>.** The wide diversity of situations experienced by persons with disabilities make them a heterogeneous group with differing needs. They are united by one simple fact: **they have the same human rights as everyone else.** Disability arises from the interaction between impairments and attitudinal or environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. Disability can be present at birth or arise later in life, including as a result of ageing. As such, disability affects societies as a whole: at different points in life, many people will experience circumstances in which barriers hamper their full participation in society. **Disability and the rights of persons with disabilities concern us all.**

Together with other [EU equality strategies](#), the [strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities 2021-2030](#) ('the strategy') contributes to creating a **Union of Equality**, to fight discrimination and improve the lives of persons with disabilities in the EU and beyond. The strategy provides a framework for: (I) implementing EU rights and action; (II) removing barriers to empower persons with disabilities to live independently and participate in society and the economy on an equal basis with others; (III) engaging with stakeholders and delivering results.

These aims are in line with the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(UNCRPD\)](#) and the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#). They also respond to the objectives of the [Competitiveness Compass](#), valorising the contribution of persons with disabilities to the economy and society as an asset to a more competitive EU <sup>(2)</sup>.

**Halfway through the strategy's implementation, the EU now needs to step up action**, ensure renewed engagement across all sectors in a mainstreaming approach, and recommit to the strategy's core objectives of **supporting self-determination, autonomy and participation**. While the overall objectives set in the strategy have not changed, reinforced action is needed to reach them by 2030. The [consultations](#) carried out ahead of this Communication, the positions taken by other EU institutions <sup>(3)</sup> and the [concluding observations](#) addressed to the EU by the relevant UN Committee in 2025 as well as an assessment of progress <sup>(4)</sup> contribute to identify the areas where further efforts are needed.

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(1) Aged 16 or over, in 2024. Source: [Eurostat](#)'s estimation using EU-SILC 2024 microdata. The [global activity limitation indicator \(GALI\)](#) is used as the main variable to measure disability at EU level.

(2) Based on Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, [Combating Discrimination in the European Union](#), gross domestic product (GDP) losses as a result of disability-related discrimination are estimated at between 0.84 and 1.42 billion (EUR, 2022 price levels).

(3) The [European Parliament](#), the [European Economic and Social Committee](#) and the [Council](#).

(4) Mid-term report on the implementation of the Union of Equality Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030, accompanying this Communication.

The Commission is therefore strengthening the strategy in order to guide the EU and its Member States in their joint engagement **to enhance disability inclusion up to 2030**.

The planned actions include **flagship initiatives** that will allow efforts to be centred around key topics. Stepping up **cooperation with Member States**, including through the use of EU funds, is part of this renewed commitment.

# I. TURNING RIGHTS INTO REALITY

## 1. Accessibility – an enabler of rights, autonomy and equality

Accessibility is crucial to enable persons with disabilities to **fully participate in all areas of life**. Persons with disabilities continue to face barriers in the built environment, transport, access to services and information and communication, including digital spaces.

### Digital accessibility and assistive technologies

**Effective implementation of key legislation** on accessibility, including through the support of [AccessibleEU](#), will remain a key focus up to 2030. The Commission will monitor implementation and application of the [European Accessibility Act](#), including through expert groups and committees, and follow up on the [standardisation request M587](#) and technical specifications regarding accessibility requirements for products and services. Accessibility aspects are also considered in the evaluation of the [Audiovisual Media Services Directive](#). Monitoring will continue of the application of relevant legislation such as the [Web Accessibility Directive](#) and the [European Electronic Communications Code](#), pending its [proposed revision](#). The Commission will support efforts to make internet platforms and digital services more accessible, including through the **codes of conduct** under the [Digital Services Act](#).

To maintain its role as a world leader on accessibility, notably in the digital realm, **the EU needs to constantly adapt to new challenges**. This concerns in particular the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), which has great potential to support persons with disabilities though requires cautious approaches in view of any discriminatory effects <sup>(5)</sup>. Emphasis on accessibility and protecting fundamental rights will be key to establish a **joint approach to deploying AI in the single market**. The Commission will issue and follow up on guidelines for the implementation of the [Artificial Intelligence \(AI\) Act](#) e.g. on the [prohibited AI practice](#) that exploit the vulnerability of a person in a significantly harmful manner due, amongst other reasons, to disability as well as on the classification of high-risk AI systems.

AI developments are particularly relevant in the area of **assistive technology**, which is key to ensure autonomy and quality of life, and becomes increasingly critical with ageing. From a business perspective, this sector presents challenges related to market entry and access to finance, likely to impact availability and affordability for users.

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(5) [2021 UN Special Rapporteur Report: Artificial intelligence and the rights of persons with disabilities](#).

## **FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE – Assistive technologies and AI: from lab to market**

The Commission will seek to promote better knowledge and strengthen the single market for assistive technologies and AI applications. The aim is to identify and remove bottlenecks that prevent persons with disabilities from benefiting from accessible and affordable technologies. **The initiative includes:** (i) an EU-level dialogue with assistive technology operators, involving users and public administrations, showcasing relevant EU business support initiatives such as the [Enterprise Europe Network](#) and identifying funding opportunities to facilitate ‘from lab to market’ transitions; and (ii) a study to assess obstacles to accessing assistive technologies and AI for persons with disabilities and provide suggestions to address them.

## **Safe and accessible products and services**

Persons with disabilities face **difficulties as consumers**, due to inaccessible interfaces and functionalities and to a lack of accessible labelling and product information. Furthermore, barriers in accessing essential services such as transport, due for instance to inaccessible vehicles and stations and to lack of real-time accessible information, limit their opportunities to be independent and engage with their communities.

The Commission will promote **accessible labelling in key sectors** <sup>(6)</sup>. The implementation of the [General Product Safety Regulation](#) and of the [revised legislation on Alternative Dispute Resolution](#) will help enhance **accessibility and the safety of consumers with disabilities**. Protecting consumers in vulnerable situations is an overarching priority of the [2030 Consumer Agenda](#), including in the digital environment. The Commission will coordinate the work of national consumer protection authorities and the [European Consumer Centres Network](#), seeking to ensure that consumer vulnerabilities are not exploited and that the rights of persons with disabilities as consumers are respected under EU law.

According to a [UN High Commissioner for Human Rights report on disability-inclusive infrastructure, transport and housing](#), persons with disabilities can face up to 15 times greater **restrictions in participation and mobility** compared to others. This highlights the need to step up action to improve accessibility, affordability and availability of transport systems for persons with disabilities, challenges which are particularly acute in rural and remote areas.

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<sup>(6)</sup> Such as energy, food and cosmetics. In the area of energy labelling, documents generated by the [European product registry for energy labelling \(EPREL\)](#) will be made more accessible as of 2026.

## **FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE – Better access to transport for persons with disabilities**

The Commission will promote accessibility across various means of transport. The initiative includes **the following deliverables**: (i) in rail transport: establishing common EU priorities and criteria for railway accessibility requirements by revising the [technical specifications for interoperability relating to persons with reduced mobility](#). In this context, the EU Agency for Railways will issue recommendations for the revision of the technical specifications e.g. to improve the train to platform step, to facilitate unassisted boarding and improve accessibility of night trains; (ii) in road transport: upgrading the sustainable urban mobility planning [reference material](#) on vulnerable groups and publishing guidance on road infrastructure safety features for vulnerable users. In addition, the [Alternative Fuels Infrastructure Regulation](#) and its forthcoming review will seek to integrate the European technical standards on accessibility of electric road vehicles charging stations; (iii) in waterborne transport: reviewing accessibility provisions as part of the evaluation of the [Directive on safety rules and standards for passenger ships](#); and (iv) in air transport: engaging with aviation stakeholders and disseminating good practices among operators to enhance the air travel experience for persons with disabilities e.g. through dialogues concerning the handling and carriage of assistance dogs and mobility aids.

The Commission will also look into ways of improving participation of persons with disabilities in **standardisation** processes and making standards more accessible and inclusive in the review of the [Standardisation Regulation](#). Furthermore, the revised [Public Procurement Directive](#) is expected to restate the obligation to **buy accessible goods and services**.

### **The Commission calls on the EU Member States to:**

- support improvement and implementation of accessibility in standards and technical specifications, including in public procurement;
- provide training on accessibility to relevant professionals in the areas of construction, transport, public procurement services and information and communication technologies.

## 2. Enjoying EU rights

### Facilitating mobility within the EU

EU citizens, including persons with disabilities, enjoy all the benefits of EU citizenship, such as the **right to move freely and to live anywhere in the EU**. The transposition and implementation of the [European disability and parking cards for persons with disabilities](#)<sup>(7)</sup>, supported by the dedicated expert group, will be instrumental to enhance the mobility and inclusion of persons with disabilities, including third country nationals legally residing in a Member State, within the EU. However, **administrative barriers remain**, including in terms of access to disability benefits when moving from one Member State to another. In this respect, differences in how Member States define and assess disability point to the need to exchange information to promote a common understanding. The Commission will therefore encourage **mutual learning on disability assessment methods among the Member States**.

#### **FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE – European disability and parking cards in your (digital) wallet**

This initiative aims to ensure the cards become a reality in the EU, meaning all EU residents with disabilities should have them in their (digital) wallets. **This will require:** (i) QR codes for the physical versions of the cards, features to ensure security of the cards and prevent fraud, and interoperability requirements for readability across the Member States; (ii) accessible digital versions of the cards and related interoperability arrangements; (iii) communication efforts to raise awareness of the benefits of the cards; and (iv) assessment of remaining gaps related to the free movement of persons with disabilities.

### Fostering participation in democratic processes

Persons with disabilities should be able to **participate in political processes, including elections, on an equal basis with others**. The difficulties they face in exercising their democratic rights include obtaining accessible paper ballots and election-related information, accessing e-government services, contesting elections and running for office.

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(7) Extended, by way of [Directive \(EU\) 2024/2842 of the European Parliament and of the Council](#), to third-country nationals legally residing in a Member State.

## **FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE – Inclusive democracies across the EU**

The Commission will work with Member States in the framework of the European Cooperation Network on Elections towards the following **deliverables**: (i) updating the [Guide of good electoral practices in Member States addressing the participation of citizens with disabilities in the electoral process](#); (ii) promoting common references and standards for inclusive elections via the repository provided for in the [European Democracy Shield](#); and (iii) sharing good practices within the European Cooperation Network on Elections on disability-relevant elements of the [Commission Recommendation on inclusive and resilient electoral processes](#) and the [Commission report on 2024 elections to the European Parliament](#).

The Commission will continue its efforts including by working with stakeholders and through communication actions to promote the rights of persons with disabilities to vote and run for office in the **2029 European elections**.

### **The Commission calls on the EU Member States to:**

- promote participation of persons with disabilities in democratic processes, both as voters and candidates in elections, including by providing electoral communication and information in accessible formats and ensuring voting materials, procedures and facilities are accessible.

## II. EMPOWERMENT AND INCLUSION

### 3. Decent quality of life and living independently

#### Developing independent living and reinforcing community-based services

The EU has promoted deinstitutionalisation through policy and funding for more than a decade, including through the [Guidance on independent living and inclusion in the community for persons with disabilities in the context of EU funding](#). However, based on a recent estimation by Eurofound, in the 10 years up to 2022-2023 the number of children, adults with disabilities and older people in residential institutions have increased in the EU over this timespan, standing at 1.4 million <sup>(8)</sup>. Accessibility issues, a lack of adequate community-based services and legal capacity restrictions are among the reasons persons with disabilities are held back from living independently.

#### **FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE – EU alliance for independent living**

The Commission will encourage Member States and stakeholders to exchange information, promote data collection and dissemination and raise awareness of factors that contribute or hinder the deinstitutionalisation process. **The initiative will include:** (i) setting up an alliance of policymakers and stakeholders to facilitate the creation of national and local centres for independent living, leveraging on EU funding; (ii) monitoring the deinstitutionalisation process in Member States and providing a cost-benefit analysis; and (iii) conducting an independent living implementation dialogue.

The Commission will also encourage **innovative solutions for independent living** through EU funding, in particular through [Horizon Europe](#) and the cohesion policy funds and policy programmes, as well as their successors under the multi-annual financial framework after 2027.

The Commission will promote **accessible community-based support for persons with disabilities** including under the [European Social Fund+](#) and the [European Regional Development Fund](#). In the area of social services, the Commission will present the **framework for social services of excellence for persons with disabilities** announced under the strategy, ensuring synergies with the update of the Social Protection Committee EU voluntary quality framework for social services.

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<sup>(8)</sup> [Paths towards independent living and social inclusion in Europe | Eurofound](#).

## Improving access to sustainable quality jobs

Improving inclusion in the labour market represents a significant opportunity to better harness the skills, talents and experiences of persons with disabilities, contributing to a more inclusive and competitive EU economy. However, **only half of persons with disabilities in the EU participate in the labour market** (56.4% in 2024<sup>9</sup>), with the disability employment gap reaching 24 percentage points in 2024 (23.1pps in 2021)<sup>(10)</sup>. Barriers to labour market participation include accessibility issues, failure to implement reasonable accommodation <sup>(11)</sup>, social benefit traps and the persistence of stereotypes.

More efforts are needed to **combat discrimination and ensure that reasonable accommodation is provided at the workplace**, in line with the EU legal requirement enshrined in the [Employment Equality Directive](#). Young persons with disabilities struggle in their transition into adulthood due to a lack of adequate **pathways between education and employment**, hampering their contribution to the labour market and to economic growth. **Emerging workplace challenges**, such as the impact of the use of AI on workers and applicants with disabilities, are a cause of concern, as is intersectional discrimination, for instance against women with disabilities. At the same time, **digital tools** and AI also present meaningful accessibility opportunities for workers with disabilities. There is a need to further foster the **social economy**, a key driver to promote labour market access for persons with disabilities, as highlighted in the [Council recommendation on social economy framework conditions](#). Working conditions and labour rights in **sheltered employment** also continue to be a matter of concern.

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<sup>(9)</sup> European Commission, [Employment and social developments in Europe 2025](#)

<sup>(10)</sup> Source: [Eurostat](#). The disability employment gap is a headline indicator in the [Social Scoreboard](#), the main monitoring tool for the European Pillar of Social Rights implementation, including in the context of the European semester.

<sup>(11)</sup> Reasonable accommodation is any change to a job role or work environment that is needed to enable an employee with a disability to perform the job.

## Improve implementation of the Disability Employment Package

The Commission will work for better access to the labour market for persons with disabilities building on the [Disability Employment Package](#) and with the involvement of social partners. **The follow-up will include:** (i) sharing best practices and issuing further guidance, e.g. on AI and assistive technologies at the work place, transition from education to employment, employment of women with disabilities; (ii) assessing the extent to which reasonable accommodation is provided at the workplace, in line with the Employment Equality Directive <sup>(12)</sup>; and (iii) publishing, together with the OECD, a cost-benefit analysis of boosting employment of persons with disabilities. Moreover, the Commission will consult European social partners on the possible direction of EU action to support the activation of persons excluded from the labour market.

The Commission will work with the Council's Social Protection and Employment Committees on the **setting of national targets for the employment of persons with disabilities**. The Commission will also promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities at the workplace through within the [EU Platform of Diversity Charters](#). In relation to **working conditions**, the Commission will seek to consider the occupational safety and health risks faced by workers with disabilities in the forthcoming Quality Jobs Act proposal, following the first stage social partners consultation and pending the second stage consultation.

## Ensuring adequate social protection

The **risk of poverty and social exclusion** has remained persistently high among persons with disabilities (28.8% versus 17.9% of persons without disabilities in 2024) <sup>(13)</sup>, a strong predictor of poorer quality of life. The rising cost of living in recent years has made households of persons with disabilities even more vulnerable.

Building on the [study on the social protection for people with disabilities in Europe](#), the Commission will carry out analytical work and collect data to **quantify the extra cost of living with a disability** and encourage discussions among Member States, including in the Disability Platform, on how disability is identified and addressed in different social protection systems.

## Affordable and accessible housing

Persons with disabilities are at a **higher risk of housing problems and energy poverty** than the rest of the population, due to insufficient accessibility and lower household income. They also have greater energy needs, due in particular to **critical**

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<sup>(12)</sup> Including based on [Eurofound work](#) on the role of the social partners in the implementation of reasonable accommodation at the workplace.

<sup>(13)</sup> Source: [Eurostat](#).

**dependence on electricity** for medical equipment, mobility and assistive devices and technologies <sup>(14)</sup>. Housing and energy policies should therefore integrate the needs of persons with disabilities to allow them a decent quality of life, in line with the objectives of ensuring a fair and clean energy transition and of fighting housing exclusion <sup>(15)</sup>.

The Commission will consider accessibility aspects in its assessment of national building renovation plans under the [Directive on energy performance of buildings](#) and will **identify and disseminate good practices**.

In addition, it will issue a specific **report** that will cast light on the **housing conditions of persons with disabilities across the EU**. Lastly, the Commission will support a comprehensive framework for **reforms, investments and interventions** in the areas of sustainable, accessible, social and affordable housing and built environment, in conjunction with the [New European Bauhaus](#), the [European Affordable Housing Plan](#), the [Citizens Energy Package](#) and the [anti-poverty strategy](#), considering the direct and indirect impact on persons with disabilities and reflecting accessibility obligations.

**The Commission calls on the EU Member States to:**

- establish national targets to promote independent living, focussing in particular on developing accessible and affordable housing and community-based services, including personal assistance, centres for independent living, peer support and other types of individualised support, such as supported decision-making, respecting individuals' will;
- adopt measures to achieve higher employment rates for persons with disabilities in the open labour market, including setting national employment targets and ensuring reasonable accommodation and rehabilitation;
- modernise social protection through reforms to tackle coverage and adequacy gaps for persons with disabilities, including by compensating the extra costs related to living with a disability, developing person-centred funding and tackling disincentives to work.

## 4. Equal access and non-discrimination

### Inclusive education at all levels

Learners with disabilities continue to face **obstacles to accessing mainstream education**. In 2024, 44% of people aged 18 to 24 in the EU who had a severe

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<sup>(14)</sup> [Breaking the cycle: addressing energy poverty among people with disabilities in Europe](#).

<sup>(15)</sup> [Proposal for a Council Recommendation on fighting housing exclusion](#).

disability left education or training early <sup>(16)</sup>. **Accessibility issues and a lack of adequate support and necessary adaptations** prevent children with disabilities from fully participating in mainstream schooling. More focused disability policies based on the [pathways to school success](#) initiative and on the [roadmap for ensuring school success for all](#) could help identify barriers to achieving fully inclusive education and training systems and how to best remedy them. In line with the [Council Recommendation on human capital in the EU](#), special attention to vulnerable groups including persons with disabilities can also contribute to the horizontal objective of **strengthening basic skills at all stages of education across the EU**.

### **FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE – Disability-inclusive lifelong learning**

The Commission will further support Member States in fostering accessible and inclusive education at all levels, through a life-cycle approach. **The initiative will include:** (i) guidance for curriculum and pedagogical development in early childhood education and care to support the acquisition of basic skills early on and to encourage detection of developmental delays and related interventions; (ii) guidance for policymakers, as part of the 2026 Education Package, addressing, amongst other, the needs of vulnerable groups at school, including pupils with disabilities; (iii) a policy initiative in 2027 to improve accessibility of higher education to a wider range of learners, including students with disabilities, and promote support services for students' wellbeing; (iv) a report in 2028 on enhancing inclusive education, with a focus on students with disabilities and special educational needs and the provision of reasonable accommodation; and (v) prioritisation of mutual learning on disability-inclusive education in the context of the [European Education Area strategic framework](#) in cooperation with the [European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education](#).

EU funds and in particular, cohesion policy funds and the **Erasmus+ programme** will continue to support inclusive and accessible education (formal, non-formal and informal), including to increase the rate of participation in learning mobility among persons with disabilities. The [strengthened European Child Guarantee](#) provides a framework for national reforms and investments to support children at risk, including children with disabilities, through high-quality inclusive education.

As part of the forthcoming **2030 Roadmap on the future of digital education and skills**, the Commission will strive to ensure that all pupils can benefit from the digital transformation in schools. To do so, the Commission will support Member States in developing shared digital infrastructure for education in line with EU values. This will include ethical and equality-sensitive use of AI and the deployment of safe European education technologies that can cater for the diverse accessibility needs of pupils.

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(16) Source: [Eurostat](#). The share of early leavers among young people with some disability was 17.1%, as compared to 8.0% for people without a disability.

## Improving access to healthcare

Health policies should be designed and implemented with the needs of persons with disabilities in mind. In this respect, the [Guidelines on access to healthcare for persons with disabilities](#) will foster a shared understanding of **challenges in access to healthcare for persons with disabilities** and encourage good practices likely to drive changes at national level.

Many individuals with cancer, rare diseases, or chronic conditions also experience disabilities. Different partnership initiatives and research projects focus on **rare diseases**, and the revised [Pharma Package](#) will help make orphan drugs against rare diseases more accessible. Moreover, the revision of the Medical Device and In Vitro Diagnostics [Regulations](#), together with the [proposal on the Biotech Act](#), will also foster research and innovation in the field of rare diseases. Various **joint actions** under the [EU4Health Programme](#) seek to: increase awareness of human rights-based approaches in dealing with mental health issues, in line with the Commission's [comprehensive approach to mental health](#); address dementia in a holistic way; tackle inequalities in cancer prevention, detection and care <sup>(17)</sup>. A **study** launched by the Commission on the **quality of life of cancer patients and survivors** will develop indicators to assess policies implemented across EU countries to monitor and improve quality of life, likely to encompass policies relevant for disabilities acquired following to cancer.

## Disability at the intersection: boosting voice and choice

Women, older and younger persons with disabilities as well as children, LGBTIQ+ people and people from racial or ethnic minorities with disabilities experience **intersecting forms of discrimination** and are at a higher risk of exclusion and inequality in many areas<sup>(18)</sup>. The needs of women and girls with disabilities will be carefully considered in the implementation of the [gender equality strategy 2026-2030](#), in particular in relation to supporting Member States in improving **access to physical and mental healthcare and sexual and reproductive health and rights**. In this respect, an initiative in cooperation with the World Health Organisation will explore ways to improve the quality and accessibility of women's healthcare, including for those with disabilities. Moreover, the Commission will launch a **study on violence against women with disabilities in the EU**. The Commission will pay

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<sup>(17)</sup> For instance, the Joint Action [EUCanScreen](#) contributes to improving access to cancer screening for persons with intellectual disabilities, including through a feasibility study on acceptance of HPV (human papillomavirus) self-sampling among long-term screening non-attenders with a mild to moderate intellectual disability.

<sup>(18)</sup> Considering an intersectional approach, discrimination against persons with disabilities may overlap with other forms of discrimination based on other personal characteristics or identities. These include gender, age, religion or belief, sexual orientation and gender identity/expression, racial or ethnic origin. Intersectionality leads to specific inequalities and unique experiences of discrimination.

close attention to the needs of persons with disabilities in the implementation of the relevant strategies, such as the [LGBTIQ+](#) and [anti-racism](#) strategies 2026-2030.

### **Ensuring equal access to justice, legal protection and safety**

To give persons with disabilities equal access to justice it is essential to **remove practical and legal barriers**, linked for instance to accessibility or legal capacity, **and to ensure reasonable accommodation**. In this context, access to justice encompasses being able to participate in judicial proceedings as well as contributing to the justice system in a professional role. Protecting persons with disabilities, especially those in vulnerable situations, from violence, hatred, exploitation and abuse, both online and offline, remains a priority.

**Victims with disabilities** will be further protected and supported through the [revised Victims' Rights Directive](#), which includes new provisions on procedural accommodation, and through the upcoming **EU strategy on victims' rights**.

Victims of gender-based violence will be supported under the [Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence](#), which includes specific provisions and protection for women and girls with disabilities. The Commission will also facilitate the development of **guidelines on procedural accommodation** for all victims with disabilities.

The [Justice Programme](#) promotes **judicial training on the UNCRPD and disability** in line with the priorities of the [judicial training strategy](#). In the context of the [European Investigation Order Directive](#) review, the Commission will seek to enable remote participation in criminal court hearings, including of persons with disabilities, from another Member State via accessible videoconference technology, ensuring the necessary procedural safeguards. The Commission will also increase the frequency of reporting on disability issues in the [EU Justice Scoreboard](#).

The Commission will support Member States' implementation of the **upcoming Regulation on cross-border protection of vulnerable adults**, promoting application in full compliance with the UNCRPD. **The Commission also will publish a study** on decision-making regimes and legal capacity legislation in the Member States, **showcasing supported decision-making approaches** to encourage self-determination of persons with intellectual, mental and psycho-social disabilities.

Moreover, the Commission will consider legislation based on the existing areas of crime covered by [Article 83\(1\) of TFEU](#) to **harmonise the definition of hate offences committed online**, and possibly include public incitement to violence or hatred online on grounds not currently covered by EU law, such as disability. Disability will also be mainstreamed in the forthcoming action plan on the protection of children against crime and strategy on combating trafficking in human beings, as well as in the [pact on asylum and migration](#).

## Preparedness and emergency management

**Persons with disabilities are disproportionately affected by disasters** and experience increased vulnerability during an emergency. In such situations, many have limited access to early warnings and alerts, to suitable transport and to the medical equipment they or their caretakers need. In addition, first responders are not always trained and equipped to meet their specific needs.

The Commission will seek to make the EU safer and more resilient to threats by enhancing its ability to anticipate, prevent, prepare for and manage crises. To achieve this, it will promote a **stronger and more inclusive culture of preparedness** in line with the [Preparedness Union Strategy](#), and making use of the [Union Civil Protection Mechanism](#) (UCPM).

### FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE – Prepared for anything, prepared for everyone

The Commission will seek to make preparedness and crisis management more disability inclusive. **The initiative will include:** (i) gaps analysis and stakeholder mapping of the situation of persons with disabilities in terms of disaster response and preparedness; (ii) guidelines for first responders, including emergency number 112 <sup>(19)</sup> operators, and for persons with disabilities and their carers on how to act in an emergency; (iii) training curricula for first responders on how to recognise a type of disability and determine the appropriate course of action; and (iv) awarding a civil protection medal <sup>(20)</sup> at the Civil Protection Forum for ‘extraordinary contribution to the UCPM in the field of disability inclusion’ in 2026.

## Participation in cultural life, sport, travel and leisure

**Strong inequalities** in access to and participation in culture affect persons with disabilities, **as artists, cultural workers and audiences**. For persons with disabilities participating in cultural and sport events, travel and leisure is often difficult because venues and services are not accessible, as well as due to persisting stereotypes and additional costs. This hampers their personal development and prevents their inclusion in society. The [Culture Compass for Europe](#) has identified **barriers linked to disability** as one of the factors that affect participation in culture, calling for inclusive cultural policies, sustained investment and inclusive and accessible design of cultural infrastructure and programmes.

By 2028 the Commission will draw up a report to support Member States in increasing the **participation of persons with disabilities in culture**. Organisations representing persons with disabilities will be consulted on the **forthcoming EU Artists Charter**. The Commission will also support, through the [DiscoverEU](#)

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<sup>(19)</sup> The emergency number 112 is set to be fully accessible across the EU, as per European Accessibility Act.

<sup>(20)</sup> Based on Article 20(a) of the [Union Civil Protection Mechanism](#) Decision.

[Inclusion Action](#), young people with fewer opportunities, including young persons with disabilities. The Commission will further promote inclusion and accessibility in sport, including through the [#BeActive EU Sport Awards](#) “Inclusion” category and the [European Week of Sports campaign](#).

**The Commission calls on the EU Member States to:**

- promote the inclusion of children, adolescents and young persons with disabilities in mainstream education, by removing barriers in the school environment, making available accessible and adapted learning materials and adopting individualised teaching approaches;
- improve access to healthcare, including through training of professionals based on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities orientations and removing administrative and practical barriers;
- strengthen capacity-building in the justice sector in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities requirements and ensure that victims with disabilities have access to justice and appropriate protection measures, including accessible complaint and redress mechanisms;

### III. ENGAGING AND DELIVERING

#### 5. Promoting the rights of persons with disabilities globally

##### External action

Over one billion people, or **16% of the world's population, have a form of disability** <sup>(21)</sup>, and this is set to increase due to the global ageing trend. Conflict-related injuries and the rising prevalence of non-communicable diseases also have an impact on disability incidence across the world.

Further to the [commitments](#) undertaken at the **2025 Global Disability Summit**, disability will be high on the agenda of EU's high-level policy dialogues with third countries. This will include **sharing relevant EU initiatives as good practices** in implementing the UNCRPD and promoting its ratification and implementation around the world, as well as promoting the [EU guidelines on non-discrimination in external action](#). The Commission will also continue to **cooperate with the UNCRPD Committee** including by supporting membership of EU experts in the Committee. The planned review of the [EU action plan on human rights and democracy 2020-2027](#) will place a **stronger emphasis on disability**.

The Commission will enhance disability inclusion in [global gateway investments](#) and promote accessibility in infrastructure programmes, including in post-conflict reconstruction and recovery. The Commission will seek to ensure that EU-funded external action does not contribute to institutionalisation of persons with disabilities and fosters, instead, human-rights based transition to family and community-based support and independent living,

Reporting will continue on disability mainstreaming and targeted actions, using the [OECD Development Assistance Committee disability marker](#) to **track disability-inclusive funded operations**.

##### Humanitarian aid

The **vulnerability and marginalisation** of persons with disabilities is **exacerbated in humanitarian crises**. Persons with disabilities are more likely to be excluded from both preparedness and crisis response measures, and their needs are not sufficiently taken into account in how aid is designed and delivered. Building on the evaluation of the [operational guidance on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in EU-funded humanitarian aid operations](#), the Commission will **strengthen disability inclusion in all EU-funded humanitarian operations** and support partners and staff in this respect. The commitment to disability inclusion will also be reaffirmed through the **upcoming Communication on EU humanitarian action in a shifting**

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(21) 2022 data. Source: [Global report on health equity for persons with disabilities](#).

**global order**, to ensure that persons with disabilities are meaningfully engaged and their needs duly considered in humanitarian diplomacy initiatives and promote inclusive humanitarian action in the current global context.

## EU enlargement

Candidate and potential candidate countries for EU accession need to gradually align their legislation with the EU acquis and relevant international and European standards in the field of fundamental rights and non-discrimination, in line with the “fundamentals first” approach of the EU revised enlargement methodology, as well as in the area of accessibility and inclusion. The Commission will **support partner countries and assess their progress** in the alignment and effective implementation of relevant policies, including through the annual [Enlargement Package](#).

Attention to the needs of persons with disabilities must be particularly prominent in relation to **Ukraine**, where the prevalence of acquired disabilities is likely to have expanded as a consequence of Russia’s war of aggression.

### **FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE – ‘Nothing about us without us’ in Ukraine’s reconstruction**

The Commission will support disability-inclusive rebuilding efforts in Ukraine. **The initiative will include:** (i) a high-level event focusing on accessibility as part of one of the Ukraine reconstruction conferences in 2027; (ii) involvement of disability organisations in participatory processes for the design and implementation of New European Bauhaus projects related to the reconstruction of Ukraine; and (iii) leveraging EU funding for accessibility in reconstruction.

In addition, candidate and potential candidate countries will be **involved in the work of the Disability Platform** as well as in other relevant actions under the enhanced strategy.

### **The Commission calls on the EU Member States to:**

- ensure that international development programmes at country level pursue the aim of disability inclusion, in line with the commitments of the 2025 [Global Disability Summit](#), and that financial support does not perpetuate institutionalisation;
- seek to make humanitarian aid operations inclusive and accessible, to allow persons with disabilities meaningful access to and full and effective participation in humanitarian action.

## 6. Efficiently delivering the strategy

Building on the creation of the Disability Platform, a consistent **co-production approach and increased cooperation with the Member States** will be key to ensure effective policy outcomes on the ground. Further disability **mainstreaming** across all policy areas and in all EU institutions and bodies will also be crucial to achieve comprehensive results.

The Commission will **upscale the Disability Platform** by strengthening the exchange of information on national developments. The Platform will support Member States to identify challenges and remedial action in preparing and implementing disability plans and strategies feeding into their national and regional partnership plans under the multiannual financial framework after 2027 (pending adoption). Mutual learning sessions on key topics, such as legal capacity, disability assessment and labour mobility of persons with disabilities will allow to share promising practices.

**The Commission will continue to promote involvement of the disability community** in policymaking at all levels in line with the [EU strategy for civil society](#), which states that inclusivity and accessibility are guiding principles of a dialogue with civil society. The Commission proposes to support organisations working for disability inclusion under the [Agora EU programme](#) under the 2028-2034 multiannual financial framework (pending adoption).

Furthermore, the Commission will work for increased **disability mainstreaming in all EU institutions, bodies, offices and agencies**, with action across EU agencies, focusing on raising awareness, and in the context of its [better regulation](#) methodology. A proposal to reform the existing [EU UNCRPD monitoring framework](#) will be put forward by 2028, building on relevant analytical work, with a view to improving monitoring.

### **The Commission calls on the EU Member States to:**

- share good practices from their disability plans and strategies and exchange information on national developments via the Disability Platform.

## 7. Leading by example

**The Commission is committed to** promote inclusion and diversity, not only in its capacity as employer but also vis-à-vis citizens and stakeholders, in line with the EU institutions' engagement to implement the UNCRPD. Building on the [Commission HR strategy](#), the Commission will continue to promote the **inclusion of staff with disabilities**.

The Commission will seek to further promote the **participation of persons with disabilities in the Blue Book traineeship programme** in the context of the upcoming revision of the decision on the Blue Book traineeship. This will complement the already existing provisions on disability allowance and reasonable accommodation.

The **European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO)** will strengthen the accessibility of its communication and selection procedures, ensuring equal opportunities for candidates with disabilities, including through its **reasonable accommodation policy**. EPSO will further enhance its **targeted outreach through cooperation with EU disability and diversity organisations** to attract a more diverse pool of candidates.

The Commission will strengthen its outreach to staff with disabilities and carers. It will continue to **streamline coordination between services providing support to staff**. It will update its [diversity and inclusion action plan](#) building on the findings of a survey conducted in 2025. It will further develop initiatives to raise awareness, deliver training to staff and managers, fight unconscious biases and **improve digital and physical accessibility as well as reasonable accommodation**. The Commission will also regularly engage with staff associations to further foster inclusion at the workplace.

Moreover, the Commission will implement its **anti-harassment policy** paying particular attention to vulnerable groups, including staff with disabilities as well as staff members with care responsibilities for family members with disabilities. The needs of staff with disabilities will also be carefully considered in the planned review of the **EU Joint Sickness Insurance Scheme**.

Furthermore, the Commission will present a **digital accessibility action plan (2026-2030)** covering its entire digital ecosystem. It will also continue to implement the **infrastructure and buildings equality work plan (2021-2030)**, increasing awareness of physical accessibility among staff and relevant professionals. The Commission will aim at making meetings and events held in Commission conference rooms more accessible across all EU languages and deploy AI-based multilingual services.

## **8. Awareness-raising, monitoring and measuring progress**

### **Raising awareness and disseminating good practices**

Promoting disability awareness and combating stereotypes are fundamental complements to legislation and policymaking. The Commission will continue to engage with the disability community through the **European Day of Persons with Disabilities** and to promote accessibility best practices through the [Access City Award](#), developing a new **community of practice among cities**. It will also continue to celebrate and support local authorities championing inclusiveness through

the [European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Award](#). In addition, the Commission will run a **Union of Equality campaign**, which will also cover disability.

### **Collecting data, monitoring and measuring progress**

Statistics are a necessary tool for evaluating policy outcomes and designing evidence-based disability policies. The Commission will progressively **step up data collection and publish data for new indicators** on the situation of persons with disabilities for various aspects of life through the dedicated [EU statistical online gateway](#), and will strive to enhance data collection disaggregated by type of disability, while minimising the administrative burden. Moreover, it will issue a **recommendation on equality data** and organise a high-level roundtable to further promote their collection and use, building on the work of the equality data expert group of the High-Level Group on non-discrimination, equality and diversity.

The Commission will also publish a new **Eurobarometer on discrimination in the EU** in 2027. In addition, it will take further steps to promote **data collection on persons with disabilities living in institutions and associated costs**. The Commission will use the Disability Platform to discuss progress and strengthen accountability, monitoring national developments, supported by the forthcoming Union of Equality reporting and the **strategy monitoring framework**. Lastly, the Commission will seek to ensure that the **use of EU funds** is monitored against the policy orientations outlined in the strategy and in this Communication.

#### **The Commission calls on the EU Member States to:**

- raise awareness and combat stereotypes of persons with disabilities, including in the portrayal of disability in the media;
- ensure availability of data disaggregated by disability, including in institutions.

## CONCLUSION

The strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities 2021-2030 **remains the EU's main policy framework for achieving a Union of Equality for persons with disabilities**. This enhanced strategy will strengthen the Commission's commitment to design and implement sound disability policies jointly with the Member States and relevant stakeholders as well as with candidate and potential candidate countries for EU accession.

Promoting disability rights and inclusion will pave the way for stronger democracies and more competitive economies and will confirm the **EU's role as a trustworthy key player in the global arena**, reflecting its commitment to upholding human rights.