



## EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT THINK TANK – TOPICAL DIGEST

November 2024

*Estimates by the World Health Organization (WHO) suggest that 15 % of the world's population live with some form of disability. This makes people with disabilities the world's largest minority. In the EU, some 80 million citizens are living with a disability. Disability is complex and multi-dimensional: it denotes impairments, limitations on activity and restrictions on participation – a combination of medical and contextual factors. Some people are born with a disabling condition, others develop a disability through injury, chronic disease, or in older age. The EU's disability policy strives for full inclusion of persons with disabilities in society, by upholding the key principles of non-discrimination, self-determination and unconditional equal treatment. The EU's disability policy framework is set out in the European disability strategy, which serves to implement the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), to which the EU and its Member States are party.*

### **The EU Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 - Achievements and perspectives**

*Briefing by the European Parliament's Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, November 2024*

At the request of Parliament's Committee on Petitions (PETI), the Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs prepared this briefing to present the 2021-2030 EU strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities. The strategy is the European Commission's policy framework for implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). It includes an ambitious set of actions and flagship initiatives until 2024 in various domains, linked to the UNCRPD. Five of the seven flagship initiatives have already been implemented, and the two remaining ones are expected to be published by early 2025. Most of the other policy actions included in the strategy will also be complete by 2024. Despite significant efforts to implement the UNCRPD across the EU, gaps remain between persons with and without disabilities, for example, when it comes to poverty, access to jobs, inclusive education, housing, and healthcare services.

### **Comparability of Statistical Data on Persons with Disabilities across the EU**

*Study by the European Parliament's Policy Department for Economic, Scientific and Quality of Life Policies, November 2024*

Prepared at the request of Parliament's Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, this study offers an overview of available data at national and European levels and seeks to pinpoint limitations. The study finds that in different areas the national data available are not comparable and recommends increasing their comparability. In other fields, there is a lack of data, and the study proposes methods to collect statistics, to help policymakers to design relevant policies in favour of persons with disabilities.

## **The European disability card and European parking card**

*Briefing by Marie Lecerf, European Parliamentary Research Service, November 2024*

One in four people in the EU has some form of disability. Over time, the EU has paid more attention to the issue of free movement for persons with disabilities, and in February 2016 it launched a European disability card scheme as a pilot project in eight Member States. Based on the experience and assessment of the EU disability card pilot project and the European parking card for persons with disabilities, the European Commission launched a legislative initiative on 6 September 2023 to create a European disability card, to be recognised in all Member States. On 31 October 2023, the Commission put forward a second proposal for a directive extending the cards to third-country nationals (the 'follow-up proposal'). It was adopted by the Council on 14 October and the final text was signed on 23 October 2024. Member States have 2.5 years to transpose the directive and 3.5 years to implement it.

## **Standards for equality bodies: Discrimination under Article 19 TFEU grounds**

*Briefing by Ionel Zamfir, European Parliamentary Research Service, June 2024*

Several EU directives dealing with equality require EU Member States to establish equality bodies with a focus on assisting victims of discrimination and preventing and fighting discrimination more broadly. However, the rules are too general with regard to these bodies' duties and manner of operation, leading to disparities between Member States. The work of some bodies has meanwhile been hampered by a lack of resources, insufficient independence or a narrow remit. As part of a package of legislative measures on equality adopted in December 2022, the European Commission published a proposal setting standards for equality bodies fighting discrimination on the grounds set out in Article 19 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). The proposal also sought to reinforce the equality bodies' independence, resources and mandate. Parliament endorsed the act in plenary in April 2024, and the Council adopted it on 7 May. It was published in the Official Journal on 29 May and entered into force on 18 June 2024.

## **The protection on vulnerable adults in cross-border situations**

*Briefing by Ionel Zamfir, European Parliamentary Research Service, December 2023*

As the mobility of people in the EU's ageing societies increases, so does the need to protect a particular group – vulnerable adults. Impairments or insufficiency in their personal faculties mean that these adults are unable to protect their own interests and have to rely on support from others. While all EU Member States have established legal provisions and practices to address these needs, they are highly divergent, for example, as regards powers of representation. In addition to these national differences, other obstacles arise across borders in relation to: determination of the jurisdiction and law to be applied; the recognition of decisions issued by other Member States; and international cooperation between competent national authorities. To remove or mitigate these obstacles, an international private law instrument – the Hague Convention on the International Protection of Adults – was adopted in 2000, but has so far been ratified by only 12 Member States. To secure ratification by all Member States but also to complement the Hague Convention, the European Commission has adopted a proposal for a regulation along with a proposal for a Council decision authorising Member States to become party to the convention. Within Parliament, the Committee on Legal Affairs (JURI) is handling the file.

## **Understanding EU policies for people with disabilities**

*Briefing by Marie Lecerf, European Parliamentary Research Service, November 2023*

The EU combats all forms of discrimination alongside and in support of its Member States. To improve the situation of disabled people, it has introduced a series of initiatives, programmes and strategies over a number of decades. A new 2021-2030 strategy, incorporating lessons learned from its predecessor, seeks to ensure that all persons with disabilities in the EU, regardless of their sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, age or sexual orientation: enjoy their human rights; have equal access to participation in society and the economy; can decide where, how and with whom they live; can move freely in the EU regardless of their support needs; and no longer experience discrimination.

## **Analysis of the European Disability Card – The Proposed Directive: Shortcomings, Strengths and Opportunities**

*Study by Parliament's Policy Department for Economic, Scientific and Quality of Life Policies, November 2023*

This study makes an in-depth analysis of the proposal for a directive establishing the European disability card and the European parking card for persons with disabilities, and outlines recommendations. The proposal represents an important step towards promoting the free movement of persons with disabilities. It is based on mutual recognition of disability status but does not harmonise disability assessments. It would ensure that holders of the cards may avail of disability benefits in a range of services across the EU. However, the current text presents some shortcomings. This study was provided by the Policy Department for Economic, Scientific and Quality of Life Policies at the request of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs.

## **Targeted measures for persons with disabilities to cope with the cost-of-living crisis**

*Study by European Parliament's Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, November 2023*

This study, commissioned by the European Parliament's Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs at the request of the PETI committee, discusses the impact of the ongoing cost-of-living and energy crises on the standard of living for persons with disabilities. Based on available evidence, it provides an overview of legislation, policy measures and schemes designed to help persons with disabilities and their families cope with the rising cost of living, at EU level and in selected Member States.

## **European Disability Card – Pre-legislative synthesis of national, regional and local positions on the European Commission's initiative**

*Briefing by Claudio Collova and Marie Lecerf, European Parliamentary Research Service, September 2023*

This briefing provides a pre-legislative synthesis of the positions of national, regional and local governmental organisations on the European Commission's forthcoming proposal on the European Disability Card. It forms part of an EPRS series offering a summary of the pre-legislative state of play and advance consultation on a range of key European Commission priorities during its 5-year term in office. It seeks to present the current state of affairs, examine how existing policy is working on the ground, and identify best practice and ideas for the future on the part of governmental organisations at all levels of the EU system of multi-level governance.

## **Standards for equality bodies: Discrimination under Article 19 TFEU grounds**

*Briefing by Ionel Zamfir, European Parliamentary Research Service, July 2023*

Several EU directives dealing with equality require EU Member States to establish equality bodies with a focus on assisting victims of discrimination and preventing and fighting discrimination on the grounds listed under the directives. However, their rules are too general with no precise definition of these bodies' duties and manner of operation, thus leading to disparities among the Member States' bodies. Furthermore, the work of some Member States' bodies has been hampered by lack of resources, insufficient independence or a narrow remit. In 2018, the European Commission adopted a recommendation on standards for equality bodies. Later, after assessing its implementation, it decided to shift to binding legislation. In a package of legislative measures on equality, in December 2022 it published a proposal setting standards for equality bodies fighting discrimination on several grounds. A second proposal, under the ordinary legislative procedure, focuses specifically on equality between men and women in the employment field. The proposal reinforces the equality bodies' independence, resources and mandate. While generally welcoming the proposal, stakeholders have suggested specific changes to its provisions.

## **Political participation of people with disabilities in the EU**

*Briefing by Marie Lecerf, European Parliamentary Research Service, May 2023*

In order to nurture democratic societies in which everyone can participate fully, the United Nations and the European Union are striving for full inclusion of people with disabilities. Through its Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the UN promotes the political participation of people with disabilities. Through its Charter of Fundamental Rights, the EU guarantees each and every citizen the right to vote and stand as a candidate in elections to the European Parliament and the right to vote and stand as a candidate in municipal elections. The European Commission's 2021-2030 strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities commits the EU and its Member States to making those rights a reality.

## **Strengthening equality bodies throughout the EU**

*Briefing by Claudio Collova and Meenakshi Fernandes, European Parliamentary Research Service, December 2022*

This briefing offers a pre-legislative synthesis of the positions of national, regional and local governmental organisations on the European Commission's initiative on equality bodies, which have been established in every EU Member State to tackle discrimination. It seeks to present the current state of affairs, examine how existing policy is working on the ground, and identify best practice and ideas for the future on the part of governmental organisations at all levels of the EU system of multilevel governance.

## **Disability assessment, mutual recognition and the EU Disability Card – Progress and opportunities**

*Study by European Parliament's Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, November 2022*

Commissioned by Parliament's Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs at the request of the PETI committee, this study examines progress made on mutual recognition of disability status, and the challenges this presents. There are differing definitions and practices of disability assessment among the Member States and in different policy fields. Citizens' petitions raise concerns about this, and about the need for mutual recognition. Harmonising assessment is difficult but common entry points are possible. The EU Disability Card offers an administrative model for mutual recognition.

## **The implementation of the 2015 Concluding Observations of the CRPD Committee by the EU**

*Study by European Parliament's Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, December 2021*

This study, commissioned by Parliament's Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs at the request of the PETI committee, examines the level of implementation by the EU of the 2015 Concluding Observations of the United Nations CRPD Committee, in light of the next monitoring and reporting cycle. The study reveals that while some recommendations have been followed up by the EU through its disability strategies and legislative and policy action, important gaps remain, notably in those areas where the EU has limited competences, or political support is lacking.

## **Creating opportunities in sport for people with disabilities**

*Briefing by Ivana Katsarova, European Parliamentary Research Service, February 2021*

According to a 2018 Eurobarometer survey, having a disability or illness is the third most frequently mentioned reason – by 14 % of respondents – for not practising sports more regularly. To remove such barriers and improve the participation of people with disabilities in sports, over 50 Erasmus+ projects have supported such activities since 2014. At national level, some EU countries, such as France, Ireland and the Netherlands, have adopted centralised approaches based on national strategies and funding initiatives. Others, including Belgium, Italy and Spain, favour strategies developed and implemented mainly at regional or local level.

## **Implementation of the Employment Equality Directive in light of the UN CRPD**

*Study by Irmgard Anglmayer, European Parliamentary Research Service, December 2020*

Undertaken in support of an implementation report of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL), this study places particular focus on reasonable accommodation, positive action, sanctions and equality bodies, and also on employment-related data regarding persons with disabilities.

## **Employment and disability in the European Union**

*Briefing by Marie Lecerf, European Parliamentary Research Service, May 2020*

Although there has been an overall improvement in the employment situation of persons with disabilities in the EU (given the increase in employment rates), they still remain among the most disadvantaged groups as regards employment. This phenomenon has a significant impact on social integration and economic growth in the EU. Alongside and in support of Member States' policies, the EU has introduced a series of legal provisions, initiatives, actions and strategies to improve the employment situation of disabled people.

## **Lowering hurdles to sport for persons with disabilities**

*Infographic by Ivana Katsarova and Lucille Killmayer, European Parliamentary Research Service, December 2020*

This infographic gives an overview of statistics on persons with disabilities and points to the international and EU policy framework seeking to enable those with disabilities to participate on a par with others in recreational, leisure and sporting activities. It also highlights EU efforts to remove the barriers facing people with disabilities and improve their participation in sport.

## [Access to cultural life for people with disabilities](#)

*Briefing by Magdalena Pasikowska-Schnass, European Parliamentary Research Service, December 2019*

The United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities entered into force in 2011. It enshrined, among other rights, the right of people with disabilities to access cultural venues such as theatres, cinemas and museums, and to enjoy cultural materials, books, films and music in an accessible format. It also highlighted the right of people with disabilities to participate in cultural life as both amateur and professional artists. The EU, party to the convention, is committed to working on legislation, and implementing and promoting programmes and actions in favour of these rights. The EU's disability strategy is a step in this direction.

## [European Accessibility Act](#)

*Briefing by Marie Lecerf, European Parliamentary Research Service, July 2019*

To ensure the full participation of people with disabilities in society, and to reduce the fragmentation of legislation governing access to products and services, the European Commission has adopted a proposal for a directive – often referred to as the European Accessibility Act. This Commission proposal, published in December 2015, has been adopted by the Parliament and the Council in March 2019. Member States have to transpose the measures of the directive into national law by 28 June 2022, and apply them from 28 June 2025. However, a transitional period will allow service providers that were already using them lawfully to continue to use products that do not meet the requirements of the directive up to 28 June 2030.

## **Further reading**

### [Research for Committee on Transport and Tourism - Transport and tourism for persons with disabilities and persons with reduced mobility](#)

*Study by Parliament's Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies, May 2018*

### [Inclusive education for learners with disabilities](#)

*Study by Parliament's Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, September 2017*

### [The European Disability Strategy 2010-2020](#)

*Briefing by Irmgard Anglmayer, European Parliamentary Research Service, July 2017*

### [European disability policy: From defining disability to adopting a strategy](#)

*In-depth analysis by Marie Lecerf, European Parliamentary Research Service, June 2017*

### [The obligations of the EU public administration under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)

*In-depth analysis by Irmgard Anglmayer, European Parliamentary Research Service, March 2016*

### [EU implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(CRPD\)](#)

*In-depth analysis by Irmgard Anglmayer, European Parliamentary Research Service, February 2016*

## Graphics

### Existing voting tools and support in Member States (ordered by range offered)

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- Accessible ballot boxes
- Free choice of assistance

**Existing voting tools and support in Member States (ordered by range offered)**

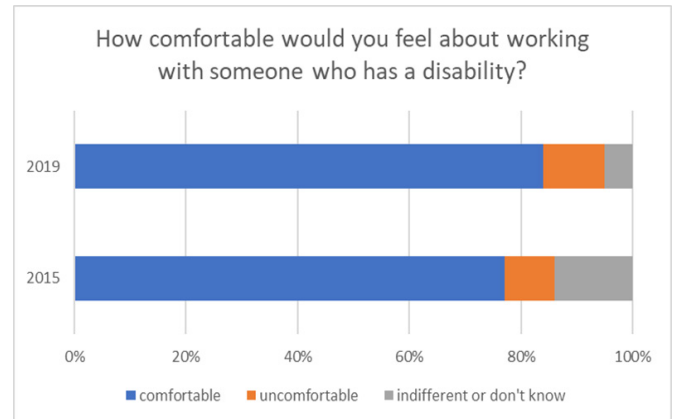
Member State	Templates	Audio description	Braille ballot papers	Mobile voting	Magnifiers	Sign language	Adequate lighting	Large printouts	Accessible voting booths	Choice of polling station	Free choice of assistance
Lithuania											
Belgium											
Spain											
Ireland											
The Netherlands											
Estonia											
Croatia											
Hungary											
Luxembourg											
Slovenia											
Austria											
Germany											
Denmark											
Finland											
Czechia											
France											
Latvia											
Poland											
Portugal											
Sweden											
Bulgaria											
Italy											
Malta											
Romania											
Slovakia											
Cyprus											
Greece											

Sources: Guide of good electoral practices in Member States addressing the participation of citizens with disabilities in the electoral process. European Commission, SWD(2022) 408 final; Human Rights Report 2022 – political participation of persons with disabilities, the right to vote and stand for election, Issue 6 – 2022, European Disability Forum

Source: [People with disabilities and the European elections](#)

Infographic by Marie Lecerf and Samy Chahri, European Parliamentary Research Service, February 2024.

### Feeling at ease working with a person who has a disability (2015-2019)



Data source: Eurobarometer.

Source: [Implementation of the Employment Equality Directive in light of the UN CRPD](#)  
Study by Irmgard Anglmayer, European Parliamentary Research Service, December 2020.

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