

Understanding EU policies for people with disabilities

SUMMARY

The EU and its Member States have signed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and use its definition of disability as a common reference at EU level. There is no other harmonised definition of disability in the EU.

The recent introduction of the Global Activity Limitation Instrument indicator (GALI) in most of Eurostat's social and economic surveys offers the opportunity to have a clearer assessment of disability in the EU than before. It confirms that in 2023 the prevalence of disability was higher among female, older and less educated respondents.

The EU combats all forms of discrimination alongside and in support of its Member States. To improve the situation of people with disabilities, it has introduced a series of initiatives, programmes and strategies over a number of decades. The European Parliament has been highly active in the bid to end all forms of discrimination against people with disabilities, since the early 1980s.

In 1997, Article 13 of the Treaty establishing the European Community on the human right not to suffer discrimination on grounds, in particular, of disability, paved the way for a genuine disability policy. The first step in this regard was the adoption of a 2001–2006 action programme to combat discrimination. Later, the 2010–2020 European disability strategy sought to enable people with disabilities to exercise their rights and participate fully in society and the economy.

The 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.

This is an update of a briefing published in November 2023.



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Disability in the European Union

Definition

Traditionally, there have been two main [models](#) of disability – a medical and a social one:

- the medical model focuses on the person's medical condition – illness or injury – which is the direct cause of their disability and may have an impact on their quality of life;
- the social model focuses on barriers created by society. Those may be physical or social restrictions preventing the development or use of the abilities – physical, social or professional – that each individual needs to thrive.

The two models view the interaction between the person's health condition and the environment in which they live differently. The medical one focuses on the person; the social one on the barriers created by the environment. In 2001, the World Health Organization published a new model: the international classification of functioning, disability and health ([ICF](#)). Based on three basic dimensions – body, activity and participation – the ICF model integrates the medical dimension of the health condition while at the same time referring to the context in which the individual lives and the society to which they belong. In line with the ICF model, in 2006 the [United Nations](#) (UN) adopted a very broad definition of disability in its Convention for the Rights of People with Disabilities ([CRDP](#)): 'Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others' ([Article 1](#)).

In the light of the difficulties encountered in adopting a common definition at EU level, when ratifying the UN CRDP, the EU recognised the UN's definition of disability provided in this convention. The [Court of Justice of the EU](#) has defined disability as an impairment that is 'long-term' and which, in the field of professional life, 'hinders an individual's access to, participation in, or advancement in employment' (Joined Cases [C-335/11](#) and [C-337/11](#), *Ring*; Case [C-363/12](#), *Z*; Case [C-354/13](#), *Kaltoft*). Under the duty of consistent interpretation, EU secondary legislation is interpreted in line with the UN CRPD.

Statistics

Data collection and data availability

As the concept of disability is so multidimensional, many difficulties arise when having to identify people with disabilities in surveys. At EU level, [Eurostat](#) is the main data provider through the European Statistical System ([ESS](#)) – the partnership between the Commission (here Eurostat), the national statistical institutes and other national authorities that are responsible in each Member State for the development, production and dissemination of European statistics. Currently, Eurostat carries out two broad population-based surveys, which include a limited number of questions relating to disability:

- the **European health interview survey** ([EHIS](#)), which provides data on the level of functioning and activity limitation among the population, and information on the population's health status, health determinants and healthcare use. Up to 2019, the survey was conducted every 5 years. As of 2019 it is conducted every 6 years;
- the **EU statistics on income and living conditions** ([EU-SILC](#)), which collects, once a year, data on long-standing activity limitation due to health problems (the Global Activity Limitation Instrument, [GALI](#)).¹

Other specific survey modules collect data relating to disability, among them:

- the [ad hoc module of the 2011 labour force survey](#), which examined the labour-market situation of 15-64 year-old people with disabilities living in private homes compared

with (same age range) people without disabilities also living in private homes. In the survey, 'disabled people' are those who claim to have difficulties in performing some basic activities such as seeing, hearing, walking or remembering;

- the 2012–2013 European survey on health and social integration ([EHSIS](#)) collected data on the barriers faced by people with a health problem or having difficulties in performing certain basic activities in their daily life. This dedicated module was discontinued owing to quality concerns.

Although those surveys are a useful source of information, they are based on self-reported data and might be affected by respondents' subjective perception. Moreover, they do not gather information on people living in collective households or institutions (particularly elderly people and children with disabilities) or on children living in a private home (the EU-SILC survey starts from the age of 16).

As announced in its [strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities 2021–2030](#) (see below), the European Commission introduced GALI, which is recognised as a good proxy measure for disability, to harmonise disability data collection in 2022. It is considered relatively easy to include in any EU social surveys, in order to monitor regularly the situation of people with disabilities in different domains affecting their quality of life, with the help of statistical data. In addition to EU-SILC and EHS surveys, such social surveys include the [labour force survey](#), the [adult education survey](#), the [household budget survey](#), the [time use survey](#) and the [ICT survey](#). Adding GALI to all those surveys offers the possibility to collect information on the gap between persons with and without disabilities in key areas such as employment, education, poverty and social exclusion, living conditions, health, and use of new communication technologies. This disability variable is accompanied by detailed information on the type of disability, with the inclusion of a short set of questions² proposed by the [UN Washington Group on Disability Statistics](#) in a three-year EU-SILC module on health from 2022 on. As regards the collection of data about children with disabilities, an adapted GALI variable in the EU-SILC module on children was also created, to be conducted every 3 years. On the basis of data extracted from the European quality of life survey ([EQLS](#)) and the European working conditions survey ([EWCS](#)), [Eurofound](#) studies access to and quality of social services for people with disabilities and chronic diseases, in specific relation to how this affects such people's employment and labour market integration.

Remaining barriers

Disability is not a marginal phenomenon in the EU. According to the [EU statistics on income and living conditions survey](#), in 2023 more than one quarter of the EU-27 population aged 16 and over (26.8 %) reported some or severe long-standing limitations in their usual activities due to health: 19.6 % reported some long-standing limitations and 7.2 % reported severe long-standing limitations. [Women](#) were more likely than men to report long-standing limitations – either some or severe – in all EU Member States (respectively 29.2 % and 24.3 %).

People in [higher age groups](#) tend to report some or severe long-standing limitations more than those in lower age groups, and the gender health gap increases with age. The prevalence of self-reported long-standing limitations is highest amongst people with a [low income](#), and decreases progressively as income increases. In the EU-27, 35.4 % of the population in the first income quintile group (the 20 % of the population with the lowest income) reported long-standing limitations in 2023 compared with 17.9 % of the population in the fifth income quintile group (the 20 % of the population with the highest income). In the same way, the prevalence of self-reported long-standing limitations is lowest amongst people having completed tertiary education (17.9 %) compared with people having completed, at most, lower secondary education (37.4 %). The health gap between [educational attainment levels](#) is also visible in all Member States.

People with disabilities still face significant barriers to accessing education, employment, healthcare, sport and culture, and to participating in the EU's political life. In 2022, 22.2 % of 18–24 year-olds with [activity limitation](#) within the EU were [early leavers from education and training](#) compared with 8.4 % of their peers without activity limitation. At EU level, the [disability employment gap](#) still stood

at 21.5 % in 2023 ([Eurostat](#)). According to a 2021 [Eurofound](#) study, despite recent progress, labour market participation remains a challenge for people with disabilities. Moreover, [women](#) with disabilities, [young](#) people with disabilities and people with [high support needs](#) are more likely to be discriminated against and excluded from the labour market.

According to a 2022 Eurobarometer survey on [Sport and physical activity](#), having a disability or illness is the third most frequently mentioned reason for not practising sport more regularly (14 % of respondents). Those who left education by the age of 15 (26 %), older people (26 % of those aged 55 or over) and women (16 %) are more likely to say that they have an illness or disability.

Access to [culture](#) also remains difficult for persons with disabilities, even though in the 2015 public consultation on the [European Accessibility Act](#) – when asked which goods and services should be given priority in relation to accessibility for persons with disabilities and the elderly – respondents (organisations and citizens) ranked [culture and/or leisure](#) as key (respectively 8 % and 6 %).

People with disabilities also face additional barriers to exercising their [voting rights](#), for example, in terms of insufficient accessibility. A 2019 [European Economic and Social Committee opinion](#) stated that an estimated 800 000 EU citizens from 16 Member States may have been deprived of the right to participate in the European Parliament elections because their national rules and organisational arrangements did not take their specific needs sufficiently into account.³

In short, compared with people who do not have activity limitation (aged 16 and over), those who do face a higher [risk of poverty or social exclusion](#) (28.8 % versus 18.0 % in 2023).

Finally but importantly, in a 2023 Eurobarometer survey on [Discrimination in the EU](#), almost half of respondents reported widespread discrimination in their country on the basis of disability (49 %).

Issues in the spotlight: Learning from crisis

Crises, including [pandemics](#), [conflicts](#), [natural disasters](#) and [economic shocks](#), are associated with a range of factors that can exacerbate the difficulties faced by people with disabilities.

War on Ukraine

People with disabilities in Ukraine were already extremely vulnerable prior to the Russian invasion. During [armed conflicts](#), the needs and vulnerabilities of people with disabilities are amplified, as is the risk of discrimination towards them. Ukraine is no exception: the mass displacement and chaos triggered by the conflict have raised serious concerns about violations of human rights inside and outside the country, in particular of those of vulnerable people such as [women](#), [children](#), [LGBTI](#) people, [Roma](#) and [people with disabilities](#). In April 2022, the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities ([UNCRPD](#)) warned that 2.7 million persons with disabilities in Ukraine were at risk of being abandoned in their homes or in residential care, with 'no access to life-sustaining medications, oxygen supplies, food, water, sanitation, support for daily living and other basic facilities'. June 2022 estimates show that more than 143 000 people with disabilities have been [displaced](#) since the outbreak of the war.

In addition, the conflict has exposed people with disabilities to a disproportionate risk of death or injury and hampered their [access to emergency information](#). People with disabilities often have no way to reach [shelters](#) or safe places, and because of mass displacement, they have been [disconnected](#) from their support networks. The UN [report](#) on the human rights situation in Ukraine, covering the period from 1 February to 31 July 2023, pointed to lack of 'access to bomb shelters, evacuation trains, necessary medication and adequate housing suited to their needs' for people with disabilities. A previous UN [report](#), published in June 2022, stressed that Ukrainian children 'with visual, hearing, developmental or intellectual disabilities' are at higher risk of danger because 'they may not have learned about or understood what was happening' or were [removed](#) from or [abandoned](#) in their institutions without appropriate support.

Non-government organisation [Inclusion Europe](#) reported that before the war, around 261 000 persons in Ukraine had disability status due to intellectual and psychosocial disorders. The sirens, explosions and alarms, in addition to the bombing and shelling, have caused them stress, depression and anxiety, in some cases exacerbating their chronic disease. Moreover, [Inclusion Europe](#) points to the difficulty for such people in accessing medical services, psychological assistance and psychiatric care, and to the fact that autistic people cannot stay in overcrowded bomb shelters. Similarly, the [World Economic Forum](#) stresses that people with disabilities are facing a 'crisis within a crisis' not only because civilian infrastructures, including hospitals and residential care facilities, are under shelling but also because people who are in wheelchairs or are visually or otherwise impaired are facing unprecedented challenges in trying to escape the hostilities.

Climate change

Europe is now facing war on the continent, a related cost of living crisis and the encroaching impacts of climate change all at once, and all linked with risks of increased difficulties for people with disabilities. In April 2020, the UN published an [Analytical study](#) on the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities in the context of climate change. The study observed that 'persons with disabilities are disproportionately affected by climate change', as climate crisis is exacerbating existing health and health inequalities, revealing the lack of disability-inclusive procedures in the event of climate disasters, and reducing equal access to adequate housing.

Similarly, in 2021, during the 26th UN Climate Change Conference ([COP 26](#)), the [International Disability Alliance](#) published an advocacy paper for [Disability Inclusive Climate Action](#) and people with disabilities finally gained official status as a caucus recognised by the UN secretariat. In 2022, [COP27](#) was decisive for the inclusion of people with disabilities. The number of people with disabilities participating [increased](#) compared with earlier conferences, as did the number of events addressing disability organised by governments, UN agencies and other stakeholders. For the first time, the [COP27 overarching decision](#) as well as the [action plan for climate empowerment](#) included references to people with disabilities. In 2023, the COP 28 [First global stocktake](#) explicitly refers to persons with disabilities by acknowledging that Parties should respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights, including the rights of persons with disabilities when taking action to address climate change.

Cost-of-living crisis and energy poverty

The economic developments in the past legislative term were dominated by several consecutive shocks, from the pandemic to the energy crisis caused by Russia's war on Ukraine that, in turn, led to a sharp increase in inflation.

The financial situation of households has become a key area of concern since the beginning of the cost-of-living crisis in 2022. A growing share of people in the EU, and particularly those in vulnerable situations, face difficulties in making ends meet. This cost-of-living crisis may worsen health inequalities across the EU, particularly for people with disabilities, as the [links](#) between poverty and health problems suggest.

According to Eurostat, 15.1 % of persons with disabilities were unable to keep their [home adequately warm](#) compared with 9.0 % on average in 2023. This 'energy poverty' endured by persons with disabilities is the result of a [combination](#) of three main factors: low income, high expenditure on energy, and poor energy efficiency in buildings. Vulnerable people, such as people with disabilities affected by energy poverty, suffer from inadequate comfort and sanitary [conditions](#), which may lead to ill health and higher mortality.

EU legal framework

Over time, the EU has paid increasingly close attention to the situation of people with disabilities. The question of what would be the right legal basis for introducing a genuine EU disability policy has also become increasingly important.

The rights of persons with disabilities have been enshrined in the EU Treaties since 1997. [Article 19](#) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (ex-Article 13 of the Treaty establishing the European Community) stipulates that 'in defining and implementing its policies and activities, the Union shall aim to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation'. The [Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union](#), adopted in 2000, prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability ([Article 21](#)) and recognises the right of persons with disabilities to independence, social and occupational integration and participation in the life of the community ([Article 26](#)). The Treaty of Lisbon, which came into effect in 2009, attributes to the Charter the same legal value as the Treaties.

Adopted in 2006, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) was the first international legally binding instrument to set minimum standards for the rights of persons with disabilities, and the first human rights convention to which the EU became a party. By ratifying the UN CRPD in December 2010, the EU associated itself with efforts agreed at international level to guarantee the fundamental rights of people with disabilities. By 2018, all EU Member States had also [ratified](#) the convention, committing, alongside the EU, to complying with the obligations under the convention and to setting up the mechanisms for its implementation and coordination.

European policies

First initiatives

The Commission has supported the [development](#) of a European disability policy through a succession of action programmes since 1974.⁴ As an additional step, in May 2001 the European Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs called on the European Council to dedicate the year 2003⁵ to people with disabilities. Accordingly, in 2003, the Commission launched a [European action plan](#) on equal opportunities for people with disabilities for the 2003–2010 period. While significant steps were taken to improve the lives of people with disabilities in the EU during that period, some stakeholders questioned the adequacy of existing EU-level policy and regulatory frameworks to address the needs of people with disabilities properly.

Building on the results of the action plan, a [European disability strategy 2010–2020](#) was adopted in November 2010, at a time when the process for the ratification by the EU of the UN CRPD was already under way (see above). The strategy was conceived as a policy framework through which the EU would deliver its commitments under the UN CRPD, in line with the respective competences provided for in the Treaties. It also complemented the [EU 2020 strategy](#) and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU. It aimed to make it possible for people with disabilities to enjoy their rights in full and to participate in society and the economy on an equal level with others. To achieve these objectives, the strategy identified eight key areas of action: accessibility; participation; equality; employment; education and training; social protection; health; and external action. The strategy also included four instruments to implement the above objectives: awareness raising; financial support; statistics; and data collection and monitoring mechanisms as required by the UN CRPD. From 2010 to 2020, several initiatives were launched to implement the strategy.

- **European Day of Persons with Disabilities.** Each year (around 3 December), the Commission, together with the [European Disability Forum](#), organises a conference to mark the European Day of Persons with Disabilities. The conference brings together decision-makers, people with and without disabilities, academic experts, the media and other stakeholders. They take part in the EU's efforts to highlight the issue of disability in accordance with the strategy.

- **European disability card.** In February 2016, a [European disability card scheme](#) was launched as a pilot project in eight Member States, to address the issue of lack of mutual recognition in disability status among Member States and to ensure equal access to benefits across borders for people with disabilities mainly in the areas of culture, leisure, sport and transport. According to the 2021 [study](#) assessing the implementation of the pilot action on the EU disability card and associated benefits, the initiative proved to be effective (see below).
- **Mobility of students with disabilities.** The [Erasmus+](#) programme promotes the mobility of students with disabilities through [youth mobility projects](#).
- **Accessibility.** After 4 years of discussions, the [European Accessibility Act](#) was adopted in 2019 and had to be transposed into national legislation by [28 June 2022](#). Goods and services, including public services and assistive devices, must now be accessible to people with disabilities. Even if the provisions on the built environment are not binding, the Member States are encouraged to [align](#) their diverging requirements as much as possible. Persons with disabilities should encounter fewer obstacles when accessing transport, education or the labour market. The [Web Accessibility Directive](#) complements the European Accessibility Act by including provisions to make sure that people with disabilities have better access to public service websites and mobile apps. The inclusion of accessibility provisions in the [Audiovisual Media Services Directive](#), the new [European Electronic Communications Code](#), the ['Marrakesh' Directive](#),⁶ and the reaffirmation of mandatory accessibility [requirements](#) for projects financed through EU funds are also fostering accessibility in the EU.
- **Access City Awards.** To encourage cities to improve accessibility, the Commission has, for 15 years now, been granting an [annual award](#) to cities that invest in guaranteeing that their citizens have equal access to fundamental rights and, regardless of their age, mobility or ability, equal access to the resources these cities offer. In 2024, the Access City Award was won by San Cristóbal de La Laguna in Spain (1st prize), Łódź in Poland (2nd prize), and Saint-Quentin in France (3rd prize). The cities short-listed for the [2025](#) edition are: Borås (Sweden), Cartagena (Spain), Nuremberg (Germany) and Vienna (Austria).
- **Access to transport** for people with disabilities. Since the 2006 Regulation on the rights of disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility when [travelling by air](#), the legislation on the [rights of passengers with reduced mobility](#) has evolved significantly with the revision of the 2014 Commission [Regulation](#) on the technical specifications for interoperability relating to accessibility of the Union's rail system, the adoption in 2010 of the [Waterborne](#) Passenger Rights Regulation and in 2011 of the [Bus and Coach](#) Passenger Rights Regulation, and the re-cast of the [Rail Passengers' Rights Regulation](#) in 2021.

The 2021–2030 strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities

In 2019, the European Commission launched an [evaluation](#) of the 2010–2020 European disability strategy to assess its implementation. The report mentions the inclusion of disability issues in European legislation and policy, notably in the areas of accessibility and passengers' rights, as some of the strategy's main achievements. The strategy also helped mainstream disability issues at EU institutional level through the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#) (Principles 3 and 17) and the [European Semester](#). Nevertheless, the evaluation underlines many shortcomings, such as the lack of a comprehensive set of indicators, the absence of a framework to monitor the implementation of the strategy or the non-existence of binding links between the strategy and EU funding. On 20 October 2020, the European Commission announced in its [2021 work programme](#) that it would publish a new EU disability strategy, which should address the shortcomings of its predecessor. Accordingly, on 3 March 2021 the Commission adopted its 2021–2030 [strategy](#) for the rights of

persons with disabilities, which seeks to make progress on ensuring 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 opportunities and equal access to participate in society and the economy;
- are able to decide where, how and with whom they live;
- move freely in the EU regardless of their support needs;
- no longer experience discrimination.

Based on the lessons drawn from the previous strategy, the new one takes account of the diversity of disability comprising long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments (in line with Article 1 of the UN CRPD), which are often invisible. Addressing the risks of multiple disadvantages faced by women, children, older persons, refugees with disabilities and those with socioeconomic difficulties, the strategy promotes an [intersectional](#) perspective in line with the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and sustainable development goals ([SDGs](#)). The strategy also announced several practical initiatives, which have been completed.

- On 15 December 2021, the European Commission launched its [Disability Platform](#). The objective of the **platform** is to facilitate cooperation between the Commission and Member States on implementation of the new strategy. This includes the preparation of policy and legislative proposals relevant to disability, and representatives from Member States, non-governmental organisations and the European Commission working together to advance the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- A package of measures on the integration of people with disabilities into the **labour market** was published on 20 September 2022. This [disability employment package](#) helps Member States ensure that people with disabilities enjoy social inclusion and economic autonomy through their employment. On 8 December 2022, the Council of the EU adopted [conclusions](#) regarding the inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market, calling on Member States to implement the guidelines contained in the package.
- '[AccessibleEU](#)', a European resource centre created in 2022, provides a framework for cooperation between national authorities responsible for implementing **accessibility** standards and laws, with the aim of sharing best practice and improving the coherence and implementation of legislation across the EU.
- Following the 2016 pilot project mentioned above, the European Commission made a proposal for a [European disability card and the European Parking Card for persons with disabilities](#) on 6 September 2023. The Council reached an agreement with the European Parliament on 8 February 2024 for EU citizens and extended it to non-EU citizens in March 2024. The directives main objective is to ensure equal access to special conditions and preferential treatment for persons with disabilities during short-term stays in other Member States. The [directives](#) i) introduce a standardised European Disability Card and improve the existing European Parking Card for persons with disabilities; ii) ensure that the European Disability Card is recognised as proof of disability, granting access to special conditions and preferential treatment offered by private operators or public authorities; iv) provide holders of the European Parking Card with equal access to designated reserved parking spaces as well as other parking conditions and facilities; v) make information available in accessible formats about how to obtain these cards and about the special conditions and preferential treatment offered; vi) and reduce administrative burdens for persons with disabilities, private operators and public authorities. Member States must apply these measures from 5 June 2028.

- With a view to ensuring that people with disabilities fully enjoy their rights as European citizens, the Commission published guidelines on their **participation in the electoral process**, as candidates and voters, on 6 December 2023.
- To support effective implementation of the existing rules on **air travel**, the European Commission published [interpretative guidelines](#) on Regulation 1107/2006 on the rights of persons with disabilities when travelling by air in October 2024.
- The Council submitted [conclusions](#) in August 2024 aimed at ensuring social integration, paying particular attention to employment and rehabilitation, including reasonable accommodation.
- A **monitoring framework** was published on 25 May 2022, and a large set of **disability indicators** were developed as of the end of 2023.

Finally, at institutional level, the Commission is promising to renew its human resources strategy to promote diversity and the integration of people with disabilities. Likewise, the [European Parliament](#) is implementing the rights and principles highlighted in the UN CRPD, in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, in the Staff Regulations of EU Officials and in a set of internal high-level documents in such a way as to change the organisational culture and build an inclusive workplace for persons with disabilities.

Assessment

In a [special report](#) published in October 2023, the European Court of Auditors (ECA) assessed the 'practical impact of EU action' and concluded that it is 'limited'. According to the auditors, the key indicators for persons with disabilities have not improved and certain gaps have been identified in EU statistics in terms of frequency of coverage and level of detail. These differences in data may hinder the mutual recognition of the disability status in the EU. When assessing the Commission 2021-2030 disability strategy, the ECA concludes that, even if it sets out clear objectives, a number of key issues (e.g. the existence of 'invisible' disabilities, an inefficient link between EU funding and the strategy, a missing review of existing legislation, etc.) remain unresolved and the monitoring system in place does not provide information on how EU funding helps improve the lives of people with disabilities.

On the basis of these conclusions, the Court of Auditors recommends that the Commission draw up a comparable statistical database, monitor and assess the relevant EU legislation to evaluate its compliance with the UN CPRD and work towards the establishment mutual recognition of disability status in the European Union.

According to the 2021-2030 strategy, the Commission is supposed to publish a report assessing progress in implementing the strategy and, if deemed necessary, update its objectives and actions before the end of 2024.

European Parliament

Since the start of the 1980s, Parliament has given priority to combating all forms of discrimination against people with disabilities. On the strength of the work done by the Disability Intergroup, Members of the European Parliament have adopted a number of decisions on the integration of people with disabilities and the acknowledgement and protection of their rights, calling on the Member States and the Commission to develop norms and regulations in the interest of people with disabilities. In 2023, the Employment and Social Affairs Committee (EMPL) organised the first [European Parliament Disability Rights Week](#) to highlight its commitment to persons with disabilities. The [2024 edition](#) of the Parliament's Disability Rights Week is taking place from 2-6 December.

Disability Intergroup

The Disability Intergroup of the European Parliament (with the [European Disability Forum](#) acting as its secretariat) is an informal grouping of Members of the European Parliament who are interested

in promoting disability-related policy. Established in 1980, it is one of the oldest and largest intergroups in the Parliament. The Disability Intergroup has been a key player in advocating and advancing the rights of persons with disabilities in the EU. The [2019-2024 term](#) provided the opportunity for the intergroup to maintain its instrumental position in the adoption of legislation favourable to persons with disabilities.

Since 2022, the intergroup has published a newsletter every 2 months, highlighting the work of its members on disability. In its last edition (December 2023 – [Issue 5](#)), the publication focused on the 2024 European elections.

Resolutions, recommendations and reports

In its 1996 resolution on the [rights of disabled people](#), Parliament called on the Member States to include a clause on non-discrimination on grounds of disability when revising the Treaty on European Union, to enact a new legal basis for social programmes, to introduce non-discrimination measures and to treat disability rights as a civil rights issue. It also called on the Commission to present a new action programme on equalisation of opportunities for people with disabilities, and to carry out censuses in all Member States to improve statistics on the causes or extent of disabilities. Moreover, it called on the EU institutions and Member States to review their access and employment policies.

In March 1998, Parliament advocated the introduction of a [European parking card](#) for people with disabilities, to be valid throughout the EU. Parliament called repeatedly for the introduction of strategies, legislative initiatives and policies to guarantee non-discrimination and equal opportunities for women with disabilities.

In its 2011 resolution on the [European disability strategy](#), Parliament pleaded for people with disabilities to be involved in all measures and decisions that affect them, and regretted the strategy's lack of an integrated gender perspective.

In December 2013, Parliament adopted a resolution on [women with disabilities](#), in which it recalled that they were disadvantaged in a number of ways. They had trouble gaining access to adequate housing, healthcare, public transport, education, vocational training and employment, were victims of inequality in access to credit, and rarely participated in decision-making processes.

In 2016, Parliament adopted a resolution on the [implementation of the UN CRPD](#), with special regard to the UN's concluding observations on the state of implementation of obligations under the UN CRPD. The resolution prompted EU institutions to ensure that all existing and future legislation fully adheres to the CRPD's recommendations.

In 2017, Parliament adopted an own-initiative resolution on the [implementation of the European disability strategy](#). The underlying report stresses, in particular, the need to mainstream equality, gender and non-discrimination, as well as the rights of children with disabilities, into all areas of a future strategy; it also urges the Commission and the Member States to reach out to the most vulnerable, such as the homeless.

On 2 March 2020, following the statement in plenary on 17 December 2019 by Commissioner for Equality, Helena Dalli, on the follow-up to the European disability strategy 2010-2020, the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL) tabled a [motion for a resolution](#) urging the Commission to deepen its commitment to the rights of persons with disabilities through a comprehensive, long-term, post-2020 EU disability strategy, so that all persons with disabilities and their families could fully enjoy their human rights. According to Members, the new disability strategy should include ambitious, clear targets and implementation periods. It should reflect the diversity of persons with disabilities and mainstream the rights of children with disabilities. An adequate budget for the strategy's implementation and a well-resourced monitoring mechanism are key. Persons with disabilities and their representative organisations should also be involved in the strategy's preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Disaggregated, comparable data collection should facilitate proper monitoring.

In a resolution of 18 June 2020, Parliament again called for a more ambitious [post-2020 European disability strategy](#). It called on the Commission to include a review of the strategy every 3 years with a clearly defined role for the EU CRPD framework and to systematically and actively involve persons with disabilities and their representative organisations (at EU and national levels) in the reviews. Furthermore, it asked the Commission to ensure that the post-2020 strategy promoted guaranteed access to: employment, vocational and professional training, inclusive education, affordable quality healthcare services, digital services, and fair pay. Parliament also recommended that the EU structurally integrate the new European disability strategy within the European Semester process.

In the context of the [coronavirus pandemic](#), on 8 July 2020 Parliament adopted a resolution on the rights of persons with intellectual disabilities and their families in the COVID-19 crisis. In it, Parliament voiced deep concern about the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 crisis on persons with intellectual disabilities and persons with other mental health problems and their families, creating an additional burden for family members caring for them, many of whom are [women](#). The resolution underlined that investing in the gradual transition from institutional care to community-based services for persons with intellectual disabilities should be a priority. Lockdown had been a serious problem, not only for persons with intellectual disabilities, but also for every person with a mental illness, as isolation could aggravate the problems.

Reflecting its concern about inequalities on the labour market for persons with disabilities, Parliament adopted a [resolution](#) on 11 March 2021 on the implementation of Council Directive 2000/78/EC establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation in the light of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The resolution called on the EU institutions and Member States to reaffirm their commitment to achieving inclusive equality for people with disabilities and to step up their efforts to create an accessible and non-discriminatory labour market for them. They called for a rapid revision of the [Employment Equality Directive](#) to bring it into line with the provisions of the UN CRPD.

On 7 October 2021, Members adopted by a large majority a resolution on the [protection of persons with disabilities in the EU](#), based on the petitions submitted by citizens and received by the European Parliament's Committee on Petitions (PETI). The debates were an opportunity for MEPs to denounce the lack of inclusiveness of European societies but also within the European institutions, including the Parliament.

In order to ensure that the future AccessibleEU centre in support of [accessibility](#) policies in the EU single market has real added value, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on 4 October 2022 stressing the need to increase overall knowledge on accessibility and the number of qualified accessibility experts. Members also called on the Commission to ensure that the centre is provided with the necessary funding and staffing.

On 4 October 2023, Parliament adopted a resolution on harmonising the rights of [autistic persons](#). Members called for the adoption of a European legal status for persons with disabilities allowing for mutual recognition and accreditation in all Member States, taking into account the specificity of autism and ensuring the protection and inclusion of all autistic persons.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ The 'GALI' question measures the proportion of people who claim to have been, 'for at least the past six months ... limited because of a health problem in activities people usually do'.
- ² This [set](#) comprises questions on six core functional domains: seeing, hearing, walking, cognition, self-care, and communication.
- ³ People with disabilities may also be easily disenfranchised. The European Court of Human Rights has recently issued several judgments on the electoral rights of persons with disabilities (e.g. *Toplak and Mrak v Slovenia*; *Strøbye v Denmark*; and *Caamaño Valle v Spain*).
- ⁴ The [social action programme](#) (1974); the [Community Social Action Programme on the Social Integration of Handicapped People](#), 1983-88, (1981); [HELIOS I](#) (Second) Community Social Action Programme for Disabled People (1988); [HELIOS II](#) (Third) Community Action Programme to Assist Disabled People (1993).
- ⁵ The year 2003 was named 'European Year of People with Disabilities' (EYPD) to highlight and raise public awareness of the situation faced by such people. To this end, the EU set aside a budget of €12 million to stimulate initiatives and launched an action plan on Equal opportunities for people with disabilities: a European Action Plan (2004-2010). It sought to ensure that disability issues were incorporated into all EU policies that may affect the lives of people with disabilities. The EYPD sought, in particular, to raise awareness of the rights of people with disabilities to protection against discrimination; to foster reflection on and discussion of the measures needed to promote equal opportunities for people with disabilities in Europe; to develop experience exchanges on good practices and effective strategies devised at local, national and European level; to improve communication on disability; to increase the attention paid to the rights of children and young people with disabilities to equality in education, etc. Among the main actions taken that year, of particular importance are the i) introduction of the 'Get on Board' specific information and promotion campaign, for which a campaign bus travelled throughout the EU providing people with disabilities and disability organisations with a means of promoting their activities; ii) highly visible media; and iii) the creation of a company participation programme to ensure that businesses promote employment and training opportunities for people with disabilities.
- ⁶ This directive implements the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who are Blind, Visually Impaired, or Otherwise Print-Disabled, which aims to facilitate access to print works in formats adapted for persons who are blind, visually impaired or otherwise print-disabled. The [Marrakesh Treaty](#), to which the EU is party, is an international copyright treaty administered by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO).

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ep@ep.europa.eu (contact)

www.ep@ep.parl.union.eu (intranet)

www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank (internet)

<http://epthinktank.eu> (blog)