

**ANSWERS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
QUESTIONNAIRE TO THE COMMISSIONER-DESIGNATE**

Helena DALLI

Equality

1. General competence, European commitment and general independence

What aspects of your personal qualifications and experience are particularly relevant for becoming Commissioner and promoting the European general interest, particularly in the area you would be responsible for? What motivates you? How will you contribute to putting forward the strategic agenda of the Commission? How will you implement gender mainstreaming and integrate a gender perspective into all policy areas of your portfolio?

What guarantees of independence are you able to give the European Parliament, and how would you make sure that any past, current or future activities you carry out could not cast doubt on the performance of your duties within the Commission?

I entered politics as a student full of idealism 40 years ago, motivated by a yearning for fairness and equality, a will to rectify injustices and build a better world for all. During this long trajectory, I met and listened to many people who were marginalised because of prejudice, stereotypes or discriminatory legislation. I have done everything in my power and to the best of my knowledge and abilities to address these situations.

I believe my academic qualifications and professional experiences will allow me to contribute to the European general interest. I hold a doctorate in sociology and have lectured for many years in that field. As Minister responsible for European Affairs and Equality, I regularly attended the General Affairs Council and the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council, responsible for ensuring a unified solution at EU level to key matters affecting the European interest. Looking forward, I intend to work together with the President, the Vice-Presidents and fellow Commissioners in our efforts to deliver on our common agenda. I will also work together with the President to make sure that all the commitments relative to Equality in the Political Guidelines are delivered effectively.

As a female politician, I persisted in a culture that made it hard for women to succeed, as I wanted to be able to bring about the necessary changes. This vocation continued to serve as my driver when I entered Parliament in 1996 and became Parliamentary Secretary for Women's Rights in the Office of the Prime Minister; my subsequent years as a Shadow Minister; and during my terms as Minister for Social Dialogue, Consumer Affairs and Civil Liberties and Minister for European Affairs and Equality.

I am glad to meet people whose lives improved thanks to equality measures that were introduced in my country. I will never forget seeing the joy of so many people following the adoption of key pieces of legislation that introduced new rights and extended the principle of

equality. At the same time, we must continue to support the most vulnerable in society, who are marginalised because of multiple discrimination, or are trapped in situations of domestic violence; thus my resolve to legislate in the field of equality, promote the ratification of human rights instruments and raise the protection that applies for the more vulnerable members of our societies.

I fully respect the fundamental values on which we have built Europe: human dignity and human rights, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law. I will neither seek nor take instructions from any entity. My aim is to consider all interests at stake, irrespective of any national, regional, professional or personal origin. I will work towards the full implementation of the political priorities set out by our President-elect.

In my role as Minister, I worked collaboratively with parliamentarians, civil society, social partners and affected individuals to deliver legislative and policy measures that enhance equality for all without exception. I will refer to this experience and adapt my approach in line with the exigencies of the work at European level.

If I am confirmed as Commissioner, I will have the honour of being tasked with the portfolio dealing with Equality. We have an obligation to mainstream and to promote gender equality in the EU and in all Commission actions, stemming from Article 8 TFEU. The Treaty provides a strong mandate and represents a political commitment that I will make the most of as Commissioner for gender equality issues.

President-elect von der Leyen has put gender equality high on her agenda and committed to lead by example by forming a gender-balanced College. She tasked me with the formulation and presentation of the next EU Strategy on Gender Equality, which presents an opportunity to further develop the concept and application of gender mainstreaming across EU policies. A strengthened application of gender mainstreaming in policy-making makes better use of resources, makes policy more efficient, supports sustainable development and creates fairer societies. In view of this, if confirmed as Commissioner, I will work closely with my Colleagues to extend the mainstreaming of gender as far and wide as possible to ensure real impact on the ground.

I will work constructively with the President and fellow Commissioners. I shall maintain the dialogue with Members of the European Parliament, listen to civil society and social partners, and conduct public consultations as appropriate throughout my term. Additionally, I will engage in a dialogue with Member States to help better coordinate the work that is taking place at the European level and the Member State level.

I commit to comply without fail, as soon as I am appointed, with the Treaty obligations on independence, transparency, impartiality and availability, as defined in Article 17(3) TEU and in Article 245 TFEU, and the obligation of professional secrecy in Article 339 TFEU.

I commit to avoid any position or situation that could put in question my independence, impartiality and availability to the Commission and to inform the President of the Commission of any situation that might involve a conflict of interests in the performance of my official duties.

I fully support our commitment to transparency set out in the political guidelines by the President-elect. I commit to making public all the contacts and meetings I hold with

professional organisations or self-employed individuals on any matter relating to EU policymaking and implementation in accordance with the Commission's rules.

2. Management of the portfolio and cooperation with the European Parliament

How would you assess your role as a Member of the College of Commissioners? In what respect would you consider yourself responsible and accountable to the Parliament for your actions and for those of your departments?

What specific commitments are you prepared to make in terms of enhanced transparency, increased cooperation and effective follow-up to Parliament's positions and requests for legislative initiatives? In relation to planned initiatives or ongoing procedures, are you ready to provide Parliament with information and documents on an equal footing with the Council?

If confirmed as Commissioner for Equality, I will take full political responsibility for the activities in the area of Equality, as set out in the Political Guidelines and my Mission Letter. My task over the next five years will be to strengthen Europe's commitment to inclusion and equality in all of its senses, irrespective of sex, racial or ethnic origin, age, disability, sexual orientation, or religion or belief. In addition to my role in integrating the gender perspective, I will lead the fight against all types of discrimination, notably by trying to find a way forward on the proposed horizontal anti-discrimination directive and if necessary by proposing new anti-discrimination legislation. I will be in charge of the EU's implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability. I will work with Member States to proceed on the Women on Boards Directive and ensure the Work-Life Balance Directive is fully implemented. Other important issues will be the fight on violence against women and gender-based violence, the empowerment of women and girls, and ensuring coherence in our external and internal policies in that respect.

I attach great importance to the principle of collegiality and will collaborate fully with other Members of the College. I will closely involve my fellow Colleagues in the development and implementation of policy initiatives, as equality will be mainstreamed across everyone's work.

Engagement with the European Parliament is of paramount importance to me. As a parliamentarian for over 20 years, I fully appreciate how important it is to have parliamentary scrutiny of all political processes. Parliamentarians are representatives of the people whose living standards it is our job to improve. I will work with Parliament and relevant committees at all stages of both the policy-making process and the political dialogue.

Effective inter-institutional cooperation is essential for the EU's system to work, and for the efficiency and legitimacy of the EU decision-making system. It relies on guiding principles that I am fully committed to follow. These principles include openness, mutual trust, efficiency, and regular exchange of information. The President-elect's Political Guidelines and Mission Letters fully reflect these principles and stress the intention to reinforce the special relationship between the European Parliament and the Commission. If confirmed as Commissioner, I will work towards this objective, and in so doing I will fully respect the provisions of the 2010 Framework Agreement on relations between the European Parliament and the Commission and the 2016 Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making. I will

manage my interactions with Parliament in an open, transparent and constructive way, to build a relationship of mutual trust.

In line with the President-elect's Political Guidelines, I will make myself available as much as possible to take part in the relevant plenary sessions, committee meetings and triologue discussions. I will ensure that parliamentary committees are involved in any major developments under my responsibility.

I will interact with the Parliament on the basis of the principles of loyalty, trust, transparency, a two-way flow of information, and mutual assistance. Specifically, I will maintain a regular flow of information with the Chairs of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL), the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) and the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) as well as other relevant parliamentary Committees, and have an open two-way communication policy with Members of the European Parliament. I will also ensure that the European Parliament is regularly briefed, notably before major events and at key stages of international negotiations in areas under my responsibility. In following up on Parliament's positions, I will also ensure the questions from Members of the European Parliament to the Commission that come under my responsibility are answered swiftly and accurately.

The President-elect's Political Guidelines stress that in order to regain citizens' faith in the Union, our institutions should be open and beyond reproach on transparency issues. Strengthening inter-institutional cooperation by promoting legitimacy and accountability will boost the EU's efficiency and good governance. I am therefore fully committed to implementing the wide-ranging provisions on transparency and the flow of information in the Framework Agreement on relations between the European Parliament and the Commission and the Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making.

The President-elect von der Leyen supports a right of initiative for the European Parliament. She committed that her Commission will follow-up on Parliamentary resolutions adopted by a majority of its members with a legislative act, in full respect of proportionality, subsidiarity and better law-making principles. I fully subscribe to this objective.

I am fully aware that the provision of information and documents is an essential aspect of deepening the partnership between the European Parliament and the Commission. I therefore commit to fully implement the relevant provisions of the Framework Agreement between the two institutions, and of the Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making.

Questions from the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality

3. During the previous term the European Commission did not issue an EU Strategy on Gender Equality, to the great dissatisfaction of the Parliament, the Member States and of this Committee in particular. Can you commit to issuing as soon as possible and not later than within the first 100 days, a fully-fledged and binding EU Strategy on Gender Equality in the form of a Commission Communication for the years to come? Which priority areas are you planning to include in it? How do you envisage the way of cooperating with the FEMM Committee when drafting and implementing it during the next term?

If confirmed, I commit to issue the comprehensive EU Strategy on Gender Equality set out in the Political Guidelines as soon as possible, and will discuss with President-elect von der Leyen on the exact timing of the adoption by the Commission.

Key elements to be considered for the Gender Equality Strategy include tackling violence against women and gender based violence, pay transparency and the gender pay and pensions gap, gender balance on company boards, work-life balance and the role of both sexes in the attainment of gender equality. The public consultation which took place earlier this year identified other possible areas such as the tackling of gender stereotypes, addressing online gender-based violence and the inclusion of the gender perspective in the field of artificial intelligence. The Strategy should have an intersectional approach to cover women and men in all their diversity. It should also look forward to possible new legislative proposals, as well as incisive policy measures and awareness-raising actions.

The new Strategy will present an opportunity to further develop the concept and application of gender mainstreaming across EU policies, both internally and externally. We should not miss this opportunity. I am looking forward to working closely with the Vice-President for Protecting our European Way of Life to make this an important theme and will count on the support of my fellow Commissioners to make gender mainstreaming a reality. I will also count on the Task Force for Equality that will be set up for the integration of the principle of equality in EU policies and processes.

I want the EU to have a Strategy that is ambitious, inclusive, comprehensive and targeted at the real needs of EU citizens. I look forward to early contact with the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality and would like to follow this up with structured co-operation.

I believe that we also need to communicate both within and outside the EU on these issues. For example, we could discuss the EU approach in a dedicated side-event at the meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women, marking the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action. I hope that Members of the European Parliament could also be present.

4. The elimination of violence against women and girls has always been a priority for FEMM as this phenomenon is a plague all around Europe and the World. A broad EU accession to the entirety of the Istanbul Convention is of the utmost importance to us. What concrete actions do you intend to take in order to get to the EU accession and to the ratification by all Member States? What are your legislative and non-legislative proposals to tackle in particular cyber violence and revenge pornography, which is so widespread namely against women and girls? What are your concrete plans with a view to establishing a European legislative act to fight violence against women? Which other measures against violence against women are you going to take in line with the commitments made by the President-elect in her agenda for Europe?

In line with the President-elect's Political Guidelines, the EU's accession to the Istanbul Convention should remain a key priority for the Commission. I have been mandated to finalise the ongoing accession process and I will do my utmost to achieve that goal.

I welcome the strong support by the European Parliament to the EU accession to the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention on combatting violence against women and domestic violence. The Istanbul Convention provides a common European framework for the efforts of the EU and its Member States in combatting violence against women and domestic violence. We can achieve more by taking action within a joint European framework than with the Member States acting individually.

In order to finalise the accession process, I will actively engage with the European Parliament, successive Council Presidencies and the Member States to find ways out of the deadlock. We also need to bring all Member States together with relevant civil society organisations to reflect the urgent need to step up the EU's actions on combatting violence against women and gender-based violence. I look forward to the opinion of the European Court of Justice, following the request of the European Parliament.

Aside from this institutional process, I intend to find ways to enhance support for victims of violence against women and domestic violence. If the accession remains blocked in the Council, I will explore proposals on minimum standards regarding the definition of certain types of violence, and strengthening the Victims' Rights Directive. I will also follow up on the Political Guidelines on adding violence against women to the list of EU crimes defined in the Treaty.

I think it is essential to address one rapidly emerging form of gender-based violence: illegal online violence and harmful online behaviour against women, including revenge pornography. Access to the internet is fast becoming a necessity for socio-economic well-being and a platform for societal and political dialogue. We cannot let online violence and harmful online behaviours silence women and girls and limit their participation in society. As part of the broader EU policy against hate speech and illegal online content, we need to look at what more we can do to ensure that digital public space is a safe, violence-free and empowering place, including for women and girls.

I will build on the existing Commission dialogue with social media platforms and non-governmental organisations concerning how voluntary-based cooperation can help in flagging and taking down harmful online content, as well as in ensuring decisive action against illegal content. Many forms of online violence have been criminalised already or otherwise prohibited in the Member States. More information is needed on the applicable legal provisions in the Member States and on the different forms of online violence they cover. We need to look at how to clarify these issues, while fully respecting fundamental rights and in particular the freedom of speech. This growing injustice is a major concern for me, and I will work with the Vice-Presidents in charge of Europe fit for the Digital Age and Values and Transparency to make a difference.

5. Women's economic empowerment: The Commission proposal for a directive on "Women on Boards" is regrettably stuck in Council, despite a constructive first reading in Parliament and a strong political effort during the past years. In the meantime, different Member States have changed their position of opposing this Directive. What are your plans in order to overcome the political obstacles and reach in the short term a more balanced representation of women in economic decision making? Which concrete actions are you going to take to unblock the situation in the Council and relaunch this Directive by all political means available? The gender pay and (subsequently) pension

gaps amount on European average to worrying figures: 16% for pay gap and 40% for pension gap. They are huge obstacles in reaching gender equality in the EU. What initiatives do you intend to take to tackle this inequity? What measure(s) do you envisage in order to fulfil the President-elect's commitment to introduce binding pay transparency measures in the first 100 days of the new Commission?

Equal representation of women in economic decision-making is an issue of equal rights and fairness. Besides, gender balance in decision-making makes economic sense.

I believe that the debates on the 2012 Commission proposal have contributed to a stronger awareness of the issue and the presence of women in companies' boardrooms has improved in some countries. Nonetheless, the pace of change remains slow and while some progress was made in recent years in some Member States, in others the situation is at a standstill or even deteriorating.

I am absolutely committed to this Directive. A majority of Member States support the initiative and an agreement is clearly within reach. I welcome the President-elect's strong support for this proposal in her Political Guidelines and, if I am confirmed, I will seek to convince the Member States to support it as well. I will be counting on the support of the European Parliament. Progress on this file is long overdue.

I also believe that the new Work-Life Balance Directive will have a positive impact on better gender balance in economic leadership. I will engage with Member States to push for full and swift implementation.

Fighting the gender pay and pension gap is 'unfinished business' and I am determined to step up this work. I believe increased pay transparency and improved legal clarity are the first necessary steps to detect gender bias and discrimination in pay structures. I want to enable companies to address pay inequality and to enable victims of discrimination to effectively seek redress. In view of this, during the first 100 days of this Commission, the Political Guidelines set out that we will table actions to introduce binding pay transparency measures. This will be a key down payment on our work, feeding into a comprehensive policy to address the gender pay gap. This means confronting persisting stereotypes, strengthening women's empowerment in decision-making, ensuring implementation and take-up of the rights in the Work-Life Balance Directive (especially by fathers), and combating the gender pension gap due to unpaid work.

We also need a change at sectoral level. The lack of women in high-paying, male-dominated professions is one of the causes of the gender pay gap. We need to enable more women to enter certain sectors and occupations, and especially address the root causes of this uneven distribution in our work force. I want to address gender stereotypes, which cause barriers to women but also to men – from seeking opportunities in sectors that may traditionally be dominated by the other sex. These stereotypes also cause unequal sharing of unpaid care work. The implementation of the Work-Life Balance Directive will be instrumental in that respect.

Since gender inequalities are socially constructed, I am confident that by addressing gender gaps in the life cycle of education, training, employment, parenthood, care, pay and pension we can accelerate progress in the EU.

6. At the very end of the European Parliament's eighth legislative term, a Directive on work-life balance for parents and carers was agreed upon by the European Parliament and the Council. While the Parliament was a strong advocate of the Directive, a certain number of Member States did not support it. As Commissioner-designate responsible, how do you see the way forward to ensure that this first legislative result of the European Pillar of Social Rights is fully implemented, and would you agree that this Directive does not only need to be implemented but also extended in scope to cover maternity leave as well as rights of self-employed workers and adoptive parents?

I am very happy that the Work-Life Balance Directive was adopted. It is a great achievement on the way to gender equality and an important step towards a Europe where both women and men are able to balance their professional and private life. This will enable women to realise their potential in the labour market, and men to have the opportunity to realise their fair share of caring responsibilities.

I will ensure that Member States implement this important Directive in their national law. We will accompany the Member States through the implementation process and provide them any guidance they need.

I think that with this Directive and the Maternity Leave Directive we provide a solid basis for work-life balance for parents and carers. Adoptive parents can also be entitled to parental leave under the new EU legislation. So as well as implementation, the key is to increase citizens' awareness of their rights, and to encourage men in particular to make use of them. It is important to deal with it as a society. For instance, I think we should encourage good practices, such as schools that tackle gender roles with regard to care, or companies in which family-friendly work practices are used by both men and women. I intend to target EU funding for such awareness-raising.

I believe that equality between self-employed women and men, as well as measures encouraging female entrepreneurship, are also crucial to fully benefit from the skills and talents of women. I intend to look carefully at the interaction of the rights envisaged in Article 18 of the Directive with family-related leave for the self-employed and adoption leave, on the occasion of the assessment of the implementation of this Directive.

7. Promoting gender equality and fighting discrimination against women must be of utmost priority for the European Union. We are therefore looking forward to the Commission's proposals for a new European Gender Strategy, including binding pay-transparency measures, which Commission President-elect Ursula von der Leyen committed to introduce during her first 100 days in office.

Which legislative measures do you envisage in order to close the gender pay and pension gap, to ensure equal pay for equal work or work of equal value at the same place and to introduce binding pay transparency measures?

Fighting the gender pay and pension gap is ‘unfinished business’ and I am determined to step up this work. I believe increased pay transparency and improved legal clarity are the first necessary steps to detect gender bias and discrimination in pay structures. I want to enable companies to address pay inequality and to enable victims of discrimination to effectively seek redress. In view of this, during the first 100 days of this Commission, the Political Guidelines set out that we will table actions to introduce binding pay transparency measures. This will be a key down payment on our work, feeding into a comprehensive policy to address the gender pay gap. This means confronting persisting stereotypes, strengthening women’s empowerment in decision-making, ensuring implementation and take-up of the rights in the Work-Life Balance Directive (especially by fathers), and combating the gender pension gap due to unpaid work.

We also need a change at sectoral level. The lack of women in high-paying, male-dominated professions is one of the causes of the gender pay gap. We need to enable more women to enter certain sectors and occupations, and especially address the root causes of this uneven distribution in our work force. I want to address gender stereotypes, which cause barriers to women but also to men – from seeking opportunities in sectors that may traditionally be dominated by the other sex. These stereotypes also cause unequal sharing of unpaid care work. The implementation of the Work-Life Balance Directive will be instrumental in that respect.

Since gender inequalities are socially constructed, I am confident that by addressing gender gaps in the life cycle of education, training, employment, parenthood, care, pay and pension we can accelerate progress in the EU.

[The above is an excerpt from the response to question number 5.]

8. We have robust provisions enshrining equality in our employment legislation, but equality cannot be limited to certain fields only and must be guaranteed to citizens in all aspects of life. Fighting against inequalities and discrimination is therefore of vital importance.

- **What concrete actions will you take as the Commissioner for Equality to unblock the anti-discrimination Directive in the Council and relaunch this Directive by all political means available?**
- **What measures do you foresee to tackle discrimination including on the basis of race, ethnic origin, religion, beliefs, disability, age, sexual orientation or gender/gender identity and multiple discrimination at the workplace and in the labour market?**
- **In line with the EU’s obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and with particular regard to the ‘Concluding Observations’, will you commit to issuing a new European Disability Strategy for the post-2020 period to realise the full implementation of the UNCRPD by the EU and all Member States, and what priority areas would you focus on in this new Strategy?**
- **Building on previous EU initiatives, what other legal instruments do you foresee to improve the social and economic situation of persons with disabilities?**

I will strive for a Union where people can flourish without any risk or fear for being discriminated. A Europe where people with unique skills, backgrounds and characteristics are

celebrated. I fully agree that equality cannot be limited to certain fields only and must be guaranteed to citizens in all aspects of life. Therefore, I am strongly committed to fill the gap in equality legislation. Since many years the Commission has been striving for the adoption of its proposal for a comprehensive horizontal Equal Treatment Directive. Thanks to the work of previous Presidencies and the Commission, technical issues have been resolved. The remaining barriers are political. I will use all my political powers to work closely with the governments to unblock the current proposal and obtain the required unanimity.

A few recent developments give hope of renewed impetus. Firstly, the adoption of the European Accessibility Act regarding persons with a disability. Secondly, the Finnish Presidency is paying particular attention to the file and will try to break the stalemate through a Policy Debate on Anti-discrimination in the EU at the 24 October 2019 Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council. I will follow this debate very closely. The output of these discussions will be key in concretising my further actions and achieving progress in the short term. In the long run, and following the recent adoption of the Commission communication on a 'More efficient decision-making in social policy'¹, I will offer my full support to strengthening our decision-making powers in this area.

As the Commissioner responsible for equality, I will continue to closely monitor the existing legislative instruments and take important policy initiatives such as those targeted on Roma inclusion and equality bodies. In order to bring about a national policy change, I will be in close dialogue with Member States, including the countries against which infringement procedures are pending. If needed, I will not hesitate to move on to the next step of those procedures and, eventually, to bring the matter before the Court of Justice of the European Union.

I will also ensure we comprehensively report on the application of the existing legislation. Our next implementation report on the Race Equality Directive and the Employment Equality Framework Directive will build on a wide consultation of Member States, civil society and all stakeholders concerned. For this next implementation report, I plan to focus strongly on the equality bodies, which are our key partners in combatting discrimination on different grounds and in various areas. Based on the results of the implementation report, I will consider options for further action in this field.

Let me stress that I fully share the view of the European Parliament, as expressed in its 2016 resolution² that legislation alone is not enough. One reason why discrimination continues is lack of awareness of existing rights and obligations. This is why I will continue the ongoing information campaign³ to raise awareness on the ground.

Moreover, I aim to continue supporting the growing movement of Diversity Charters in Europe, as they provide guidance in diversity management to thousands of companies that voluntarily decide to commit on diversity. These Charters are all part of the EU Platform of Diversity Charters, which facilitates regular exchanges between Charter representatives, publications and the organisation of High Level Events on diversity management. It is my

¹ 'More efficient decision-making in social policy: Identification of areas for an enhanced move to qualified majority voting', COM(2019) 186, 16.4.2019

² European Parliament Resolution of 15 September 2016 on application of Directive 2000/78/EC (P8_TA-PROV(2016)0360).

³ Website and leaflets available in all the EU official languages: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/EUvsDiscrimination>

aim to continue funding this platform. I will also make sure to engage the social partners, who have an important role to play in promoting diversity in the workplace.

I am honoured and fully committed to improve the situation in the EU of the approximately 100 million Europeans with disabilities. This very diverse group includes 32 million persons with severe disabilities and about 70 million persons with moderate disabilities, mostly older persons who are increasing in numbers. By 2020, one-fifth of the EU population is expected to have some form of disability. I am convinced of the urgency of our actions together with the Member States, building on the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU and on the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU.

I am fully committed to lead the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities across the EU. Improving the situation of persons with disabilities also contributes to addressing inequalities, as reflected in the European Pillar of Social Rights, as stated in principle 17.

The current instrument to implement the Convention, namely the European Disability Strategy, is coming to an end in 2020. It covers eight areas of action: accessibility, participation, equality, employment, education and training, social protection, health and external action and is currently being evaluated. Prior to launching any follow-up strategy, I will first carefully study the results of the evaluation, which we expect by mid-2020. I also want to take time to involve directly persons with disabilities and their families and to consult organisations and relevant stakeholders to set my priorities. I am convinced that this leads to higher quality results.

One very important tool in my work will be to continue ensuring that the Convention is adequately implemented in all relevant EU policies. To that end, I look forward to working closely with my fellow Commissioners to ensure that in addition to the initiatives under my responsibility, also major initiatives under their responsibility, such as legislation and budgets, adequately reflect disability matters. I will work closely with the Vice-President for Protecting the European Way of Life to this end.

Improving the social and economic situation of persons with disabilities is not only a matter of adopting new laws. It is also about making the laws that we have working effectively. I am determined to ensure that recently adopted legislation like the European Accessibility Act is implemented in a correct, ambitious and coherent manner. Member States have three years for transposition and then an additional three years to apply the Directive. I will also carefully analyse the Pilot Projects on the European Disability card and the usefulness of such card for removing barriers to the free movement of women and men with disabilities.

I am convinced that by the end of my mandate, our political commitment to a 'Union of Equality' will deliver concrete and tangible results for persons with disabilities, so they will be in a better position to enjoy the benefits that Europe brings to them.