

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT THINK TANK – TOPICAL DIGEST

July 2026

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.

Understanding EU policies for people with disabilities

Briefing by Marie Lecerf, EPRS, November 2025

At the request of Parliament's Committee on Petitions, 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 (UN CRPD). Despite significant efforts to implement the UN CRPD 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.

UNCRPD Concluding Observations in relation to the EU report, from the perspective of petitions received

In-Depth Analysis by the European Parliament's Policy Department for Citizens, Equality and Culture, November 2025

This briefing gives an overview of the concluding observations issued in March 2025 by the Committee monitoring the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It looks at those concluding observations through the experiences set out in petitions to the European Parliament, with a focus on three distinct UN CRPD articles: accessibility, education and employment.

EU strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities post-2024

'At a Glance' note by Marie Lecerf, EPRS, November 2025

The EU strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities runs until 2030. Considering persistent inequalities, the Parliament's Committee on Employment and Social Affairs has called for an updated framework for 2025-2030. On 30 October 2025, the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs adopted an own-initiative report urging the Commission to propose an updated strategy for the 2025-2030 period. The report calls for a strengthened

AccessibleEU centre, a comprehensive mid-term evaluation and the integration of disability rights into the post-2027 multiannual financial framework.

Independent living of persons with disabilities in the European Union – Research for the EMPL Committee

Study by the European Parliament's Policy Department for Transport, Employment and Social Affairs, November 2025

This report, requested by the European Parliament's Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, examines EU progress on implementing UN CRPD Article 19. It synthesises the EU's 2015 and 2025 UN CRPD reviews, assesses implications of the proposed 2028-2034 multiannual financial framework and evaluates Member States' efforts on deinstitutionalisation. Despite policy advances, institutionalisation, inadequate community-based services and lack of meaningful consultation persist. Clear definitions, a minimum dataset and CRPD-compliant investments are among the measures required to realise Article 19.

Women with disabilities

Briefing by Marie Lecerf, EPRS, July 2025

Both women and men with disabilities face inequalities because of their disability, but their experiences differ depending on their gender. Women and girls with disabilities face multifaceted discrimination due to both gender-based and disability-related barriers, affecting their access to education, employment, healthcare, and social participation. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Istanbul Convention acknowledge the intersectional discrimination faced by women with disabilities. Likewise, the EU has responded through strategies like the European disability strategy (2021-2030) and the gender equality strategy (2020-2025), which promote inclusive, gender-sensitive policies. Legislative initiatives include the 2016 European Accessibility Act, the 2019 work-life balance directive, and the 2024 directive on violence against women. The European Parliament has consistently supported the rights of women with disabilities. Since the 1980s, it has adopted various resolutions addressing their systemic marginalisation and calling for intersectional approaches in EU policymaking. The Parliament also highlights the need for targeted social, educational, and healthcare measures, reaffirming its commitment to ensuring equal rights and social participation for women with disabilities across the EU.

Updating the European strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities

'At a Glance' note by Marie Lecerf, EPRS, December 2024

The European disability rights strategy for 2021-2030 needed to be updated, since the list of initiatives published in 2021 only went up to 2025. During its December 2024 plenary session, Parliament held a debate on the new initiatives the European Commission should commit to for the 2025-2030 period.

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, 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. 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 design relevant policies in favour of persons with disabilities.

The European disability card and European parking card

Briefing by Marie Lecerf, EPRS, 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, EPRS, 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. 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.

Political participation of people with disabilities in the EU

Briefing by Marie Lecerf, EPRS, April 2024

The opportunity to be involved in political life is at the heart of what it means to live in a democracy, whether by standing for elected office, joining a political party, or following political news in the media. People with disabilities are active citizens who are keen to participate given the right opportunities. However, legal, administrative, institutional and accessibility barriers can still prevent them from taking part in elections. To nurture democratic societies in which all members 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.

The protection of vulnerable adults in cross-border situations

Briefing by Ionel Zamfir, EPRS, 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; 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. To secure ratification by all Member States but also to complement the Hague Convention, the European Commission adopted a proposal for a regulation along with a proposal for a Council decision authorising Member States to become party to the convention.

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 made 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 outlined recommendations. The 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 Committee on Petitions, discussed the impact of the cost-of-living and energy crises on the standard of living for persons with disabilities. Based on available evidence, it provided 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 Collovà and Marie Lecerf, EPRS, September 2023

This briefing provided 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 sought 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, EPRS, 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, focused specifically on equality between men and women in the employment field. The proposal reinforced the equality bodies' independence, resources and mandate.

Strengthening equality bodies throughout the EU

Briefing by Claudio Collovà and Meenakshi Fernandes, EPRS, December 2022

This briefing offered 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 sought 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 Committee on Petitions, this study examined 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 Committee on Petitions, examined 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 revealed 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.

Further reading

Creating opportunities in sport for people with disabilities
Briefing by Ivana Katsarova, EPRS, February 2021

Implementation of the Employment Equality Directive in light of the UN CRPD
Study by Irmgard Anglmayer, EPRS, December 2020

Lowering hurdles to sport for persons with disabilities
Infographic by Ivana Katsarova and Lucille Killmayer, EPRS, December 2020

Employment and disability in the European Union
Briefing by Marie Lecerf, EPRS, May 2020

Access to cultural life for people with disabilities
Briefing by Magdalena Pasikowska-Schnass, EPRS, December 2019

European Accessibility Act
Briefing by Marie Lecerf, EPRS, July 2019

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, EPRS, July 2017

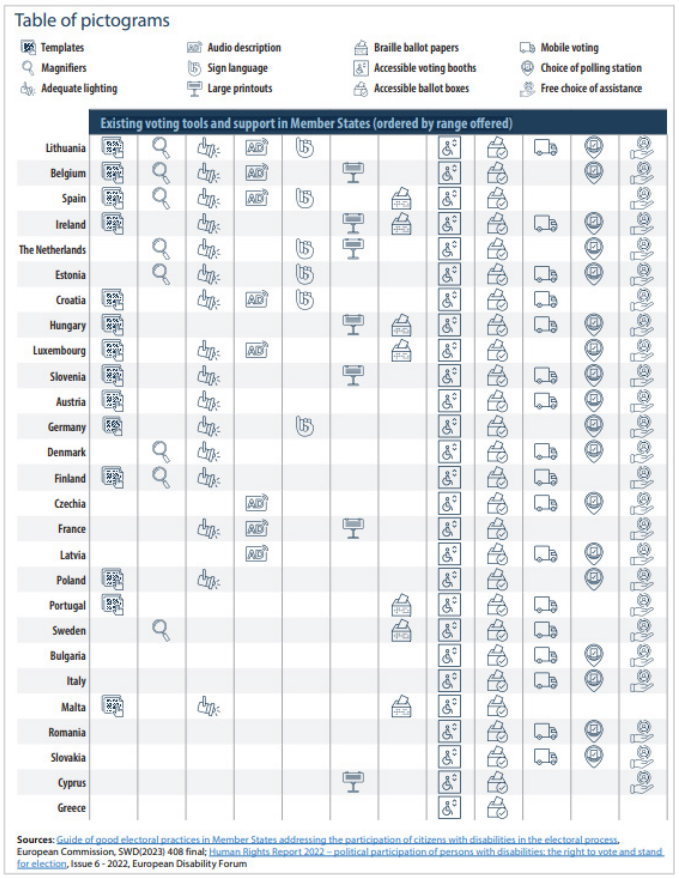
European disability policy: From defining disability to adopting a strategy
In-Depth Analysis by Marie Lecerf, EPRS, June 2017

The obligations of the EU public administration under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
In-Depth Analysis by Irmgard Anglmayer, EPRS, March 2016

EU implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
In-Depth Analysis by Irmgard Anglmayer, EPRS, February 2016

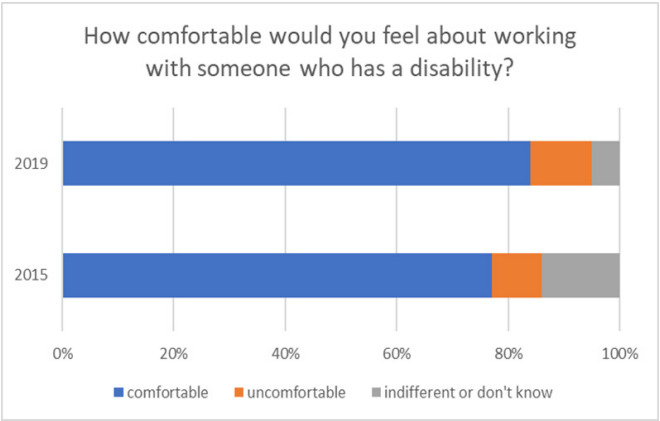
Graphics

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



Source: [People with disabilities and the European elections]
Infographic by Marie Lecerf and Samy Chahri, EPRS, 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, EPRS, December 2020.

You can access this Topical Digest at
http://www.europarl.europa.eu/EPRS/TD_Persons_with_disability.pdf
or by scanning the QR code.

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