

### Targeted measures for persons with disabilities to cope with the cost-of-living crisis <sup>1</sup>

#### ABSTRACT

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

This study was commissioned by the European Parliament's Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs at the request of the Committee on Petitions (PETI). Petitions addressed to the Committee reveal various types of difficulties encountered by persons with disabilities, not least in relation to poverty and social exclusion. There are currently 100 million persons with disabilities in the European Union, representing 15% of the total population. Data shows that **persons with disabilities more likely experience poverty or social exclusion than persons without disabilities** (in 2021, 29.7% vs 18.8%). This study brings together available knowledge that **recent crises**, like the COVID-19 pandemic, the ongoing energy crisis due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, together with rising inflation **affect persons with disabilities and their families disproportionately**.

Findings from literature show that persons with disabilities experience **many different extra costs due to disability** which can place a significant financial burden on them and their families, leading to increased risk of living in poverty. These **extra costs can be direct** (e.g., assistive devices, home adaptations), **indirect and opportunity costs** and relate to **general items**, such as food or healthcare, or to **disability-specific goods and services**.

Over the past years, the EU has adopted legislative and non-legislative instruments to support the social inclusion of persons with disabilities, and several recent initiatives (e.g., the European Green Deal or the Fitfor55 package) are also relevant for persons with disabilities and their families, as they address the issue of **energy poverty**. In initiatives that respond to the challenges posed by the recent crises, **persons with disabilities are considered under the larger category of vulnerable groups/households** (see e.g., in the case of energy poverty) and thus **remain invisible in policy efforts**. As a result of that, a risk is that their specific needs are not taken into consideration by policy makers. For instance, **policies in the area of energy efficiency** promote households to cut back on

<sup>1</sup> Full study in English:

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2023/754127/IPOL\\_STU\(2023\)754127\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2023/754127/IPOL_STU(2023)754127_EN.pdf)



energy consumption or invest in energy efficient housing and renovations as part of the energy transition. These policies may **unintendedly further marginalise persons with disabilities who have higher energy needs** and tend to have fewer financial resources or capital to invest.

Between 2020 and 2023, EU Member States introduced **ad-hoc measures that benefitted persons with disabilities and their families, either targeted or indirectly**. These measures were designed to meet their extra needs or to compensate the additional costs vulnerable groups faced due to the cost-of-living crisis. The case studies conducted for this study showed that **targeted measures need to consider the context of existing welfare instruments for persons with disabilities**. Countries with existing **targeted benefits for persons with disabilities can respond to the crises by increasing or restructuring existing benefits to compensate the additional costs** of persons with disabilities and their families. Relaxing the eligibility criteria to provide easier access to existing benefits can be another approach. On the other hand, countries with extensive pension or social assistance benefits that are available to the public, including persons with disabilities, implemented general **ad-hoc measures** that supported persons with disabilities independent of their status. These measures have provided support to vulnerable groups but **might have missed to compensate the disability-specific additional need**.

In general, both at EU- and national-level more effort is required to identify and monitor the situation of population groups such as persons with disabilities that are particularly vulnerable to the effects of cost-of-living and energy crises. There is certainly a need for collecting more systemically **disability-inclusive disaggregated data**, when measuring poverty, including energy poverty and policy outcomes. This is highly relevant for the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to ensure the **right of persons with disabilities to an adequate standard of living and their full participation in society**. To be aware of the specific needs and situation of persons with disabilities, policy makers both at EU and national levels should **closely consult and involve the representative organisations of persons with disabilities** in designing policy instruments.

## Recommendations to EU institutions

- Enhance European efforts to **monitor the situation of persons with disabilities** (and other vulnerable groups) that are particularly vulnerable to the effects of increased cost-of-living and energy crises. This includes **monitoring and evaluation of the impact of already implemented general and targeted policy responses** on persons with disabilities and their families.
- Given the disproportionate impact persons with disabilities face during the cost-of-living and energy crises, **EU policies should target persons with disabilities** who may have additional needs and increased costs. If they are only considered under the category of “vulnerable groups”, their specific needs may not be addressed or are even unintentionally penalised (e.g., energy efficiency policies may further marginalise persons with disabilities due to higher energy needs in some cases and less financial means to invest in the energy transition).
- Improve the **availability of good quality disaggregated data that are inclusive of disability**, as well as improved methodologies and indicators in the measurement of social and welfare policy outcomes such as poverty (e.g., adjusting for the extra costs arising due to disability).
- Linking to the previous point, provide funding for **an independent, EU-wide research that comprehensively assesses the extra costs of living with a disability** and evaluates the

impact of ad-hoc policy measures provided in different EU Member States to mitigate the consequences of the cost-of-living crisis.

- Monitor more closely how EU funds (e.g., ESF+) and temporary instruments (e.g., RFF) supported the **labour market inclusion of persons with disabilities**, as beneficiaries of EU financed programmes and how strengthened social services and social protection systems contributed to their independent living, including in rural areas.
- **Provide support and opportunities for exchange and mutual learning for EU Member States** on the different approaches countries chose to mitigate the impact of the cost-of-living crisis for persons with disabilities and what results different policy measures brought up to date.
- Promote the **inclusion and representation of persons with disabilities and their representative organisations** in the design and implementation of policies to ensure they address the specific needs and challenges faced by them and avoid any unintended penalisation or further marginalisation.

## Recommendations to national governments

- **Monitor closely the impact of already implemented policy responses**, as well as general or targeted ad-hoc measures on persons with disabilities and their families (along with other vulnerable groups) to ensure they provide effective protection against increased risk of poverty and social exclusion.
- In line with the recommendation of the EU Disability Strategy 2021-2030, **define measures to tackle existing gaps in social protection for persons with disabilities** to reduce persistent inequalities, including by compensating extra costs related to disability and eligibility for disability benefits. Social support benefits should not hinder but complement efforts to **improve the labour market integration of persons with disabilities** (eliminate the 'benefit trap').
- Promote the **inclusion and representation of persons with disabilities** in the design and implementation of policies.
- All four countries analysed in this study, introduced one-off payments to compensate for the rise in cost-of-living, thus providing non-recurring support to mitigate the effects of the multiple crises. However, in case of the ongoing crisis, the approach of **automatic valorisation of social benefits** might be more suitable to mitigate persistent impacts with the costs of increasing public expenditures.

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