

EESC urges the Commission to make the new strategy for disability rights far more ambitious

Top proposals include full harmonisation of the new agenda with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and strengthened EU-level supervision of its application so as to ensure freedom from discrimination for people with disabilities and their acceptance as part of human diversity and humanity throughout the EU

The European Economic and Social Committee has put forward its recommendations for the EU's **Disability Rights Agenda** for the next decade, urging the European Commission to take them into account when drawing up the strategy that is bound to affect the lives of more than a hundred million people with disabilities living in Europe.

With the EU and all Member States having signed and ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the EESC has called upon the Commission to ensure that the CRPD is addressed in its entirety in the 2020-2030 Disability Agenda.

The new strategy should also contain measures to fully implement the related UN Sustainable Development Goals and the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights, which was lacking in the Disability Strategy in force since 2010.

The EESC presented the recommendations in an [own-initiative opinion](#).

Its rapporteur, **Ioannis Vardakastanis**, said: "A lot has changed over the past ten years, meaning that the Disability Rights Agenda for the next decade must be far more ambitious than the strategy currently in place, particularly as regards monitoring and implementation, which must be substantially improved".

The EESC has put strong emphasis on ensuring that the implementation of the CRPD and of the Agenda are monitored at EU level. In the opinion, it strongly recommended that the Commission should establish "disability focal points" within all its directorates-general, agencies and EU institutions.

It was also of paramount importance to have a strong disability focal point in the Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers to support the new Equality Commissioner. An interinstitutional mechanism for the European Commission, European Parliament and the European Council to cooperate on disability should also be established. Setting up a working group on disability within the European Council would encourage this cooperation.

Sufficient human and financial resources should be provided to the current monitoring system for EU actions relating to the CRPD. The Commission should also review how EU institutions and Member States can work together to better include people with disabilities, by reviewing the existing Declaration of Competences and ratifying the Optional Protocol to the CRPD. These steps would allow for the EU to have a more decisive say when it comes to the compliance of Member States with the provisions of the CRPD.

The EESC also called for the mainstreaming of disability in all EU policies and legislation affecting the life of persons with disabilities. The Agenda should promote a society where diversity is a key value and in which the principles of non-discrimination, accessibility, participation and inclusion are fully upheld.

With more than half of all Europeans feeling that discrimination on the grounds of disability is widespread in the EU, the adoption of an anti-discrimination directive should be a priority. Such a directive should define any denial of reasonably accommodating persons with disabilities in any area of life as a form of discrimination, the EESC argued.

Free movement of persons with disabilities should be ensured by a directive that would establish common disability assessment standards in the EU. People with disabilities should be enabled to fully participate in the political life of their communities, by removing all obstacles that deprive them of their right to vote or to be politically active.

The Commission should create a European Access Board to monitor the implementation of EU laws providing for accessibility, as public spaces, buildings or transport still remain inaccessible for many persons with disabilities.

To fight the disproportionately low employment rate of persons with disabilities, the Commission should propose measures that would provide for reasonable workplace accommodations. These measures would stipulate what employers are obliged to offer and in turn what support they should get from their governments to make workplaces suitable for employees with disabilities.

To encourage the employment and training of people with disabilities, the EESC proposes a Disability Rights Guarantee, similar to the Youth Guarantee, to be agreed between Member States and EU institutions.

Benchmarks, measurable indicators and better data collection could also encourage better-targeted EU and national actions on disability rights and access.

The EESC also proposes that better use be made of the [European Semester process](#) by encouraging Member States to develop their own national disability strategies.

"We still have a long way to go to implement the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It's the EU's obligation to do so, out of duty to more than a hundred million persons with disabilities in Europe", **Mr Vardakastanis** concluded.

BACKGROUND

The current Disability Strategy, adopted in 2010, aimed to promote a barrier-free Europe and equality of persons with disabilities. Despite many improvements and achievements, such as rules setting accessibility requirements for products and services and on rights for passengers with reduced mobility, the situation remains difficult for many people in the EU living with a disability.

Figures available indicate that they still face great inequalities. The gap between non-disabled and disabled employment rates is huge, totalling 24 percentage points, and rising with more severe levels of impairment. The rate of early school leaving for people with disabilities is double that of the general population, and these people are much more likely to live in poor households.

The situation is even worse for women and marginalised groups who often experience double or multiple discrimination.

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The European Economic and Social Committee is an institutional consultative body established by the 1957 Treaty of Rome. The Committee has 350 members from across Europe, who are appointed by the Council of the European Union. It represents the various economic and social components of organised civil society. Its consultative role enables its members, and hence the organisations they represent, to participate in the EU decision-making process.