



## The EU Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030

*EuroHealthNet's contribution to the EC consultation*

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EuroHealthNet welcomes the European Commission's plans to develop the EU Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities for 2021-2030, as a contributing enabling framework for public health actors to address disability-linked health and social inequalities. The strategy also offers opportunities to strengthen the imminent Action Plan for implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, the EU's contribution to the UN Agenda 2030, the EU Green, Skills and Digital agendas.

Persons with disabilities are at a heightened risk of disadvantage and vulnerability, what significantly contributes to direct and indirect impact of their 'condition' on health, social and economic outcomes at multiple population levels. Persons with disabilities are often of older age and poor; 28.6% of them live in poverty and social exclusion, as compared to 19.1% of those without disabilities. Severe disability further increases the poverty risk to more than a third.

Poor living conditions constitute a powerful socio-economic determinant of health and inequalities in health outcomes. As highlighted briefly in this Roadmap, persons with disabilities face many challenges as concerns their health status and equal access to healthcare. Disabled people in all EU countries and in different regions in Europe are at a higher risk from most of the 'common' chronic and noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) due to a combination of higher exposure to risk factors, older age, poorer access to preventive measures and health services in general, and less capacity to deal with the social, employment, and financial consequences of the disease as confirmed by data from OECD, WHO Europe and Eurofound. Further disparities may occur in terms of informal care and peer-support required, capacity to find or return to work arrangements or need for long-term care. They may be living in institutions, being deprived of independent living. Due to their health, social and economic fragility they are more exposed to exploitation and violence, especially children and women as confirmed by the Fundamental Rights Agency studies. They also face limited accessibility to the environment, green spaces and active transport and mobility options.

Often, people with physical, mental and learning disabilities enter and stay within 'linear' and silo health and social systems which fail to address disabilities holistically considering people's complex needs and abilities. Furthermore, people living with disabilities are often defined by their impairments and disabled condition, that their other health needs don't receive timely attention. The already mentioned NCDs are an example of that, but also mental health, sexual and reproductive needs slip through the gaps.

Plans for the post-pandemic recovery and resilience of health and social care systems in Europe should furthermore fully include the rights of people with disabilities. This can be linked with the EU investments and technical support within the EU Recovery and Resilience Facility, the European Semester process, and plans for the European Health Union in the making.



Last but not least, considering the recent speed of transition and transformation of the delivery of health and care towards one that's increasingly digital and commercial, we urge stepping up investments in digital and health literacy, skills and competences needed for healthy lives.