



# Including people with disabilities

Europe's equal opportunities strategy



European Commission



## Equal opportunities for equal rights

### The European added value

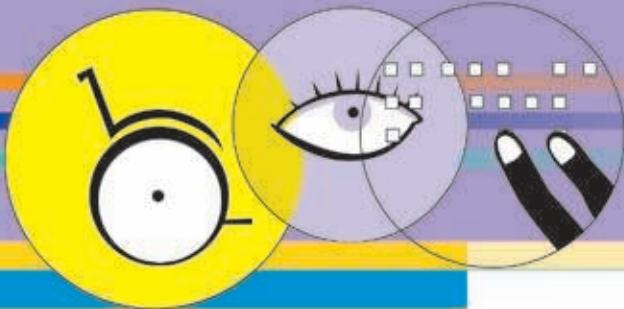
The 2003 **European Year of People with Disabilities (EYPD)**, brought together all European citizens to think about disability rights. Member States are mainly responsible for disability measures. However the EU plays a major role, complementing and enhancing national measures while creating the conditions for further progress as **European legislation and actions impact on the situation of disabled people.**

The EU seeks the active inclusion and full participation of disabled people in society, in line with **the EU human rights approach to disability issues.** Disability is a rights issue and not a matter of discretion. Furthermore, this approach is at the core of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, to which the European Community is a signatory.

### It's all about equal access to rights

As full citizens, people with disabilities have equal rights and are entitled to dignity, equal treatment, independent living and full participation in society. Enabling people with disabilities to enjoy these rights is at the centre of EU actions. As a result, **equality of opportunity underpins Europe's long-term goals on disability and empowers people with disabilities** so that they can fulfil their potential and are able to participate in society.

**The European Disability Action Plan** provides the framework to organise the mainstreaming of disability issues. It makes use of different policy instruments covering a wide range of issues which are of concern to people with disabilities. By 2010, the European Commission wants to see improvements in employment prospects, accessibility and independent living. Disabled people are involved in the decision-making process on the basis of the European principle: **'Nothing about disabled people without disabled people'**.



## Working towards full inclusion

### Facts and figures

People with disabilities represent at least **16% of the overall EU working age population.**

More than 45 million people in Europe – one in six – aged between 16 and 64 have a long-standing health problem or a disability. Among young people aged between 16 and 25, the figure stands at around 7.3%.

As people with disability usually need some form of assistance or care, there are careers and services providers responding to these needs. The service providers generate employment and benefit for the economy in providing these services.

### Finding and keeping jobs

On average **only 50% of Europeans with a disability have a job, as compared with over 68% of non-disabled people.** Disabled people are almost twice as likely to be inactive as non-disabled people. Yet, with a little more help, millions of disabled Europeans could enter or re-enter the jobs market.

The EU revised **Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs** aims in particular to improve the comparatively low work participation rates of Europe's disabled people.

Member States set their own employment policies on the basis of the **European Employment Strategy (EES) guidelines.** They report back yearly to the European Commission on national employment initiatives, including those for disability.

The **EU policy work on Social Protection and Social Inclusion** supports Member States in developing policy for social inclusion, healthcare and social services, thereby increasing the chances for disabled people to find and keep work.



## Education for all

The EU Disability Strategy emphasises **equal access to quality education and lifelong learning**. These two areas enable disabled people to participate fully in society and improve their quality of life.

The European Commission supports the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream education. It has launched several educational initiatives for disabled persons. These include the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, as well as a specific study group on disability and lifelong learning. Various Community programmes, such as Socrate and Leonardo da Vinci on vocational training, have brought the education and training of disabled people into the mainstream.

## Living independently

The EU Disability Strategy aims to provide disabled people with the same individual choices and control in their daily lives as non-disabled people. **Care and support services are to be more tailored to the specific needs of people with disabilities**. The European Commission promotes affordable, accessible and quality social services, and support through consolidated social and inclusion provisions.

The EU Disability Strategy also supports the case for the de-institutionalisation of disabled people. **The European Commission funds studies on the delivery of community-based services to ensure that disabled people receive the right levels of security, freedom and independence for community living**. Partners from the first study on large residential institutions have formed the European Coalition for Community Living.



## Legally speaking

The **Employment Directive** prohibits discrimination as well as harassment and instruction to discriminate. All employers must provide 'reasonable accommodation' for people with disabilities. Many Member States have had to substantially amend their national law to comply with employment regulations.

The **Regulation on state aid for employment** promotes the recruitment and retention of disabled workers. It enables Member States to create financial incentives for employers and provides workshops to recruit and retain them.

The **Regulation on rights of disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility when travelling by air** provides for compulsory, free-of-charge assistance and information at airports and by air carriers. No reservation can be refused on the grounds of disability except for safety reasons or insufficient size of aircraft. Air carriers and airport managers must ensure that their staff have received appropriate training to assist disabled people. Establishment of enforcement bodies and complaint

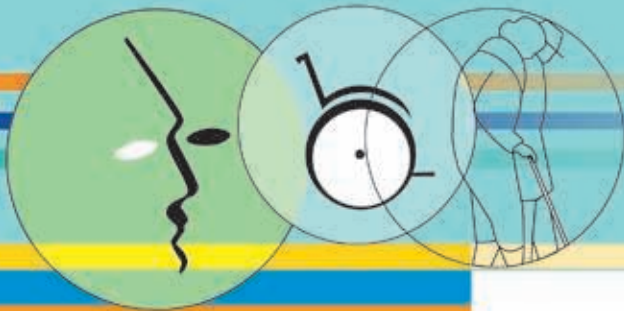
procedures are obligatory. Legislative work on passengers with disabilities in rail transport is on-going. Proposals for maritime and coach transport will follow.

Several pieces of European legislation address the concerns of people with disabilities, such as legislation in the field of **telecommunications**.

## Providing guidance

The **European Open Method of Coordination** sets the agenda and supports Member States in developing their policies within an integrated framework. It enables disability issues to be taken into consideration in employment, social inclusion and protection, pensions, health and long-term care.

Through **EU social dialogue**, social partners are encouraged to implement their recommendations for employing people with disabilities, including sectoral initiatives.



## Financial instruments

### Structural Funds

The **European Social Fund** is an important instrument to support the active inclusion of disabled people in society and the labour market. It co-finances projects that make people more employable or adapt human resources to the labour market. It has new provisions prohibiting discrimination on the grounds of disability. Accessibility for disabled people is now one of the main criteria to be used when defining operations **to be financed**. Member States are responsible for identifying their own priorities for funding and selecting projects.

### Social solidarity

Starting in 2007, several disability-related projects will be financed under the new **Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity: PROGRESS**. These projects will be crucial in working towards the EU goals for employment, social inclusion and protection, working conditions, gender equality, anti-discrimination and diversity. The new programme provides the possibility of co-funding the operating costs of European level disability NGOs.

### Pilot projects

There are 15 pilot projects under way to kick-start or facilitate disability mainstreaming in policy areas at various levels of governance and in areas such as accessible buildings, transport, regional development, and employment, including at regional and local levels.

### Other possibilities

In line with the mainstreaming principle, disability issues are part of various funding initiatives such as statistical studies; Community Framework Research Programmes, education, the 2007 European Year of Equal Opportunities for All.



## Europe's policy instruments

### The Disability Action Plan

The EU's long-term strategy for the active inclusion of disabled people revolves around the **Disability Action Plan (DAP)** and the **European Disability Strategy (2004–2010)**, with both empowering the EU to cope with an ever-changing social and economic environment. The Plan organises the actual delivery of mainstreaming of disability issues by structuring priorities in the wide range of EU policies and activities according to developments in the situation and environment of people with disabilities and new challenges.

**Mainstreaming** is at the centre of EU actions so that society as a whole recognises the needs, as well as the contribution, of people with disabilities. Mainstreaming involves analysing the relevant policy areas from the disability perspective, understanding the diverse needs of people with disabilities and taking them into account when developing policy. Various instruments are used to encourage fully integrated measures which meet the individual needs of people with disabilities and those of people without disabilities in the same way.

Mainstreaming involves constant dialogue with public authorities, social partners, private sector and disability NGOs.

The Action Plan structures priorities in EU policies and activities according to developments in the situation and environment of people with disabilities. Every two years, the European Commission issues a **report on the overall situation of people with disabilities** that provides the basis for identifying these priorities. It also guides Member States and stakeholders in their disability policies.

#### Priorities 2004–2005

- Access to, and remaining in, employment
- Education, training and youth
- New technologies in empowering people with disabilities
- Access to goods and services in the community

#### Priorities 2006–2007

- Attracting people with disability into employment
- Providing access to quality support and care services
- Fostering accessibility to goods and services



# Where can I find more information?

## Further information

[http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/disability/intro\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/disability/intro_en.html)

## Other links

- European Commission paper (2005) on disability mainstreaming in the EES:  
[http://ec.europa.eu/comm/employment\\_social/disability/emco010705\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/comm/employment_social/disability/emco010705_en.pdf)
- EdeAN: [www.e-accessibility.org](http://www.e-accessibility.org)
- [http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/disability/index\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/disability/index_en.html)
- [http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/fundamental\\_rights/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/fundamental_rights/index_en.htm)

# Involving all European citizens

## The European Day of Disabled People

Every year on 3 December, the European Commission organises a conference to mark the **European Day of People with Disabilities**, in close cooperation with the **European Disability Forum (EDF)**. This date was chosen to coincide with the UN's International Day of Disabled People, set up by the United Nations in 1992.

These conferences bring together policy-makers, people with and without disabilities, stakeholders, academic experts and media, along with other actors in the field of disability. They form part of the EU's efforts to promote the mainstreaming of disability issues, as set out in its Action Plan for Equal Opportunities of People with Disabilities. They also stimulate

the exchange of good practice in areas that are crucial for the active inclusion of people with disabilities, as well as allowing networking between key players in the disability policy field.

Each year has a theme which addresses a different aspect of disability. Among those of previous years are combating violence against disabled people, design for all, education, finding and keeping jobs, living together in society, and youth.

**The findings and conclusions of these conferences feed into the European Commission's biennial reports on the overall situation of people with disabilities, bringing Europe closer to all its citizens.** These reports provide the basis for the European Commission to define priority actions for successive phases of the EU Disability Action Plan.

© European Communities, 2007 – Reproduction is authorised provided the source is acknowledged.

*Printed in Italy*

PRINTED ON WHITE CHLORINE-FREE PAPER



Publications Office

*Publications.europa.eu*