



The voice of blind and partially sighted people in Europe

A Moderately Ambitious Update of the EU Disability Rights Strategy

EBU Press Release | 7 May 2026

On 6 May the European Commission published its [Communication](#) on enhancing the EU Disability Rights Strategy up to 2030.

“It is a good thing that the Commission decided to strengthen the Strategy after remarkable progress in its delivery in the first half of the decade” said the president of the European Blind Union Tytti Matsinen. “However, together with our umbrella group the European Disability Forum, we regret that the update focuses on implementing existing legislation, already foreseen actions, and studies, preparatory work, and exchange of best practices, falling short of the new legislative and funding initiatives we called for”, she added.

Our [demands](#) remain largely unaddressed, namely: strengthening the article on accessibility in the Audiovisual Media Services Directive; deleting in the Marrakesh Treaty Directive the possibility for Member States to provide for compensation of rights holders; reviewing the Regulation on the passenger rights of persons with disabilities to uphold the right of persons with disabilities to travel without needing approval or prenotification and to travel with an assistance dog; reforming the EU electoral law to ensure accessible elections; turning the AccessibleEU resource centre into a proper agency for accessibility.

Especially disappointing is that the Commission only mentions “assessment” of the remaining gaps related to the free movement of persons with disabilities, without announcing already a proposal, complementary to the Directive establishing a European Disability Card, to address the situation of those who move their residence to another

Member State and are without access to disability benefits in the transition of competencies.

On the positive side, we welcome the announced study to assess obstacles for persons with disabilities in accessing assistive technologies and AI and to identify relevant solutions.

Also important are the announced measures to achieve higher employment rates for persons with disabilities in the open labour market, including the setting of national employment targets, ensuring reasonable accommodation and rehabilitation, and research to quantify the extra cost of living with a disability. We regret that the Strategy does not go as far as the EU Employment and Skills Guarantee the disability movement had called for. And while the incompatibility of social benefits with revenue from employment is identified among barriers to labour market participation, it does not appear in how the Commission aims to improve the implementation of the Disability Employment Package.

Together with the enhanced Disability Rights Strategy, the Commission presented the first-ever [EU Antipoverty Strategy](#), with a “comprehensive approach to eradicate poverty”. Of relevance to us is the identification of quality employment as the first way out of poverty for those who can work, combined with the adequate design of social benefits and in-work benefits. Francesca Sbianchi, Chairwoman of the EBU Advocacy Committee, said: “This resonates with the EBU analysis of a disability benefits trap in many Member States.”

Ends

The European Blind Union (EBU) is a non-governmental, non-profit making European organisation founded in 1984. It is one of the six regional bodies of the World Blind Union. It protects and promotes the interests of blind and partially sighted people in Europe. It currently operates within a network of national organisations of the visually impaired in 40 European countries.

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