

The protection of persons with disabilities through petitions: lessons learnt

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The European Parliament adopted by 579 votes to 12, with 92 abstentions, a resolution on the protection of people with disabilities, through petitions: lessons learnt.

There are currently around 87 million people with disabilities in the EU. Approximately 1 % of all petitions received each year by the Committee on Petitions relate to various disability issues. Petitions received by Parliament demonstrate the barriers faced by people with disabilities in various areas, such as access to public transport and the built environment, the use of sign languages, funding or access to education.

Given the petitions received on disability issues, the main findings of the report are as follows:

Governance and implementation

The resolution highlighted the need to raise awareness at all levels of the rights of people with disabilities enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) to protect their rights and dignity, and to promote the exchange of good practice between Member States. It encouraged the consultation and participation of disabled people's organisations at every stage leading to the adoption of measures, so that these measures do not undermine the fundamental rights of disabled people.

Parliament called on all Member States that have not yet ratified the Optional Protocol to the CRPD to do so without further delay, to designate responsible authorities to act as contact points and to establish coordination mechanisms at all administrative levels for its implementation and monitoring.

The Commission is invited to present a comprehensive and cross-cutting review of EU legislation and funding programmes to ensure full compliance with the CRPD.

Free movement

The resolution welcomed the Commission's plan to present, by the end of 2023, a proposal for a European disability card recognised in all Member States. Such a card should be compulsory in all Member States to enable people with disabilities to exercise their right to free movement in a barrier-free Europe. Parliament warmly welcomed the adoption of enhanced rail passenger rights for people with disabilities and reduced mobility.

Digitalisation

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that the entire population should be able to benefit from digital transformation, without any discrimination or exclusion. Parliament stressed the development of necessary digital skills and knowledge of AI can provide a labour market foothold for vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities. Member States are urged to develop programmes which aim to include persons with disabilities in society through sport, the arts, culture and leisure activities, and which promote their participation in the political process without any constraints.

Accessibility

Parliament called on the Commission to use the EU accessibility legislation to adopt a robust European framework for an accessible and inclusive environment with fully accessible public places and services. Full accessibility must be guaranteed in all European public places. Parliament called for concrete measures, such as public bodies providing information in sign language, braille and easy-to-read text. Sign language interpretation should be introduced for speech-based events.

Combating discrimination

Parliament pointed out that the EU needs to focus more on combatting violence (including gender-based violence) and harassment, of which people with disabilities are disproportionately the victim, and to close the employment gap between people with a disability and others. Parliament also called on the Council to move forward with a cross-cutting Anti-Discrimination Directive, currently stuck there.

Inclusive education and training

Inclusive education policies implemented in Member States are welcomed, however, the resolution called on Member States to further increase their education systems capacity to provide high-quality and accessible education to all learners by promoting specific measures and personalised support, such as accessible and tailored curricula and learning materials, accessible ICTs and appropriate digital education.

The Commission is invited to strengthen the role of the Child Guarantee by considering an award scheme for the most accessible schools, to ensure equal treatment of children with disabilities.

Lastly, Parliament called on the Commission and the Member States to invest in training professionals regarding the needs of persons with disabilities.