

Position Paper

Committee of the Regions (CoR) – Enhancing the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2021 –2030)

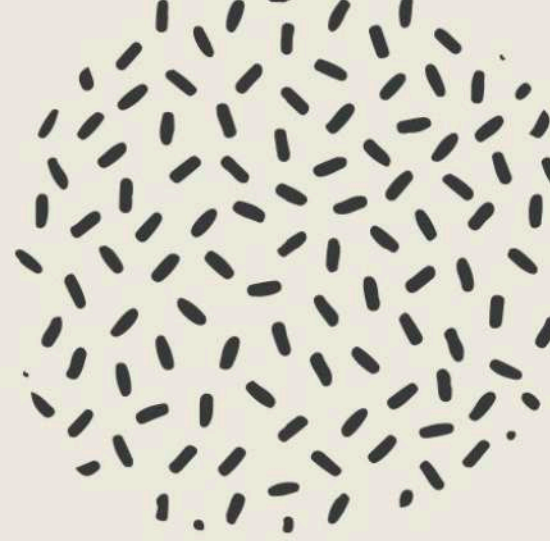
On behalf of the Maltese
delegation in the
SEDEC Commission



**Assoċjazzjoni
Kunsilli Lokali**

Local Councils' Association Malta





1. Introduction

The Maltese Delegation to the European Committee of the Regions welcomes the initiative to enhance the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030. Malta reaffirms its commitment to a rights-based and inclusive approach that ensures persons with disabilities enjoy equal opportunities, full participation in society, and independent living.

From the perspective of local and regional governance, it is essential that the enhanced Strategy translates high-level commitments into practical, measurable action at municipal and regional level, where policies directly affect people's daily lives. In this spirit, and following national-level stakeholder engagement, the Maltese Delegation presents the following priorities and recommendations.



2. Gaps and Issues Relevant for Further EU Action

2.1 Bridging the implementation gap

While the EU and Member States have adopted important commitments and frameworks, implementation remains uneven. Stronger EU action is needed to support:

- consistent application of accessibility and inclusion requirements;
- clearer monitoring and accountability mechanisms;
- practical guidance and measurable indicators that drive delivery on the ground.

2.2 Accessibility in the built environment and public space

Persistent barriers remain in streetscapes, buildings, amenities, and public transport interfaces. The EU should:

- reinforce universal design as the default standard;
- support retrofitting and accessibility upgrades, including in historic and dense urban areas;
- link EU funding more clearly to accessibility outcomes.

2.3 Digital accessibility and emerging technologies

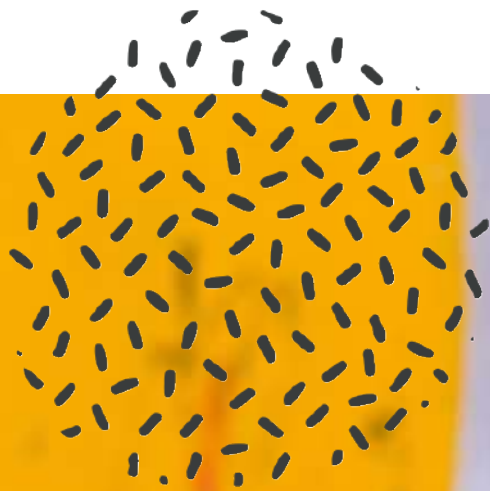
Digital transformation creates opportunities but also risks exclusion when platforms are not accessible. The EU should strengthen:

- enforcement of accessibility requirements in public digital services;
- integration of affordable assistive technologies, ensuring that accessibility solutions are not only available but financially attainable for persons with disabilities and for local and regional authorities implementing them;
- safeguards against bias and exclusion in AI systems used in public administration and service delivery.

2.4 Employment and economic participation

Persons with disabilities continue to face barriers to entering and remaining in the labour market. EU action should support:

- inclusive employment incentives and employer support measures;
- skills development pathways aligned with labour market needs;
- supported transitions to open employment and entrepreneurship initiatives.



2.5 Independent living and community-based support

Independent living must be supported through community services and inclusive environments. The EU should encourage:

- stronger community-based service models;
- initiatives that reduce isolation and promote participation in cultural, civic, and recreational life.

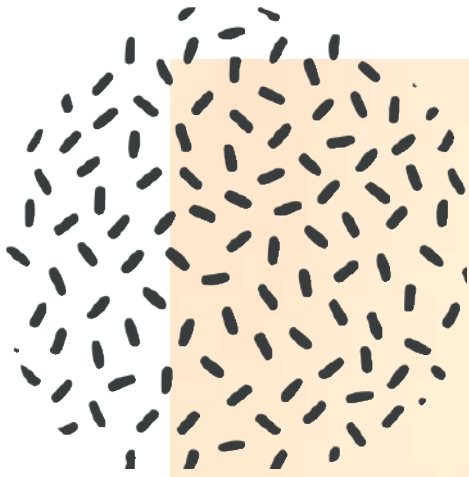
2.6 Inclusive Education and Skills Development

Access to quality, inclusive education is fundamental to employment, autonomy, and independent living. Without strong educational foundations, persons with disabilities risk leaving the education system without the necessary skills to enter the labour market or participate fully in society.

EU action should therefore support:

- strengthening inclusive education systems at all levels;
- early intervention and tailored support measures;
- improved transitions from education to employment;
- lifelong learning and reskilling opportunities aligned with labour market needs.

Education must be recognised as a structural pillar of disability inclusion policy, as it directly influences economic participation, independence, and long-term social integration.



3. Elements Relevant to the Maltese Local and Regional Context

As a small island Member State, Malta's local realities bring particular considerations:

- **High-density and historic urban areas: accessibility upgrades may require tailored solutions (pavements, junctions, public buildings, amenities, and heritage environments).**
- **Mobility and first/last-mile accessibility: accessible routes, information systems, and inclusive street design remain critical to participation.**
- **Tourism and public-facing infrastructure: accessible tourism is both a rights-based priority and an economic opportunity.**
- **Local-level data and monitoring: local authorities often need better tools and datasets to plan and prioritise accessibility interventions effectively.**

4. Suggested Actions to Promote Accessibility and Inclusive Services Across Cities and Regions

4.1 Accessibility as a cross-cutting conditionality

EU-funded projects should systematically demonstrate compliance with universal design and accessibility requirements, including accessibility impact considerations and user involvement where relevant.

4.2 Local Accessibility and Inclusion Action Plans

Cities and regions should be encouraged to adopt local disability inclusion plans aligned with EU objectives, supported through:

- measurable targets,
- clear budgeting and prioritisation,
- monitoring and reporting frameworks.

4.3 Capacity building for local authorities

Local administrations often require technical support and training. The EU could facilitate:

- toolkits and practical guidance for local implementation,
- peer-learning networks between municipalities and regions,
- access to technical expertise for project design and compliance.

4.4 Disability-inclusive innovation and “smart” solutions

Smart city initiatives must embed accessibility by design, including:

- accessible information systems,
- safer and more accessible crossings and way-finding,
- inclusive digital public services and reporting tools.

4.5 Inclusive emergency preparedness

Persons with disabilities can be disproportionately affected during crises. The Strategy should promote:

- disability-inclusive emergency planning,
- accessible communication protocols,
- inclusion within civil protection and local contingency planning.





5. The Role of Local Authorities in Design and Implementation

Local and regional authorities are frontline implementers of disability rights. They can contribute through:

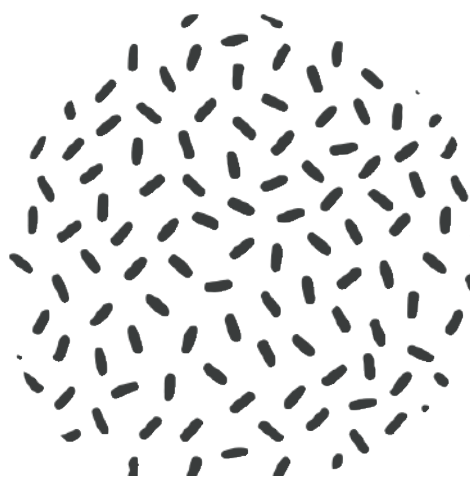
- **Participatory governance:** structured consultation and co-design with persons with disabilities and representative organisations.
- **Inclusive urban planning and permitting:** ensuring accessibility is embedded in public works, maintenance, development control, and public realm design.
- **Inclusive service delivery:** integrating accessibility and reasonable accommodation across municipal services, amenities, and community programmes.
- **Awareness and cultural change:** community engagement, education, and local campaigns that promote inclusion and respect.
- **Monitoring and feedback mechanisms:** accessible complaint/reporting systems and community feedback loops to identify barriers and prioritise interventions.



6. Island and Small-State Perspective

Malta's compact territorial context enables close engagement between residents and local authorities and supports integrated, community-based approaches. At the same time, spatial constraints and historic built environments require adaptable implementation approaches.

EU tools, benchmarks, and funding mechanisms should reflect territorial diversity, including the realities of islands and small states, to ensure fairness and practicality in implementation.



7. Conclusion

The Maltese Delegation strongly supports the reinforcement of the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities up to 2030. The next phase must move decisively from commitment to delivery through:

- stronger local and regional implementation capacity;
- adequate financial and technical support;
- accessibility as a default standard across policies and investments;
- improved monitoring, accountability, and transparency;
- meaningful participation of persons with disabilities at every stage of policy-making.

Disability rights are fundamental to democratic participation, social cohesion, and sustainable local development. The European Union must ensure that accessibility becomes the rule, not the exception, across all territories — including small and island states.





Acknowledgement Note

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