Mobility and inclusion of people with disabilities and the European disability strategy 2010-2020

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PURPOSE: to present a European Disability Strategy 2010-2020.

BACKGROUND: **one in six people in the European Union (EU) has a disability** that ranges from mild to severe making around 80 million who are often prevented from taking part fully in society and the economy because of environmental and attitudinal barriers. Over a third of people aged over 75 have disabilities that restrict them to some extent, and over 20% are considerably restricted. Furthermore, these numbers are set to rise as the EU's population ages.

The EU and its Member States have a strong mandate to improve the social and economic situation of people with disabilities.

The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU states that 'the EU recognises and respects the right of persons with disabilities to benefit from measures designed to ensure their independence, social and occupational integration and participation in the life of the community.' In addition, it prohibits any discrimination on the basis of disability;

The Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU) requires the Union to combat discrimination based on disability when defining and implementing its policies and activities (Article 10) and gives it the power to adopt legislation to address such discrimination (Article 19);

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the first legally-binding international human rights instrument to which the EU and its Member States are parties, will soon apply throughout the EU.

Full economic and social participation of people with disabilities is essential if the EU's Europe 2020 strategy is to succeed in creating smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

The economic downturn has had an adverse impact on the situation of people with disabilities, making it all the more urgent to act.

CONTENT: this Strategy is intended to harness the combined potential of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and the UN Convention, and to make full use of Europe 2020 and its instruments.

This Strategy **identifies actions at EU level to supplement national ones** and aims to empower people with disabilities so that they can enjoy their full rights, and benefit fully from participating in society and in the European economy, notably through the Single market.

The Commission has identified **eight main areas for action.** For each area, key actions are identified, with the overarching EU-level objectives.

(1) Accessibility: the aim is to ensure accessibility to goods, services including public services and assistive devices for people with disabilities. Following further consultations with Member States and

other stakeholders, the Commission will consider whether to propose a 'European Accessibility Act' by 2012. This could include developing specific standards for particular sectors to substantially improve the proper functioning of the internal market for accessible products and services.

(2) Participation: there are still many obstacles preventing people with disabilities from fully exercising their fundamental rights - including their Union citizenship rights - and limiting their participation in society on an equal basis with others. The Commission will work to: (i) overcome the obstacles to exercising their rights as individuals, consumers, students, economic and political actors; (ii) tackle the problems related to intra-EU mobility and facilitate and promote the use of the **European model of disability parking card**; (iii) promote the transition from institutional to community-based care ; (iv) improve the accessibility of sports, leisure, cultural and recreational organisations, activities, events, venues, goods and services including audiovisual ones;

(3) Equality: the Commission will promote the equal treatment of people with disabilities through a two-pronged approach. This will involve using existing EU legislation to provide protection from discrimination, and implementing an active policy to combat discrimination and promote equal opportunities in EU policies. The overall aim being to eradicate discrimination on grounds of disability in the EU.

(4) Employment: the rate of employment for people with disabilities is only around 50%. To achieve the EU's growth targets, more people with disabilities need to be in paid employment on the open labour market. The Commission will provide Member States with analysis, political guidance, information exchange and other support. It will also address the issue of self employment and quality jobs, including aspects such as working conditions and career advancement, with the involvement of the social partners.

(5) Education and training: in the 16-19 age group the rate of non-participation in education is 37% for considerably restricted people, and 25% for those restricted to some extent, against 17% for those not restricted.

With full respect for the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems, the Commission will support the goal of inclusive, quality education and training under the Youth on the Move initiative. EU action will support national efforts with a view to promoting inclusive education and lifelong learning for pupils and students with disabilities.

(6) Social protection: the aim is to promote decent living conditions for people with disabilities. They need to be able to benefit from social protection systems and poverty reduction programmes, disability-related assistance, public housing programmes and other enabling services, and retirement and benefit programmes. The Commission will pay attention to these issues through the European Platform against Poverty. This will include assessing the adequacy and sustainability of social protection systems and support through the European Structural Funds.

(7) Health: people with disabilities may have limited access to health services, including routine medical treatments, leading to health inequalities unrelated to their disabilities. The Commission will support policy developments for equal access to healthcare, including quality health and rehabilitation services designed for people with disabilities. EU action will support national measures to deliver accessible, non-discriminatory health services and facilities.

(8) External action: the EU and the Member States should promote the rights of people with disabilities in their external action, including EU enlargement, neighbourhood and development programmes.

EU action will support and complement national initiatives to address disability issues in dialogues with non-member countries, and where appropriate include disability and the implementation of the UN Convention taking into account the Accra commitments on aid effectiveness.

Implementation of the Strategy: this Strategy requires a joint and renewed commitment of the EU institutions and all Member States. The actions in the main areas above need to be underpinned by the following general instruments:

- **raise society's awareness** of disability issues and foster greater knowledge among people with disabilities of their rights and how to exercise them;
- optimise use of **EU funding instruments** for accessibility and non-discrimination and increase visibility of disability-relevant funding possibilities in post-2013 programmes;
- supplement the collection of **periodic disability-related statistics** with a view to monitoring the situation of persons with disabilities.

By the end of 2013, the Commission will report on progress achieved through this Strategy. his will provide an opportunity to revise the Strategy and the actions. A further report is scheduled for 2016.