

### **ANNEX III RATIONALE AND CONTEXT OF THE CALL**

The European Union (EU) disability policy is a fundamental component of its broader framework for social inclusion and human rights. Its aim is to ensure equal opportunities, accessibility, and the full participation of persons with disabilities in society. This policy is grounded in the principles of non-discrimination, equal treatment, and the promotion of social and economic inclusion, in line with the values enshrined in the EU Treaties and the European Pillar of Social Rights.

EU disability policy has evolved significantly over the decades, driven by legal, social, and economic imperatives. Initially, disability-related issues were addressed mainly through national policies, with the EU playing a complementary role. However, the adoption of the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1997 marked a turning point, as it explicitly included disability as a ground for non-discrimination in Article 13 of the Treaty establishing the European Community. This laid the foundations for a more coordinated and rights-based approach at EU level.

A milestone in EU disability policy was the adoption of the European Disability Strategy 2010–2020. This strategy provided a comprehensive framework focused on eight key areas: accessibility, participation, equality, employment, education and training, social protection, health, and external action. Its aim was to remove barriers and promote the active participation of persons with disabilities in all aspects of life. The strategy also aligned with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which the EU ratified in 2010, becoming the first regional organisation to do so. Since then, the CRPD has served as a legal and political reference for EU disability initiatives, strengthening the commitment to a rights-based approach.

Building on these advances, the European Commission launched the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030. This new strategy sets ambitious goals to further progress the rights of persons with disabilities and ensure full implementation of the CRPD across all EU policies and programmes. The strategy emphasises three main pillars:

1. **Accessibility:** Ensuring that persons with disabilities can access physical spaces, digital services, and information without barriers. The European Accessibility Act, adopted in 2019, plays a crucial role in this regard by establishing common accessibility requirements for products and services throughout the EU.
2. **Equality of rights and non-discrimination:** Strengthening the enforcement of the rights of persons with disabilities through legal and policy measures, including full implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights.
1. **Autonomy and inclusion:** Increasing social and economic participation through

specific measures in employment, education, and independent living. The strategy supports deinstitutionalisation and the development of community-based services that enable independent living.

The EU's disability policy is also supported by various funding instruments. The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), for instance, plays a key role in promoting employment and social inclusion for persons with disabilities. The EU also integrates disability considerations into its cohesion policy, ensuring that Structural Funds contribute to improving the living conditions and rights of persons with disabilities across all Member States.

Despite significant progress, challenges remain in fully implementing the rights of persons with disabilities throughout the EU. Disparities persist in employment rates, access to education, and social protection for persons with disabilities. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed and exacerbated these inequalities, highlighting the need for stronger policies to ensure resilience and inclusion in crisis responses.

Looking ahead, EU disability policy will continue to evolve to address new challenges and opportunities. Digital transformation, the green transition, and demographic changes will require adaptive and inclusive policies to ensure that persons with disabilities are not left behind. The European Commission, in collaboration with Member States, civil society organisations, and disability advocacy groups, will play a central role in monitoring and advancing these efforts.

In 2025, the EU will undergo its second review by the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which will issue recommendations to maintain momentum and further progress in implementing the CRPD. At the time of drafting this application, the European Commission had yet to develop flagship actions and initiatives for the second half of the current Disability Strategy.