A new decade of making cities disability-inclusive

Learnings from local level on implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights and looking ahead to the European Disability Strategy 2021-2030

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About this study

Acknowledgements:

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Eurocities is the network of 190 cities in 39 countries, representing 130 million people, working together to ensure a good quality of life for people. Through joint work, knowledge-sharing and coordinated Europe-wide activity, the network ensures that cities and their people are heard in Europe (www.eurocities.eu).

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Introduction

One-fifth of the EU population has some form of disability. People with disabilities face persistent challenges accessing services, local infrastructure, quality education and the labour market.[1] People with disabilities also face persistent barriers to participation in public and cultural life. To promote the inclusion of people with disabilities across the Union, the **European Disability Strategy**, as the EU's main instrument to support the implementation of **the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CPRD)**, was ratified by the EU[2] and all member states.

With the EU Disability Strategy 2010-2020 coming to an end, the EU Disability Strategy 2021-2030 is expected to strengthen all key areas of disability inclusion[3] and reinforce synergies with the **European Pillar of Social Rights** and the **UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**,[4] while taking into account new circumstances such as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on persons with disabilities.

The European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR), the UN CRPD and the SDGs cannot be implemented without strong action at local level. While the UN CRPD is a legally binding international treaty signed by state parties, the responsibility to implement it falls to all levels of government. As the closest level to citizens and communities, cities need to translate European and international commitments into concrete realities, with tangible impact on improving people's lives.

Since 2019, Eurocities has been running a campaign to engage city leaders to commit to putting the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights into action by taking tangible local measures backed by specific budgetary commitments. To date, mayors of Brno, Ljubljana, Lyon and Stuttgart have signed pledges to demonstrate a strong commitment to continue investing in the inclusion of people with disabilities.[5]

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[1] European Commission, 2017, SWD(2017) 29 final. Progress Report on the implementation of the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=16995&langId=en

[2] The European Union was the first regional organisation to ratify the UN CRPD, in 2010.

[3] The key areas are accessibility, participation, equality, employment, education and training, social protection, health, external action.

[4] Disability is specifically referenced in SDGs 4, 8, 10, 11 and 17 and interlinked with the UN CRPD in areas such as health (SDG3), gender equality (SDG5), access to justice and participation in political and public life (SDG 16).

[5] The pledges can be accessed through the Eurocities 'Inclusive cities for all' website: https://inclusivecities4all.eu/political-campaign/.

Executive summary

This report is the fifth in a series of surveys designed to collect evidence from cities concerning the implementation of the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights. This report focuses on principle 17, on the inclusion of people with disabilities, as well as the broader implementation of the UN CRPD. In this context, the report's findings offer a valuable perspective on the challenges that persist for the inclusion of people with disabilities at local level and how to address them.

In total, 22 cities were surveyed[6] across 14 EU member states. Eight of them are in Western Europe, four in the east, south and Nordic countries, and two in the Baltic states. Responses were provided by city authorities and their relevant administrative departments, which are those closest to citizens and thus have a better overview of their needs and provided support. The research methodology combines quantitative questions that provide a general overview of the challenges faced by cities and the actions taken, with qualitative questions that allow for an exploration of nuances and detailed accounts of city practices. Research was conducted between September and November 2020, so it takes into consideration the COVID-19 pandemic, the additional challenges faced by people with disabilities due to the health crisis, and city efforts to address them.

Cities are key actors in implementing the UNCRPD and principle 17 of the EPSR. They are the closest to citizens' needs and have the best tools to support them. As the report shows, cities do so by developing local strategies for the inclusion of people with disabilities and mainstreaming disability across different policy areas. Secondly, they ensure accessibility to public life and the adaptation of the built environment.

Thirdly, cities support people with disabilities in employment, often also as employers themselves, as well as in education and skills training for better inclusion in the job market. Finally, cities promote independent living by investing in community-based care and developing innovative solutions to advance deinstitutionalisation.

Based on the survey findings, the report proposes the following recommendations to boost the inclusion of people with disabilities at local level in the EU:

- Collaboration with the private sector should be strengthened, by establishing a 'European Compact' to bring private companies on board to implement the UN CRPD.

- Cities need more dedicated funding streams and specific calls for the inclusion of people with disabilities. Investments are also needed in research and innovation, with a focus on digitisation and assistive technologies.

- The EU should issue guidelines for universal design and a common framework for quality community-based services and it should foster the use of open data platforms.

- To advance the transition to independent living, investment in social infrastructure and local services should be upscaled, as should outreach and community-centred care.

- Reforms and investments should be put forward to make labour markets more inclusive and skills training more accessible. The EU initiative on minimum income should promote enabling schemes that improve the compatibility between disability benefits and active labour market integration policies.

- Supportive solutions and professional pathways for carers need to be developed, for example by developing an EU-wide qualification programme.

- Cooperation between EU, national, regional and local levels should be strengthened to support an enabling governance framework for a coherent implementation of the UN CRPD, create ownership and foster common learnings.

[6] Angers, Barcelona, Berlin, Bialystok, Bologna, Brno, Dresden, Gothenburg, Hamburg, Leipzig, Ljubljana, Malmö, Milan, Porto, Riga, Solna, Stockholm, Tallinn, Toulouse, Utrecht, Vienna, Zagreb.

Key findings

City actions

City challenges

Disability mainstreaming

City actions
- Local strategies aligned with the UN CRPD.
- Disability councils and advisory bodies.
- Awareness-raising and promoting access to and active participation in cultural life and sports.
- Information about public services and targeted counselling.
- Financial support for housing and building adaptation.

City challenges
- Lack of affordable and accessible housing.
- Insufficient human and financial resources.
- Limited accessibility of buildings, spaces and public transport.
- Insufficiently adapted communication tools.

Accessibility

City actions
- Applying principles of universal design for new buildings and building renovations.
- Open data platforms and accessibility systems.
- Transdisciplinary projects and working with schools of architecture and design.
- Introducing a special 'accessibility label'.

City challenges
- Gaps in accessibility of built environment and transport.
- Accessibility and preservation of cultural heritage.
- Accessibility of private buildings.
- Managing conflict of use.

Employment

City actions
- Job search support through person-centred counselling and partnerships with private employers.
- Financial support for employers.
- Accommodation in the work environment.
- Adaptation of education and training and increase of transition programmes.
- Quotas for public and/or private employment.

City challenges
- Lack of sufficient disaggregated data at local level.
- High unemployment rates, concentration in low-paid jobs, wage gap.
- Insufficient flexibility of education and training, little recognition of skills and difficult transition to the labour market.
- Employer discrimination.

Independent living

City actions
- Provision and running of social care services, home-care services and personal assistance.
- Support for affordable and accessible living and small group living arrangements.

City challenges
- Staff shortages and lack of qualified personnel.
- Lack of cooperation between national, regional and local levels.
- Lack of sustainable funding for community living.

Solna

Stockholm

Tallinn

Gothenburg

Riga

Malmo

Hamburg

Bialystok

Utrecht

Berlin

Leipzig

Dresden

Brno

Angers

Vienna

Toulouse

Zagreb

Milan

Ljubljana

Porto

Bologna

Barcelona
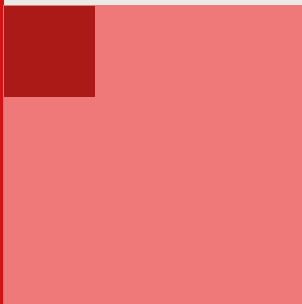
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1. Strategic approach to disability policy, mainstreaming and inclusion

Mainstreaming disability into municipal policies

Half of the cities surveyed (11 out of 22) have a **local strategy** or action plan to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities, and three others are in the process of developing one. Local strategies are a key lever to put the rights and principles of the UN CRPD into concrete practices. The local level determines the reality of life of people with disabilities in very central areas (e.g. housing, mobility, leisure). An inclusion strategy at local level is therefore indispensable to implementing the UN CRPD.

Amongst the cities that do not have such a strategy in place, five integrate disability issues into their local accessibility and/ or mobility plans. Regardless of whether they have a specific disability inclusion strategy, the surveyed cities take measures to mainstream disability in other city policies.

City practice: Leipzig's participation plan for the inclusion of people with disabilities

Leipzig started developing its strategy in 2015, with a strong participatory approach following the central principle of the UN CRPD "nothing about us without us". A 'Participation Forum' with more than 150 participants mostly with disabilities was organised to gather ideas about how to create a more inclusive city. In 2019, a second forum took place, this time gathering more than 200 people, and focusing on how to implement measures in practice. The process itself was highly inclusive; for example, sign language interpretation and easy to understand language were used throughout the second forum. Leipzig's strategy includes 115 concrete measures, which were based on extensive research. Each field of action of the strategy includes, amongst other aspects, reference to relevant UN CRPD articles and is based on evidence from past developments in the field and thorough evaluation of existing measures. A first major impact and success of the strategy was increased awareness-raising within the city administration throughout the participatory development process. Leipzig evaluates its strategy annually, and each city department is expected to report on their progress in making the abstract rights of the UNCPRD into concrete realities that meet people's needs.

Figure 1:

City measures on mainstreaming disability in local policies

A disability council (or similar body) provides ongoing policy advice	17
Disability questions are addressed across several departments and are part of an integrated policy planning	17
Specially appointed disability coordinator	10
Disability is covered by our policy department dealing with inclusion	8
Guidelines on how to mainstream disability in all policies (education, employment, housing etc)	7

Seventeen out of the 22 cities (77.3%) have a working **disability council** or a similar body that provides the municipality with policy advice, and 10 cities have appointed a specific disability coordinator. Concerning the Vienna Social Fund, for instance, whose work largely concerns the inclusion of people with disabilities, the 9,000 users of the service elect a panel consisting of 14 members, who are people with disabilities and users of the public services themselves. The panel is elected for a period of five years, during which it works with the Vienna Social Fund to evaluate existing policies, provide experience-based input, and suggest improvements to the existing framework. Seventeen cities also address **disability questions across a range of policy departments**, which allows such considerations to be an integral part of policy developments. Additionally, eight cities include the inclusion of people with disabilities in other municipal departments that deal with inclusion more broadly, and seven cities have developed guidelines on how to **mainstream** disability in different policies. Overall, 12 cities implemented at least three of the above measures, with four implementing all measures.

© City of Leipzig, day of encounter 2018, Mahmoud Dabdoub

City practice: Utrecht's municipal disability strategy

Utrecht's 2019-22 local strategy for the inclusion of people with disabilities is based on the principle 'Nothing about us without us'. A key point for the municipality when drafting the strategy was to ensure the full participation of people with disabilities in both the evaluation of the previous strategy (2012-18), and the development of the current one (2018-22). To do so, Utrecht organised meetings with organisations representing the interests of people with disabilities (DPOs) and the elderly, interviewed more than 100 residents with disabilities and consulted over 50 civil servants. The city then organised a meeting on accessibility together with Solgu, an organisation that represents persons with disabilities, which was open to any relevant stakeholder or actor interested in the matter, including individual citizens. The outcome of this meeting was later evaluated together with Utrecht citizens.

Finally, the 2018-22 local disability strategy entitled "Utrecht accessible for everyone" was drafted with three organisations representing the interests of people with physical, psychological and cognitive disabilities, under the coordination of the local councillor in charge of ensuring compliance with UN CRPD.

Challenges to disability mainstreaming in cities

Cities identified several common obstacles to disability mainstreaming into other policy areas. One of the main challenges is the provision of adequate and affordable **housing** that facilitates independent living. Ten out of 22 cities signalled this as a significant barrier. The provision of adapted and accessible housing is hampered by various factors, such as shortages in the private housing market, high rents, increased difficulties in adapting old buildings to accessibility requirements, especially those located in historical areas, or the lack of qualified care personnel. Lack of affordable housing does not only affect people with disabilities. As highlighted by a recent Eurocities report,[7] limited social housing stock, high rental prices in the housing market and challenges surrounding renovations of dwellings are fundamental problems in European cities.

Another challenge faced by cities is the lack of **resources**, both financial and human, when designing and implementing measures. Dresden, for example, mentioned that to mainstream the inclusion of people with disabilities into all areas of intervention, it is necessary to have sign language interpretation and the adequate adaptation of written texts, for which considerable financial resources are needed.

Ten cities consider **accessibility** to be one of the principal areas where more action is needed. This concerns both private spaces such as cafés, bars and shops, whose size does not always allow for the necessary adaptations, as well as in public buildings. Accessibility also needs to be considered during street or building renovation works. Dresden highlights that it is essential to incorporate a disability-sensitive perspective in all processes of city planning and urban design. To ensure that both public and private spaces are accessible, cities need to work with the private sector. However, they face difficulties in finding sufficient incentives for private companies to endorse the inclusion of people with disabilities in their practices.

Accessibility is also a challenge in public **transport**. For example, **Milan** has nearly completed the installation of elevators in underground stops and railway stations to make the entire network totally accessible. Beyond the physical environment, access to information is also a challenge for cities.

Communication tools need to be adapted, and digital technologies can serve as a great help for this, but they themselves need to be made inclusive in their use, and affordable to all.

Another impediment that transversally affects most areas of life for people with disabilities, thereby blocking their inclusion, is the underlying **wage gap and income inequalities**. This is intrinsically linked to employment and training, examined in detail below. Unemployment rates and lack of sufficient economic resources spill over to the difficulty of affording adapted housing for independent living, or technological devices that facilitate communication. It can also lead to overall worse living standards, with a negative impact on people's health.

An emerging issue is the inclusion of **migrants and especially refugees** with disabilities, who often do not have equal access to support systems and assistance services due to language and culture barriers but also due to asylum legislation, as Leipzig states. Milan points out the need to find pathways to employment for newcomers whose physical disabilities impede them from doing physical work and who have a low level of Italian.

Participation in cultural life and sports

Cities put forward a variety of actions to promote the participation in cultural life and sports of citizens with disabilities, as Hamburg puts it, 'on stage, behind the stage, and in front of the stage'. This includes facilitating access to venues via ramps, elevators and adapted toilets. For this, Tallinn has appointed a specialist in charge of reviewing all building projects and ensuring disability is at the core of their design. Ljubljana also allows public buildings to be used free of charge for events hosted by disability organisations. Another strategy is adapting the communication about the city's cultural and leisure offer. Cities also adapt the **information** provided during events, by means of audio guides, live audio descriptions or live sign language, the use of simple language, or the possibility of verbalising written online content. Additional measures include **discounts** on fares or free passes for cultural activities.

Besides working towards their participation as spectators, cities also target their inclusion as performers and artists. Below are some city examples:

- Barcelona's 'La Mercè' or 'Festa Major de Gràcia' and Zagreb's 'F=O Festival of Equal Opportunities' are rendered inclusive by inviting people with disabilities to actively shape their programmes and take part in them.

[7] Eurocities, 2020. Cities Delivering Social Rights. Access to Affordable and Social Housing and Support to Homeless People. Available at: https://eurocities.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/EUROCITIES-report-EPSR-principle-19-on-housing-and-homelessness.pdf

- Riga's 'Integrative Arts Festival' seeks to empower young people with disabilities to develop their artistic skills and self-confidence.

- In Hamburg, a project called 'ARTplus' brings artists with disabilities together with cultural institutions to increase employment opportunities in the arts sector for people with disabilities.

- Milan organises a Disability Week in tandem with the International Day of People with Disabilities, on 3 December. Various exhibitions, conferences, seminars and performances take place, which emphasise the experience of disability and offer a space for discussion and the sharing of practices. Previous Disability Weeks have attracted several thousands of participants.

With regards to **sports**, cities have adapted sports facilities, additional materials or tools that can be borrowed, as well as training sports instructors and staff at the venues to adequately cater to the needs of users with disabilities. Some cities also offer funds to sports clubs active in promoting the participation of people with disabilities. Berlin, for example, provides live audio descriptions of matches held at the Olympic Stadium. To increase accessibility, Malmö has a 'Companion Service', whereby someone who accompanies a person with disabilities to an event and helps them participate does not have to pay any fare. Cities also organise specific sports events for this purpose, such as Dresden's German-Czech year of sports for people with disabilities, which also serves as an example of European solidarity in this field. Hamburg, for example, has since 2014 a dedicated 'Inclusion and Sports Action Plan', which was initiated by the Hamburg Sports Association as well as other sports clubs and associations.

Cities' actions for awareness-raising

Cities play a key role in raising awareness amongst citizens about the challenges and experiences of people with disabilities, which serves to counter stereotypes and discrimination and promote adequate and equal treatment in daily life. The majority of the cities surveyed (19 out of 22) increased awareness of disability issues through the organisation of **targeted events**, such as the Mental Health Awareness Week in Angers. Utrecht has a specific public subsidy to support private companies who carry out such awareness-raising activities. Almost three-quarters (16 out of 22) provided disability **awareness training to municipal employees**, and 10 cities did so to the general public.

Vienna provides training on institutional violence against people with disabilities in the context of public services. Over the course of two years, 200 workshops are planned.

Other actions taken by cities include Berlin's annual €20,000 Integration Prize awarded by the municipality to companies who demonstrate outstanding efforts towards the long-term employment of people with disabilities and the creation of accessible jobs. This recognises companies for their efforts but also sheds light on the need for private businesses to work for inclusion.

Angers raises awareness amongst its youngest residents through the 'Handi'Cool' comic book, which targets children aged 7-12. It features six heroes with disabilities, in situations imagined by people with disabilities and designed by an Angevin artist. This comic book is an example of the inclusion of people with disabilities in programmes that foster inclusion, as its publication is the result of almost 40 meetings over three years. It aims to enable children to familiarise themselves with disabilities and foster social responsibility for creating an inclusive environment through small actions, such as keeping bus aisles free of book bags or other potential obstacles to children with disabilities. In all, 1,600 copies are available free of charge for distribution in schools or recreation centres, while additional copies are available for purchase by private individuals.

© Angers, "Handi'comic", author: Gérard Berthelot

City support for people with disabilities

All but one of the cities surveyed provide **financial assistance** to people with disabilities. The majority (13) provide financial aid to those without any income, and the same number complement already existing regional or national subsidies. Additionally, seven cities provide targeted financial help for specific **vulnerable groups**. In 2020, Barcelona began providing specific grants for individuals to improve their dwellings with new technologies that facilitate living for people with disabilities. Financial support is also provided for **housing and building adaptations**. Tallinn, for instance, reimburses part of the costs of housing adaptations if, as a result, the person's ability to live independently and perform daily tasks has improved, or their need for assistance in movement, hygiene operations, cooking, ensuring safety and communication is considerably reduced. Bologna is a telling example of how cities can financially support people with disabilities. The city provides financial assistance through the following:

■ Subsidising discounts for public transport and leisure events.

■ Financial support for carers and those who want to keep living in their homes.

■ Support for purchasing equipment that facilitates living at home.

■ Financial aid to cover home-to-work commutes.

■ Financial aid to businesses seeking to eliminate architectural obstacles to their employees.

■ Contributions for the purchase or adaptation of private vehicles.

■ Support for telephone and internet services.

Beyond economic aid, cities provide support to people with disabilities in a variety of ways. Firstly, they play an essential role in providing citizens with disabilities with **information and advice** about services available to them.

Some, like Barcelona, Bologna and Dresden have specialised information desks for people with disabilities, and others adapt mainstream information services to specific needs. Berlin, for instance, has a dedicated information service for barrier-free tourism, and Bologna publishes a monthly municipal newsletter addressed to residents with disabilities.

© City of Malmö

Zagreb's communication strategy includes regularly informing the media about city activities for people with disabilities, so that information is available on web portals and local TV and radio shows. It also encourages private bodies to increase their use of accessible technologies for communication. Moreover, some cities have dedicated hotlines that provide **counselling** for people with disabilities. Tallinn's 'Abitaja' project provides a telephone service for callers to receive specific information or just talk to volunteers trained in the prevention of loneliness.

Secondly, many cities provide **care** services by running residential or day-care centres, offering home-care services, supplying food and medicine to people in their homes, or providing occupational rehabilitation and companionship services. As mentioned above, housing has become a relevant aspect of the inclusion of people with disabilities. Conscious of this, Bologna has a Centre for House Adaptation (CAAD), which provides advice on how to best adapt dwellings to increase the autonomy of the elderly and people with disabilities, as well as on how to improve home care provided both by family members and external operators. The centre's team is multidisciplinary, encompassing psychotherapists, social workers, or home automation engineers, amongst others.

Most cities also provide support for **mobility**, which, beyond discounts, can take the form of reserved slots in parking spaces, providing access to restricted roads, organising special transportation or priority taxi services.

Monitoring and evaluation of disability inclusion

Almost all cities surveyed evaluate their disability inclusion policy regularly. They monitor their action plans either annually, according to other established time cycles, or as the end of the frameworks in force approaches and there is a need to design a new action plan. For example, the Swedish cities of Stockholm and Solna report every four months, whereas Utrecht reports yearly or every four years, depending on the indicators. Those which do not carry out regular evaluations plan to do so in the near future, as they are in the process of drafting an evaluation strategy. Barcelona's local institute for people with disabilities (IMPD) evaluates the Municipal Action Plan once for every four-year mandate, in addition to its Annual Activity Report. As mentioned above in this section, the majority of cities have committees, advisory bodies or steering groups in their local administration, which take part in the evaluation of inclusion measures. Eight cities include them in monitoring processes. Dresden and Utrecht organise participatory events to gather feedback and suggestions for improvement based on the experiences of citizens with disabilities.

The most common **evaluation tools** used by cities are customer satisfaction surveys, focus groups, data on the number of users who inquire about, apply for, or receive a specific service provided by the municipality, or consultations with stakeholders. Utrecht has developed a set of indicators to facilitate evaluation; for instance, the number of bus stops in the city that are accessible to people with disabilities, or the amount of real estate that is rendered accessible every year.

Impact of COVID-19 on people with disabilities in cities

COVID-19 has hit cities particularly hard and exacerbated pre-existing inequalities in our societies. It has also laid bare the critical interdependencies between human health, socio-economic inequalities and the economy. People with disabilities can be particularly affected by the pandemic and its consequences. The COVID-19 crisis has revealed the fragility of people with disabilities, who found themselves isolated, in particular due to the breakdown of home-care services in the context of the first lockdown. The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) reports that people with disabilities face particularly grave challenges due to the reduction of support services, obstacles in access to education for children with disabilities and the lack of accommodation for people with disability-specific situations in the employment context.[8]

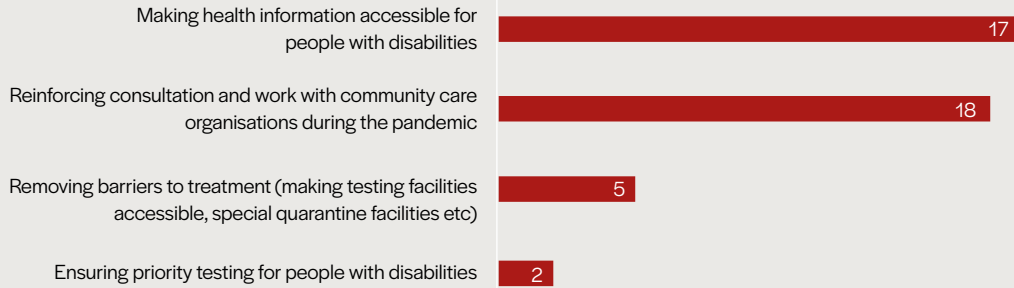Cities mentioned in particular the following challenges in the COVID-19 context:

- Working from home is not an option for some people with disabilities.

- Some people cannot use personal protective equipment (PPE) such as mouth-nose protection.

- New items related to social distancing are not accessible for people with sensorial disabilities, thus becoming new barriers: street or transport signs, partition screens at helpdesks, prioritising online channels over other channels, access to bus/underground through different doors.

- Worsening access to health and social services due to new access barriers and facility closures.

- Social exclusion and risk of isolation.

In addition, people with disabilities are disproportionately affected by poverty and social exclusion[9] across the EU and are more likely to be in poor health. People with disabilities are therefore at extremely high risk of falling through the cracks and being left behind if mitigation and recovery measures do not appropriately consider their needs in early pandemic preparedness.

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[8] FRA, 2020. Coronavirus pandemic in the EU – fundamental rights implications: focus on social rights. Available at:
https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2020-coronavirus-pandemic-eu-bulletin-november_en.pdf.
[9] Eurostat, 2020: 28.7% of the EU population with an activity limitation was at risk of poverty or social exclusion, compared with 19.2 % of those with no limitation.

Figure 2:
City measures during the COVID-19 pandemic

Measure	Value
Making health information accessible for people with disabilities	17
Reinforcing consultation and work with community care organisations during the pandemic	18
Removing barriers to treatment (making testing facilities accessible, special quarantine facilities etc)	5
Ensuring priority testing for people with disabilities	2

City measures

Article 25 of the UN CRPD enshrines the right to the highest attainable standard of health for people with disabilities, and stresses the importance of health services provision as close as possible to people's own communities. Our results show that 87% of cities in our sample took measures of making health information accessible for people with disabilities, by providing trusted public health messaging and communication tailored to their specific needs, for example through online information with sign language. Key measures include accessible communication and online information for people with visual and hearing impairments, municipality newsletters with tailored information for people with disabilities, their carers and organisations representing them, and specialised telephone helplines.

In addition, most cities have reinforced consultations and work with community care organisations during the pandemic, to ensure organisations working with people with disabilities have accurate information to pass on, and stepped up direct financial support measures to organisations working with people with disabilities. Several cities (Barcelona, Gothenburg, Leipzig, Milan, Vienna) also focused on removing barriers to treatment and testing by enhancing accessibility to testing facilities or providing special quarantine facilities. While many cities faced PPE shortages during the first wave, PPE purchasing logistics substantially improved before the second wave. For example, several cities introduced transparent face masks to make non-verbal communication easier for people affected by hearing impairments.

2. Accessibility and built environment

City actions are indispensable to delivering progress on the implementation of the UN CRPD, the EU disability strategy, and the UN SDGs. Article 9 of the UN CRPD urges States Parties to take appropriate measures to ensure access for persons with disabilities, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, transportation, information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems, and other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development not only emphasises universal access for public space, but also refers to accessibility to green spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities under SDG11. Indeed, improving accessibility to green areas is an important entry point for strengthening synergies between social inclusion and environmental protection. For instance, the Riga Sustainable Development Strategy for 2030[10] emphasises environmental accessibility and sets out requirements for accessibility to the urban environment. The European Handbook for SDG Voluntary Local Reviews[11] proposes several indicators for green public spaces, such as the measurement of the total amount of green areas in square meters and an indicator describing the share of total population that does not have green urban areas in their neighbourhood.

Accessibility is also an integral part of the EU Disability Strategy and a key area of progress in recent past years, notably through the adoption of the Accessibility Act and the Web Accessibility Directive. Concurrently, the recent evaluation of the EU Disability Strategy 2010 - 2020[12] identifies the major shortcomings of actions in accessibility with respect to the built environment. Main gaps in the previous implementation period include the scope limitations of the Accessibility Act (accessibility of the built environment is subject to voluntary adoption by member states), and incomplete actions on the standardisation mandate on accessibility to the built environment, inclusion of accessibility in curricula of architects and engineers and the inclusion of accessibility in the Lead Market Initiative for sustainable buildings.

City measures to make urban environments inclusive and accessible

Our survey results show that the majority (16 out of 22) of cities apply principles of universal design to new building environments, and 15 out of 22 cities apply them to building renovation. Public procurement is a strategic instrument to mainstream accessibility in city strategies and purchases, which local governments have at their disposal and which is used by another 15 cities from our sample. Over half of cities surveyed use open data to improve information to citizens via open data platforms and online maps covering accessibility of public places. For example, Bologna is constantly expanding the municipal open data portal to enable access to public and cultural heritage sites. The open datasets are a key outcome of the EU funded 'ROCK' project which resulted in free and easy to use tools such as the BOforAll App[13] for providing customised and differentiated routes to visitors with disabilities and ParkingBO for accessible parking. Nine cities from our sample engage in transdisciplinary planning and engage directly in joint projects with schools of architecture and design. Finally, four cities (Gothenburg, Stockholm, Porto and Toulouse) have introduced a special 'accessibility label', for instance for rental housing, to encourage accessibility in built environments early on in the planning process.

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[10] https://www.rdpad.lv/strategija/
[11] European Commission, 2020. European Handbook for SDG Voluntary Local Reviews. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/publication/eur-scientific-and-technical-research-reports/european-handbook-sdg-voluntary-local-reviews.
[12] European Commission, 2020, SWD(2020) 291 final. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/10102/2020/EN/SWD-2020-289-F1-EN-MAIN-PART-1.PDF.
[13] https://www.itcares.it/portfolio/boforall/.

Figure 3:
City measures on accessibility

Measure	Value
Applying principles of universal design to new building environments	16
Applying principles of universal design in building renovations	15
Implementing accessibility requirements in public procurement	15
Improving information to citizens via open data platforms and online maps covering accessibility of public places	13
Encouraging transdisciplinarity in planning and promoting cooperation and joint projects with schools of architechture and design	9
Introduction of an 'accessibility level' (e.g. for rental housing)	4

In addition, half of the cities surveyed indicate the use of navigation systems for people with disabilities. These include online barrier free city guides, navigation and information portals, special apps for accessible public infrastructure and special tools for people with a specific disability such as visual impairment. Tallinn has developed a new integrated accessibility information system which combines five modules:

- Objects, referring to elements of urban space such as buildings, including commercial buildings, tunnels, crossings, bus stops, etc.

- Road elements, sending information on road closures and accessibility in real time.

- Video tools, consisting of video recordings of accessible itineraries for both local and touristic use.

- Services, including information on accessible services such transport services, counselling, pharmacies, etc.

- General accessibility information, which collects accessibility news and data all over Estonia.

© Bologna, BOFor All - App

City practice: Berlin Mobility Act

The Berlin Mobility Act came into force in the summer of 2018 as an outcome of a participative process involving mobility associations, districts, competent Senate departments and Berlin Parliament representatives. Representatives of disabled and elderly persons participated in the entire legislative procedure.

The Berlin Mobility Act is a milestone in forward-thinking city mobility: the first three components describe general, cross-transport mode objectives as well as local public transport and cycle traffic. The "pedestrian traffic" section followed at the end of 2019 and the "new mobility" section in 2020.[14] Specifically, the act involves more barrier-free access and a higher quality of stay in the city, more safety on school routes, and longer green phases at traffic lights.

With the current local transport plan, Berlin is planning to introduce a multi-modal pedestrian routing, based on the results of the "m4guide – barrier-free navigation in Berlin" research project funded by the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWi). Aimed at the needs of people with motor function and sensory impairments, the routing system is to be integrated in the travel info app of the Berlin-Brandenburg transport association and transport companies. This system will enable passengers with mobility limitations to navigate independently through voice output via TalkBack and VoiceOver.

[14] https://www.berlin.de/sen/uvk/en/traffic/transport-policy/berlin-mobility-act.
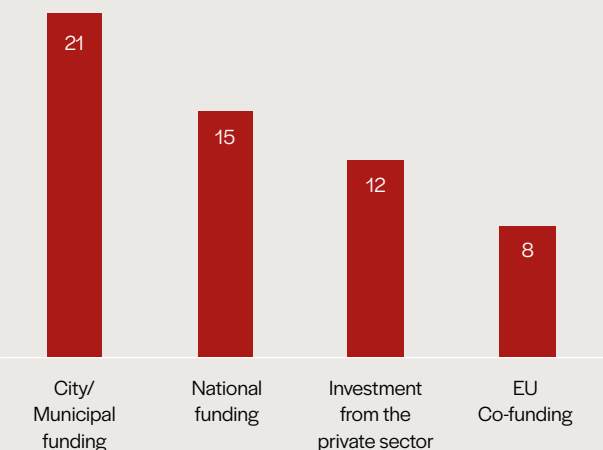
Challenges to accessibility

Accessibility of the built environment (public roads, squares, parks, public toilets and new urbanisation schemes) and accessibility to public transport (underground stop elevators, railway stations) are key areas in which over 50% of surveyed cities highlight the need for improvements. Several cities (Milan, Riga, Bologna, Zagreb) highlight key challenges in conversions and renovations of already built infrastructure, with specific focus on the preservation of cultural heritage.

A key challenge that requires concentrated action is accessibility to private buildings, including shops and restaurants. Cities point at the difficulty of enforcing standards in private facilities, which strongly correlates with the challenge linked to a lack of national regulations to prescribe accessible buildings. The latter can be understood as an important impediment to fully implement accessibility actions under the EU Disability Strategy. Managing conflict of use and balancing various needs is another area where synergies need to be reinforced and potential trade-offs mitigated in urban accessibility planning. For example, different target groups may need different measures – people with vision impairment need sharp colour contrasts which may affect negatively people with neuropsychiatric disabilities.

Financing to support accessibility measures in cities

Municipal funding is the main instrument to fund accessibility measures in cities; 14% of our respondents use it exclusively, while 27% use a combination of mainly two funding sources – national and municipal funding. In addition, investment from the private sector is a source used by more than half of surveyed cities; eight cities also use EU co-funding. The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) is the most widely used funding source. For instance, Hamburg develops districts through district cultural centres or educational and community centres, such as the ERDF-co-financed tin smelting plant. This brings together barrier-free social, leisure, educational and cultural offers and promotes the formation of social networks that enable both independence and participation in social life. Dresden is also involved in ERDF-funded Interreg programme between the state of Saxony and the Czech Republic. The majority of German cities in our sample, along with Tallinn and Bologna, used all four funding sources available.

Figure 4:
Financing of accessibility measures

21	City/ Municipal funding
15	National funding
12	Investment from the private sector
8	EU Co-funding

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Supported employment of people with disabilities: document digitisation in cooperation with Riga city municipality and organisation of people with disabilities and their friends "Apeirons".

3. Employment

The right to work for people with disabilities is enshrined in Article 27 of the UN CRPD, which includes their right to be employed on an equal basis with others, to be protected from discrimination, to freely choose their employment and make a living from it, and to work in an accessible and inclusive environment. The UN Convention also invites signatories to provide for adequate education and training and employ persons with disabilities in the public sector. The right to employment is also protected under EU law, through Article 15 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, which recognises every person's freedom to seek employment in an EU Member State, as well as Article 21, which enshrines protection from discrimination, amongst others, on the grounds of disability. Article 26 of the Charter also calls for the occupational integration of persons with disabilities. Moreover, employment is one of the eight key areas in the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020, which focuses particular attention on young people's transition from education to employment. The evaluation of the EU Disability Strategy 2010-2020 showed that 12 out of the 15 strategy actions for employment had been fully implemented, making it one of the areas with the highest implementation rates. However, the impact of these measures in increasing the participation of people with disabilities in the regular labour market is not clearly measurable, as the employment gap between people with disabilities and the general population has only slightly decreased.

Supporting the employment of people with disabilities

Cities play an essential role in promoting the employment of people with disabilities. Fifteen out of 22 cities (68%) organise, run or support **sheltered workshops** that provide a safe and adapted work environment. Additionally, 14 cities (63%) provide job counselling and **job search support**, as well as support for transitioning from sheltered workshops to the mainstream labour market. An example of this is Leipzig's 'Breakfast Included' programme, which since 2008 facilitates informal networking sessions between employers and job-seekers with disabilities. The municipality organises two breakfasts per year, each reaching about 45 job-seekers, and it offers special sessions for people with hearing impairments. Another example is Malmö's 'Make it Work' project, which started in April 2020 for a period of two years, targeting around 40 job-seekers with disabilities under the age of 30. The project involves study visits, information campaigns for employers about how to support people with disabilities in the workplace, work placements, and individualised long-term support to ensure continuity in the labour market. A joint individual plan is developed amongst all the actors involved.

Fourteen cities take action to adapt **education and vocational training** and 12 cities facilitate the transition from the educational to the employment world. For example, Malmö's curriculum for special upper secondary schools emphasises the need for educational institutions to work closely with businesses, promote students' chances to access internships or employment after graduation, and strengthen workplace-based
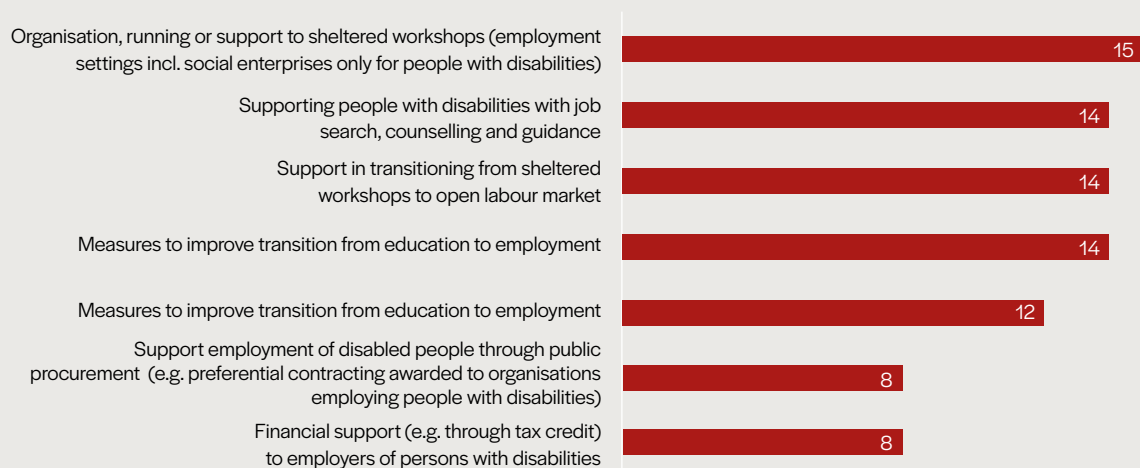
learning. The 2030 Vienna Qualification Plan offers alternative pathways to obtain qualifications for people with disabilities aged 14 to 25. This allows them to continue learning beyond compulsory schooling and includes coaching services, the possibility to take up apprenticeships, and on-the-job training.

Additionally, eight cities have clauses that support the employment of people with disabilities in public procurement and another eight provide **financial support to employers** who hire people with disabilities. Beyond economic aid, cities also work with employers to promote the incorporation of people with disabilities into their staff. Barcelona, for instance, leads a network of 11 labour inclusion services, which enables them to share best practices and engage in collective action to foster employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

Cities are increasingly making use of digital technologies to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities. Two-thirds of surveyed cities do so in order to boost the employability of people with disabilities. This is achieved through the digital matching of employers and job-seekers (Hamburg), the provision of online trainings and workshops (Utrecht), or the use of recruitment tools that are adapted to Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) (Malmö). It is noteworthy that cities with more than one million inhabitants tend to use digital technologies (80%) more than smaller cities (24%). This might be linked to funding capabilities or infrastructure.

Figure 5:
City measures to support employment for people with disabilities

Measure	Value
Organisation, running or support to sheltered workshops (employment settings incl. social enterprises only for people with disabilities)	15
Supporting people with disabilities with job search, counselling and guidance	14
Support in transitioning from sheltered workshops to open labour market	14
Measures to improve transition from education to employment	14
Measures to improve transition from education to employment	12
Support employment of disabled people through public procurement (e.g. preferential contracting awarded to organisations employing people with disabilities)	8
Financial support (e.g. through tax credit) to employers of persons with disabilities	8

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Use of digital technologies by city size

> 1M inhabitants: 20% / 80%
< 1M inhabitants: 76% / 24%

Yes
No

City practice: Porto's '(D) de Eficiência' project

In 2019-20, Porto implemented the '(D) de Eficiência' Project, aimed at fostering the employability of people with physical and intellectual disabilities. The project is based on a cross-sectoral collaboration between the Municipal Employability Promotion Division – City of jobs, the Cerebral Palsy Porto Association, the Portuguese Business Association, the Salvador Association, the Polytechnic Institute of Porto, IEFP Employment and Vocational Training Institute, Aliados Consulting and the University of Porto.

The project involves informational and awareness-raising campaigns amongst employers, with the objective of deconstructing prejudices, promoting employability skills for job seekers with disabilities, creating training and job opportunities and networking opportunities between job applicants and employers. It has so far reached nine companies and 17 job-seekers with disabilities.[15]
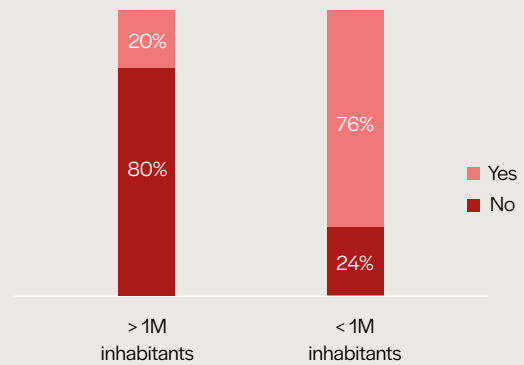
The project evaluation revealed that:

- 100% of participants consider that the training in employability skills prepared them for job interviews and that the project overall helped support their job-search;

- 85% feel more aware of their professional interests and skills;

- 77% are motivated to join the labour market;

- 85% believe the project helped them find new professional opportunities and 78% consider that it boosted their professional development.

[15] A video summary of the project is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZHUkgiq2Zg8&feature=emb_logo

Cities as employers of people with disabilities

Cities do not only support the employment of people with disabilities by promoting good practices and inclusion amongst private businesses. In their role as employers themselves, cities contribute to the job-market inclusion of people with disabilities primarily in three ways.

The majority of surveyed cities (18 cities, 81.2%) ensure a **supportive work environment** and put in place reasonable accommodations for workers with disabilities, be it in terms of infrastructure and material, or of working hours and workloads. Stockholm provides size-adaptable chairs, computer glasses, ramps, and door openers, amongst other tools, and offers the possibility of adapted working hours. Bologna trains managers and officers in municipal posts to raise awareness on the topic of disability in the workplace and make them key partners in the inclusion of employees with disabilities.

Two-thirds of surveyed cities provide person-centred support services such as counselling or mentoring programmes targeted at employees with disabilities. For example, in 2017 and 2018, Bologna implemented a programme that sought to strengthen the resilience and emotional resources of employees with disabilities.

Cities also take proactive measures to increase the diversity of their staff. Berlin, for instance, recently relaunched its online career portal, putting the focus on its responsibility to ensure equal employment opportunities. The administration seeks to hire and train more persons with disabilities, especially for traineeships.

The portal offers information about Berlin's role as an employer, both in easy-read mode and with sign language videos. Other cities focus especially on expanding opportunities for young people with disabilities. Utrecht has a targeted internship programme for young people with disabilities to work within municipal departments, and Toulouse has established partnerships with universities and other educational centres to hire people with disabilities for internships and apprenticeships.

Finally, half of the cities surveyed promote their job inclusion in public services by establishing a quota system for municipal staff. In France, for example, the minimum quota is 6%. Angers achieves 8% to 10% employment of people with disabilities. Barcelona has recently adapted its quota system, whereby 2% of job offers for municipal staff are reserved for people with cognitive disabilities, who are amongst the least represented groups. The municipality has adapted screening tests and replaced a rather theoretical exam with a competency-based evaluation. Barcelona is also developing specific plans to further support those selected once they begin working in the municipality.

Challenges to inclusive employment

Despite city actions to support the job market inclusion of people with disabilities, there are still considerable barriers. First of all, cities encounter considerable difficulties when trying to access and collect accurate data on the employment situation of people with disabilities, which hinders the adoption of evidence-based policy solutions.

Respondents that did have access to data, however, report that employment rates of people with disabilities in their cities are considerably lower than those of the overall population. Available employment rates of people with disabilities range from 31% in Riga to 48.2% in Tallinn. In Barcelona's case, the differences in employment rates between citizens with disabilities and those without any declared disability reach almost 45 percentage points.
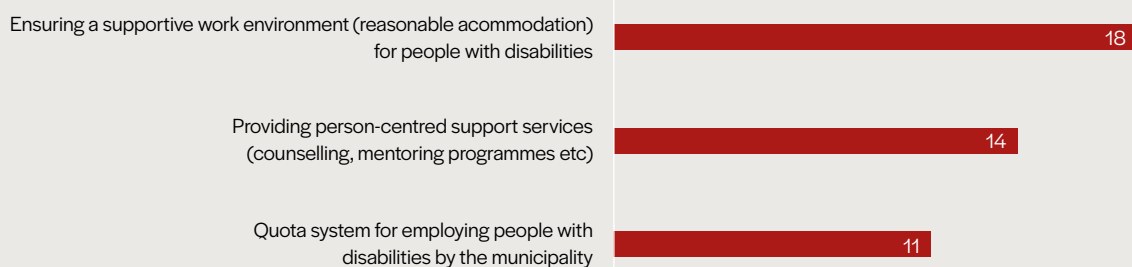
To further counter the knowledge gap about the employment of people with disabilities, Barcelona conducted a special analysis of the disability pay gap at territorial level as an evidence-based starting point to devise and fine- tune public policies designed to get people with disabilities into work and make the job market more inclusive.[16]

Zagreb has disaggregated data on unemployment based on the type of disability, which shows that those with combined disabilities find the most barriers to employment, constituting 36.4% of the total unemployed city population with disabilities, followed by those with intellectual disabilities (15.8%) and people with physical disabilities (13.9%).

Hearing impairments, visual impairments and voice-speech disorders seem to pose the least obstacles to job market inclusion (4.2%, 3.3% and 0.9% respectively). Addressing unemployment is particularly relevant, to ensure adequate income, reduce the risk of poverty, and to increase people's ability to afford adequate and adapted housing, basic necessities and other support services or equipment they might need. Moreover, the potential of insertion in the job market to foster social inclusion and personal well-being should not be underestimated.

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[16] Cotrina D. et al., 2019. The earnings of people with a disability in Barcelona, Barcelona Societat, Available at: https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/dretssocials/sites/default/files/revista-ingles/10_cotrina-costa-morera-trujillo-profunditat-23-en.pdf.

Figure 7:
Measures by cities as employers of people with disabilities

Measure	Value
Ensuring a supportive work environment (reasonable acommodation) for people with disabilities	18
Providing person-centred support services (counselling, mentoring programmes etc)	14
Quota system for employing people with disabilities by the municipality	11

Additional common trends amongst those that were able to provide information on this matter are a higher concentration in low-paid jobs, which often results in a wage gap, paired with lower prospects for upward mobility. Barcelona's study on the wage gap that was mentioned above showed that the differences in pay between people with disabilities and workers without a declared disability can be up to 25%. Additionally, cities in Sweden highlight that young people with disabilities are over-represented in their age group NEETs (those Not in Employment, Education or Training).

In German cities, alternative employment outside of the regular job market is available for people with disabilities, mostly in the form of sheltered workshops. These are designed specifically for them and meant to prepare them to transition to the regular job market. Dresden highlights that although participation in these workshops ensures some financial stability in retirement, remuneration during working life is relatively low. Berlin, for example, also has so-called 'inclusion companies', which are private enterprises that employ people with disabilities and form a bridge between sheltered workshops and the mainstream job market.

The main challenges that people with disabilities face when trying to access the labour market are shared across cities. Overall, cities regret a lack of adaptation by the job market when it comes to required skills, physical work environments, working hours, and teleworking on the grounds of disability (at least in pre-COVID-19 times). Lack of flexibility in education and training is also mentioned by cities. Often, the skills acquired are not sufficient to allow people with disabilities to enter the job market, and they are disconnected from the development and pace of the regular job market's demands. The Swedish cities of Gothenburg and Stockholm also point out that the requirement of high school diplomas or specific academic exams can constitute an additional obstacle for people whose disabilities might have prevented them from obtaining such credentials.

Porto and Hamburg echo a similar concern, reflected in the lack of flexibility in the labour market to recognise the skills and capacities of those with a disability and the sometimes strict fixation on the need for specific certificates and qualifications. In this context, Vienna places special attention to young people with disabilities, as their alleged incapacity for work is 'attested to' through premature and limited testing. Inadequate assessment of capacities results in the wrong classification of many as 'unfit for work'.

Eight cities cite employer attitudes towards job-seekers with disabilities as another important factor that might prevent their incorporation into the labour market. Besides negative attitudes, employer disinformation and stereotypical beliefs regarding their skills and capabilities affect employer readiness to hire people with disabilities. Cities highlight the need to raise awareness regarding this area and work closely with employers to address misjudgements.

Barcelona also points out that some social benefits are incompatible with being in employment, which might discourage people with disabilities from taking up jobs that could otherwise provide them with higher incomes and more opportunities for social inclusion.

# Financing to support the employment of people with disabilities

The main source of funding for measures seeking to improve the job-market inclusion of people with disabilities are national funds, to which all but one of the surveyed cities resort. This is then followed by city funding (16 cities, or 72.7%) and to a much lesser extent by EU funding (eight cities, 36.4%) and social investment from the private sector (six cities, 27.3%).

EU funds come almost exclusively from ESF, which Brno complements with Erasmus+. Berlin's 'Inkulsion Geklingt!' project, which provides companies with information and trains prospective workers with disabilities, is supported by social investment from the Chamber of Industry and Commerce.

It is worth noting that although almost three- quarters of cities use municipal funding, only 5% do so exclusively, which suggests that local budgets are far from sufficient to cover the investments required to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities. National funds alone are not enough either, as they finance the inclusion plans of less than a fifth of the cities. Most cities (36%) combine three funding sources, others two (32%). Only two cities use all the funding options the survey presented them with.

Figure 8:
Financing of employment measures
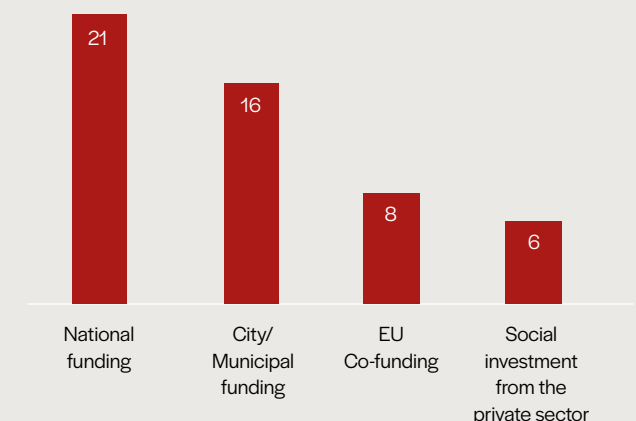
4. Independent living, deinstitutionalisation and community care

City measures to support independent living of people with disabilities

The right to live independently and be included in the community is laid down in Article 19 of the UN CRPD. The right to independent living is also protected under EU law, in particular through the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of disability (Article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU) and Article 26 which recognises 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.

The European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) represent a key instrument to invest in independent living and the transition from institutional to community-based care. The European Social Fund (ESF) is particularly important to foster opportunities for independent living and supports actions for the transition from residential/institutional care to family and community-based care, thus investing in deinstitutionalisation. The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), which succeeds the ESF under the current programming period, earmarks 25% of the Fund's total amount for social inclusion projects which need to be in line with the UN CRPD and supports measures to shift from institutional to community-based care.

Figure 9:
City measures to support independent living

Measure	Value
Organisation and support to home-care services (e.g.. personal assitance at person's home)	18
Supporting to other type of small group living arrangements	16
Independent living projects	15
Providing affordable and accessible accomodation (e.g. rental housing) with on-site support services	13
Engagement of disabled people's rep orgs in elaboration of independent living policies	12

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Cities are key actors in realising the right to independent living by organising, supporting and often running community-based care projects and associated services. Eighteen out of 22 cities (82%) are extensively involved in organising and supporting home-care services for people with disabilities. Sixteen cities provide direct support for small-group living arrangements, such as community-type independent living facilities, and a further 15 cities directly support independent living projects. For example, Hamburg provides support for private living projects where persons with disabilities live together, supported by a care service of their own choice. The number of residents in such settings varies from two to eight persons. Other examples of independent living support:

■ Zagreb allocates flats for persons with the most severe degree of disability who are also beneficiaries of social welfare assistance.

■ Vienna provides support for housing with small living units, including housing communities and inclusive flat-share co-living. Social care support is adjusted to need and ranges from high-level daily support to low-level support (visits).

■ Brno provides sheltered housing with a capacity of two to six persons in a housing unit.

■ Toulouse supports projects for inclusive housing in accessible apartments where persons with disabilities can attend social or cultural events with other people.

■ Utrecht signed a performance agreement that includes targets to be met annually, with social housing organisations providing houses for the homeless and people living in shelters with mental issues.

Finally, 12 out of 22 cities directly engage disabled people's representative organisation (DPO) in the elaboration of independent living policies.

City practice: Milan. Experimentation of the independent life model and inclusion in society of people with disabilities

Targeted at people with disabilities aged 18-64 in Milan, this pilot project provides for an independent lifestyle and inclusion of people with disabilities in society, in line with the provisions of Article 19 of the UN CPRD.

With 20 beneficiaries per year, it is implemented by the Municipality of Milan in partnership with an association and with financial support from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies (80% co-funding; the municipality finances the remaining 20%).

The preparatory phase focused on understanding how to individualise the project and personally address persons with disabilities according to their wishes and expectations, with contextual research and mapping area resources, e.g. housing, mobility, social inclusion, personal assistants.

This phase is followed by piloting independent life projects in various intervention areas provided for by the ministerial guidelines (personal assistance, self-catering, social and relational inclusion, home automation). Implemented by a multidisciplinary team of social workers, psychologists, peer consultants, and architects, the project benefitted from individualised planning and the knowledge of local resources, skills, and innovative tools needed to activate educational and socialising paths.

The project's added value is the ability to simultaneously and flexibly activate all the activities and economic resources necessary to enable independent living for people with disabilities in an integrated manner. Over time the policy's success decreases overall costs related to the care and assistance of people with disabilities.

As a pilot project it allows people with disabilities to evaluate their aspirations in practice, such as trying independent life for a short period to understand if they really want to undertake it.

As a pilot in 25 regional areas, the project is currently (2021) in the sixth year of activity.

Challenges to independent living

While cities actively design and implement measures to support independent living solutions, access to affordable and accessible housing has been cited as a key challenge by nearly half of the surveyed cities. The underlying reasons may vary according to the local context but confirm common overarching trends valid for all cities. First, the existence of independent living projects has not reached sufficient scale and coverage. In this context cities highlight investment needed for affordable apartments, housing grouping, and mobile teams to support decentralised models of inclusive living and care. Second, the situation of people with disabilities, who are among the groups most in need of housing and social services assistance, is largely exacerbated by shortcomings in housing policies and the lack of affordable housing in cities overall. Against the background of demographic trends and population ageing, with 30.3% of the European population projected to be aged 65 years or older and 13.2% projected to be aged over 80 years by 2070, the issue requires urgent attention by policymakers.

Over one-third (38%) of cities point to challenges caused by the lack of cooperation between national, regional and local governments, and by the lack of a national legal and policy framework of deinstitutionalisation. This points to potential gaps in the UN CRPD implementation, which, while ratified by all member states, hinges on a strong multilevel governance and a place-based approach which empowers local authorities to provide inclusive community-based services.
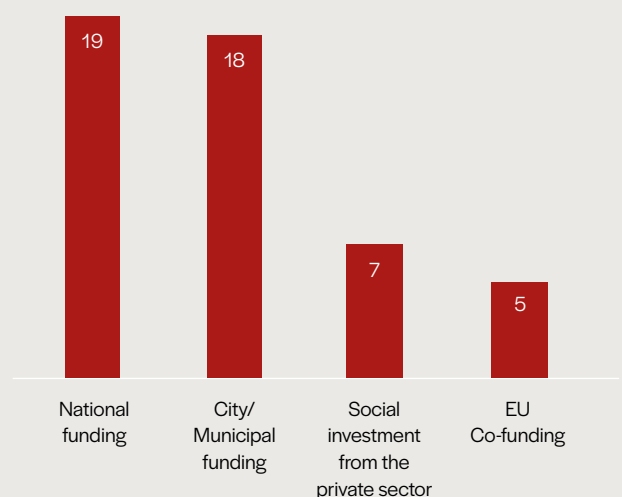
Nearly a third of cities point to an increased need to tackle staff shortages and to train and develop staff in the context of independent living settings. Several cities also highlight the challenge of ensuring sustainable funding for personal assistance to enable modern community-based service provision. Especially during the transition from institutional to community settings, continuity of such funding can pose challenges and lead to disruptions, for example due to fragmented budgets. To meet the challenge, Milan highlights the need to pool healthcare and social services budgets to better fund truly integrated services. Finally, care coordination and integration of social and health services should also be reflected in budgetary procedures.

Financing to support independent living and community-based care

The overwhelming majority of cities use a combination of national and municipal funding. This is also valid for cities where service delivery is highly decentralised, such as those in Sweden, where the cost, administration and governance of personal assistance are shared by local and national levels. Vienna, which is simultaneously a municipality and a region, mainly resorts to municipal funding. In addition, social investment from the private sector is used by seven cities – Angers, Bologna, Gothenburg, Hamburg, Leipzig, Milan and Tallinn. Milan and Tallinn are also the only cities in our sample that resort to a combination of all four funding sources. EU co-funding (mainly ESF) is used by merely five cities, which can partially be explained by a slight over-representation of Western cities in our survey.

The new programming period 2021-2027 presents cities with new opportunities to support independent living projects and the transition from institutional to community-based care. For example, Toulouse is looking for fresh ways to combine ERDF and ESF+ for inclusive residences and living labs, as well as for actions linked to tourism to make the city a "Destination for All", including people with disabilities.

Figure 10:
Financing of independent living

National funding	City/Municipal funding	Social investment from the private sector	EU Co-funding
19	18	7	5

Recommendations

Step up collaboration with the private sector on the inclusion of people with disabilities

Incentivising the private sector to promote accessible solutions, inclusion and diversity is both an economic and a social imperative. The EU should establish a 'European Compact', inspired by the UN Global Compact as an actionable framework to bring private companies of all sizes on board to implement the UN CRPD. Such an initiative should be fully integrated in the new European Disability Strategy and closely linked to the new SME strategy, the digital strategy, the European skills agenda and the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan.

Improve funding ecosystems for disability inclusion in cities

Cities highlight the need for more dedicated funding streams and specific project calls for inclusion of people with disabilities. In particular, the EU4Health programme, EU funds for migrant integration, structural funds in the area of communal housing projects and social infrastructure need to better respond to the needs of people with disabilities. More investments are also needed through EU research and innovation funding programmes, especially with respect to digitisation and assistive technologies.

Support common frameworks and open data

The EU should support the development of common frameworks, such as guidelines for infrastructure adaptation and universal design, and a framework for quality community-based services, building on the quality framework for Social Services of General Interest. Capacity building and peer-learning opportunities on how to improve information disseminated to citizens through open data should be further explored.

Support investment in social infrastructure and local services

The COVID-19 pandemic has accentuated the role of local interventions and the need to create better conditions for local engagement through targeted investments for outreach and community-centred care. Unlocking and boosting investments for social infrastructure and social care delivery to support key aspects of independent living in an integrated way is a crucial lever for the implementation of the UN CRPD.

The European Semester should be mobilised to advance a meaningful dialogue and cooperation with local authorities, accompanied by an assessment of local care needs and the inclusion of disability-disaggregated data to ensure a proper monitoring of progress in line with the European Pillar of Social Rights and UN SDGs.

Promote investments and reforms to make labour markets more inclusive and skills training more accessible

Cities are central actors in providing active employment support to people with disabilities. Further support is needed to include people with disabilities in the open labour market while improving the legal status of people working in sheltered workshops. Any future European initiative on minimum income needs to address compatibility between income and disability benefits to promote enabling schemes that offer a high level of social protection while promoting work incentives and active labour market integration policies.

Increase attractiveness and recognition of care work

Cities face an ever-increasing demand for health and social care, while the care sector is also key for job creation. Carers should be able to benefit from supportive solutions, such as training, upskilling and reskilling, including for digital tools and services. An initiative for an EU-wide qualification programme, supported by structural funds and Erasmus+, would help to harmonise requirements, offer avenues for exchange and peer-learning, and increase the attractiveness of care work.

Strengthen multilevel governance and build capacity with cities

Strengthening multilevel governance and partnerships across national, regional, and local levels is a prerequisite for successful implementation of the UN CRPD. The new EU disability strategy should foster capacity-building activities to enable its coherent implementation, while supporting cities in peer review of best practices, transferability assessment to other cities, and mutual learning of integrated strategies to foster disability inclusion across all municipal policies. Such efforts should be accompanied by a systematic evaluation of applications for the European Access City Award and creation of a database on good practices.

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