



An Roinn Gnóthaí
Eachtracha agus Trádála
Department of
Foreign Affairs and Trade

Public Consultation on the Development of the Priorities and Policy Programme for Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union 2026

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1. How to make a submission

This form contains important guidance and background information on the consultation, followed by optional guiding questions to which respondents are invited to provide responses. We ask that the response to each question is limited to a maximum of 500 words.

Respondents are welcome to submit additional information alongside the Submission Form. However, in such cases, respondents must provide a summary of the additional information under the 'Any other comments' question. This summary should also be limited to a maximum of 500 words.

We ask that, where possible, respondents frame feedback with reference to the EU Strategic Agenda 2024-2029, the legislative programme of the Council, the planned legislative proposals included in the European Commission's 2026 work programme, or the work of a relevant Council configuration.

Please submit the form via email to EUPresidency2026Consultations@dfa.ie. The deadline for receipt of submissions is Friday 12 December 2025. If you have any questions, please send your query to this same email address.

Feedback received from submissions will be considered as part of the development of Ireland's Presidency priorities and policy programme. A summary thematic report, along with all submissions received, will be published on the consultation webpage.

2. Background information

Ireland will hold the Presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU) for the eighth time from July to December 2026. This will be an opportunity for Ireland to play an important role in shaping the EU's policy and legislative agenda in a way which responds to the overall interests and needs of the Union and its Member States.

Ensuring the delivery of a successful EU Presidency will be essential for Ireland's position and influence in the EU. During the six-month EU Presidency period, Ireland will steer the agenda of the Council and its legislative and policy-making processes. Irish Ministers and officials will chair meetings of the Council and its preparatory bodies, and Ireland will represent the Council in its interactions with other EU institutions.

The Programme for Government includes a commitment to resource and deliver a successful EU Presidency in 2026. Planning for the Presidency is being led by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, in close cooperation with the Department of the Taoiseach, and with active engagement from all Government Departments.

The Council of the EU is one of the three main institutions involved in the EU decision-making process. For further background information on the Council of the EU and how the EU's legislative and policy processes operate, see the following:

- [The Council of the European Union - Consilium](#)
- [Policy, law – decision-making process | European Union](#)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

The Council of the EU is composed of representatives at Ministerial level from the governments of all EU Member States. It meets to negotiate and adopt EU laws; conclude international agreements on behalf of the EU; adopt the Union's budget; develop the EU's foreign and security policy; and coordinate Member States' policies in specific fields.

The Council meets in ten different configurations to discuss policy and legislation:

- | | |
|---|---|
| • Agriculture and Fisheries (AGRIFISH) | • Environment (ENVI) |
| • Competitiveness (COMPET) | • Employment, Social Policy, Health and |
| • Economic and Financial Affairs (ECOFIN) | Consumer Affairs (EPSCO) |

- Education, Youth, Culture and Sport (EYCS)
- Foreign Affairs (FAC)
- General Affairs (GAC)
- Justice and Home Affairs (JHA)
- Transport, Telecommunications and Energy (TTE)

THE COUNCIL PRESIDENCY

The Presidency of the Council rotates among EU Member States every six months. It is responsible for driving forward the Council's work on EU legislation, ensuring the continuity of the EU agenda, orderly legislative processes and cooperation among Member States. To do this, the Presidency must act as an honest and neutral broker.

The Presidency chairs meetings of the Council in each of its configurations (with the exception of the Foreign Affairs Council, unless trade matters are being discussed) and meetings of the Council's preparatory bodies, working parties and other committees dealing with specific policy issues. The Presidency also organises various formal and informal meetings in Brussels and Luxembourg, and in the country of the Presidency.

The Presidency represents the Council in its relations with the other EU institutions, notably the European Commission and the European Parliament. The rotating Presidency works in close coordination with the President of the European Council and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

Since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, groups of three successive Council Presidencies – known as “Trios” – work together to ensure the coherence of the Council’s agenda over an 18-month period.

3. The Presidency Policy Programme

Shortly before the start of each Presidency term, the incoming Presidency sets out its priorities and objectives for the work of the Council during its term in the form of a Presidency policy programme. This identifies the areas of focus for the work of the Council during the Presidency, and highlights the specific legislative and policy initiatives on the Council’s agenda that the Presidency will seek to progress during its term.

The Presidency programme generally has two parts. One part highlights a range of high-level priorities for the Presidency term, setting out the overall areas of thematic focus for the Presidency. A second

part details the specific legislative and policy proposals that the Presidency will seek to take forward during its term across each of the ten different policy configurations in which the Council meets.

The policy programmes of recent EU Presidencies can be found at the following links:

- [Denmark \(July to December 2025\)](#)
- [Poland \(January to June 2025\)](#)
- [Hungary \(July to December 2024\)](#)
- [Belgium \(January to June 2024\)](#)
- [Spain \(July to December 2023\)](#)

While the Presidency does offer the opportunity for Ireland to shape and influence the EU agenda, as Presidency, Ireland will be expected, in effect, to act as an impartial chair and be tasked with guiding the work of the Council in a way that reflects the interests of all Member States and of the Union as a whole. In effect, this means that the Presidency policy programme does not typically prioritise the specific national interests of the Member State holding the Presidency. Instead, the policy programme sets out the perspective of the Presidency on the policy areas and initiatives that are likely to be of most value and relevance for the Union – and all of its 27 Member States – during the Presidency term. The policy programme identifies areas of ongoing Council work on which the Presidency will seek to reach agreement or make substantial progress in discussions among Member States during its term.

The Presidency programme generally indicates how each Presidency plans to build on the work done by its predecessor in progressing the Council's legislative and policy agenda. It also reflects the programme of legislation planned by the European Commission, which is the sole institution that can propose new EU laws for consideration by the Council of the EU and the European Parliament.

4. Preparing the Irish Presidency Programme

Ireland will publish its priorities and policy programme for its 2026 EU Presidency in June 2026, shortly before the start of the Presidency term. The development of the programme is now underway and the stakeholder consultations form part of this process.

A number of EU documents set out the background and context for the policy and legislative work of the Council, and will inform the development of Ireland's EU Presidency priorities and policy programme:

- The EU's overall priorities and strategic orientations for the period ahead have been set out by the European Council in the [Strategic Agenda for the Union for 2024-29](#).
- The legislative work of the Council in 2026 will reflect the [Work Programme of the European Commission for 2026](#), which was published on 21 October 2025.
- Each year, the European Parliament, the Council of the EU and the European Commission set out a **Joint Declaration on Legislative Priorities** for the year ahead. The Joint Declaration on Legislative Priorities for 2026 is expected to be agreed and published in the coming months.

The evolution of the Council's legislative agenda through the Danish and Cypriot Presidencies over the coming months will also have a significant bearing on the definition of the policy and legislative objectives to be reflected in Ireland's Presidency policy programme.

Ireland will also work with its Trio Presidency partners, Lithuania (January to June 2027) and Greece (July to December 2027) to prepare a Trio programme setting out an overall orientation for the work of the Council during the 18-month Trio period (July 2026 to December 2027). It is expected that the Trio programme will also be finalised and published in June 2026.

This process of consultation with domestic stakeholders will play an important part in ensuring that the policy priorities for the Irish Presidency take account of views across different sectors of Irish society on important areas of focus for the work of the European Union during the Presidency term.

5. Freedom of Information Act 2014 and Publication of Submissions

The Department will make public all submissions received as part of this consultation on the consultation webpage on gov.ie. Additionally, information provided to the Department via this consultation may be disclosed in response to a request under the Freedom of Information Act 2014. Therefore, if you consider any information you provide as part of this consultation to be commercially sensitive, please clearly identify it as such and specify the reason for its sensitivity. The Department will contact you regarding any information identified as sensitive before publishing or otherwise disclosing it.

6. General Data Protection Regulation

Respondents should note that the General Data Protection Regulation ('GDPR') entered into force in Ireland on 25 May 2018 and is intended to give individuals more control over their personal data. The key principles under the Regulation are as follows:

- Lawfulness, fairness and transparency
- Purpose limitation
- Data minimisation
- Accuracy
- Storage limitation
- Integrity and confidentiality
- Accountability.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is subject to the provisions of the Regulation in relation to personal data collected by it from 25 May 2018 onwards. Any personal information which you volunteer to this Department, will be treated with the highest standards of security and confidentiality, strictly in accordance with the Data Protection Acts 1988 to 2018.

We would like to draw your attention to our [Data Privacy Notice](#), which explains how and when we collect personal data, why we do so, and how we treat this information. It also explains your rights in relation to the collection of personal information and how you can exercise those rights. Anonymised excerpts from individual submissions may be included in internal and published reports. While the Department will carefully consider all comments and suggestions received, it does not intend to respond to individual submissions.

Please note that all responses received as part of this consultation are subject to the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2014 (FOI), the European Communities (Access to Information on the Environment) Regulations 2007-2014, and the Data Protection Act 2018.



7. Submission Form

Public Consultation on the Development of the Priorities and Policy Programme for Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union 2026

Mandatory questions	
Name	Emer Begley
Organisation (if any)	Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI)
Date of submission	
Do you agree to all of the terms set out in this consultation process, including those set out under section 5 and 6?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

Optional questions <i>The following questions are asked only to help us understand the range of perspectives received as part of this consultation process.</i>	
Respondent type (i.e. individual, NGO, business, academic, local authority, etc.)	Civil Society Organisation
What is your sector/area of work?	Disability Rights
What is your connection to the issues you are providing feedback on? For example, are you an expert practitioner, person affected by a policy issue, member of the public with a general interest in the topics, etc.?	DFI is a federation of 106 pan-disability organisations operating across the country. We are also the National Council representing Ireland on the European Disability Forum (EDF) and currently hold a seat on the EDF Board. This connection gives us an important role in linking national priorities to European policy and ensuring that Ireland's voice is heard within EU decision-making spaces. DFI has previously hosted EDF board meetings and policy conferences in Ireland – most recently in November 2022, at which speakers from the Department of Children, Equality and Disability, and the newly established Decision Support Service spoke. We are a long-standing member of the

Optional questions

The following questions are asked only to help us understand the range of perspectives received as part of this consultation process.

	Better Europe alliance and meet annually with the EU Commission delegation when they visit Ireland as part of the EU Semester process. We led the Irish delegation to the European Parliament of Persons with Disabilities in 2023, joining over 700 disability advocates and stakeholders to discuss the rights of disabled people. Finally, we are members of the European Association of Service Providers for People with Disabilities (EASPD).
Describe your geographical focus in the context of your submission? For example, rural, urban, national or EU wide.	Our predominant focus is on the national context of disability rights policy; however, we have a community team who engage with the disability sector at regional level. Finally, we also follow all relevant updates at the EU level on this policy area in light of our membership of the EDF and EASPD.

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Through these consultations the Government is seeking to gather observations, suggestions, and reflections on how Ireland can best fulfil its Presidency role; ensure the Presidency policy programme is informed by diverse perspectives from across Irish society; and identify EU-wide issues, themes, and policy areas that should be given particular attention during Ireland's Presidency.

It is proposed that Ireland's overall policy approach for the 2026 Presidency will be expressed at a high level in the form of a single overarching phrase or slogan setting out a people-centred and future-oriented vision for the EU, accompanied by three priority themes.

Respondents are asked to consider the following guiding questions and to limit their responses to each question to a maximum of 500 words. Please note that you do not have to respond to all questions.

Respondents are welcome to submit additional information alongside Submission Form. However, in such cases, respondents must provide a summary of the additional information under the 'Any other comments' question. This response should also be limited to a maximum of 500 words.

Question 1 – What should Ireland choose as the high-level thematic priorities for its Presidency of the Council in 2026?

Please limit response to a maximum of 500 words.

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Ireland's Presidency of the EU presents a unique opportunity to demonstrate leadership on equality, inclusion, and human rights at a European level in line with the EU Strategic Agenda 2024-2029. Highlighting the value of a social and inclusive Europe. It will coincide domestically with the implementation of the National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People (2025), offering a timely platform to show Ireland's commitment to the UN CRPD in action. At a European level, initiatives and policy developments of significant during the Irish presidency, include the second phase of the European Disability Rights Strategy; implementation of the European Accessibility Act and policy focus on affordable housing, poverty reduction and climate change, offer an opportunity to strengthen disability mainstreaming. The EU must deliver on its commitments under the EU Pillar of Social Rights e.g. r Principle 17, with a new Action Plan to be adopted by the end of 2025, and ongoing commitments to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Against this backdrop of human rights commitments seeking to **leave no one behind**, Ireland has the opportunity to support the EU's progress towards becoming a true **Union of Equality**. However, this cannot be achieved without ensuring the rights of marginalised groups are respected and advanced. Considering the current political climate and advancing climate crisis, upholding human rights standards is more important than ever. Ireland can support the realignment of the EU with its core values outlined in its Strategic Agenda, notably: "respect for human rights (including the rights of persons belonging to minorities – which remain a cornerstone of our Union)".

We propose the following thematic priorities:

1. **The Advancement of Disability Rights** – In light of Ireland's recent publication of its Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People and the EU's soon to be updated Disability Rights Strategy, 'the advancement of disability rights across the Union' should be prioritised. The Taoiseach has identified disability as a [key government priority](#) – and thus should be reflected in the Irish presidency. One in four adults in the EU live with a disability. Ireland can raise the visibility of the EU's largest minority group, a group anyone can join at any point in their life.

The Commission will update the EU Disability Rights Strategy 2021–2030 in the second quarter of 2026, making such a focus timely. Moreover, the EU Parliament Disability Rights Week, International Day of Persons with Disabilities, International Day of Sign Languages, and Human Rights Day fall within the Irish Presidency. In a world where respect for human dignity and rights is increasingly under attack, the EU is a vital guarantor to progress the full and equal participation of disabled people.

2. **Reinforce a Social Europe through inclusive growth that combats poverty and invests in society.** DFI highly values being part of the EU project and supports its vision for a Social Europe. This involves advancing the 2030 Agenda that seeks to leave no one behind. Ireland should prioritise

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working to re-align the EU's actions with its commitments under the UN SDGs, particularly on combatting poverty. The concept of leaving no one behind relates to the context in which we find ourselves – political unrest, war, climate crisis, and threat to democratic values.

Ireland's Presidency term will be timely, considering the lack of movement as planned during the Danish Presidency on key areas like the EU Equal Treatment Directive, Anti-Poverty Strategy, the Affordable Housing Plan, and the EU Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan. It is essential that the EU combats disability poverty - [28.7% of persons with disabilities are at risk of poverty and social exclusion](#) in the EU, compared to 17.9% for persons without disabilities. Equally [11% of persons with disabilities in the EU report being overburdened by the cost of their housing](#), and only [28.9% consider their dwelling meets their needs](#).

Question 2 – Which particular policy areas and legislative proposals should be a focus of work for the Irish Presidency of the Council in 2026? What should the Irish Presidency aim to achieve in these areas?

Please limit response to a maximum of 500 words.

1. **EU Disability Rights Strategy:** During Ireland's Presidency, the new flagship initiatives under the Strategy should be adopted (planned for Q2 2026). Ambitious initiatives and concrete actions in line with [EU Parliament recommendations](#), and the recent [concluding observations of the UN CRPD Committee](#) are necessary. Ireland can ensure that the flagships also align with [the detailed recommendations of the European Disability Forum](#). A focus on addressing employment of disabled people can help to redeem Ireland's poor reputation, with one of the worst disability employment gaps (38.2%).
2. **EU Equal Treatment Directive:** Denmark, during its Presidency, aims to reach Council unanimity on the EU Equal Treatment Directive, however it is unlikely that this will be achieved. It is crucial that the EU adopts this Directive, which has been blocked for 17 years by some Member States. Given the current environment, this Directive should be prioritised – to reach Council unanimity, or if this has been achieved, to prioritise implementation. De-prioritisation would represent a backslide on equality and caving to anti-democratic actors. This Directive would prohibit both indirect and direct discrimination based on disability and would apply the principle of "equal treatment" on grounds including disability - across a wide range of areas.
3. **EU Pillar of Social Rights and new Action Plan:** The implementation of the EPSR Action Plan should be prioritised, including targeted measures for people with disabilities; for instance, implementing the Adequate Minimum Wage Directive, Platform Work Directive and a new 'quality job target' to promote decent work (EESC Opinion). The EESC urges the establishment of ambitious EU-wide standards to combat in-work poverty. These actions would complement

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measures included in the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy and align with commitments to combat poverty under the SDGs.

- 4. Upcoming EU Anti-Poverty Strategy:** Considering the upcoming publication (Q2 2026) of the EU's Anti-Poverty Strategy, and our emphasis on defending a Social Europe, Ireland can play a positive role in arguing for an ambitious approach to eradicating poverty. Socio-economic issues need to be addressed to cut across the divisions which are being exploited by far-right forces across the EU. Ireland can be a unifier in this area and support careful targeting of those groups with higher levels of poverty (including disabled people).
- 5. EU Affordable Housing Plan:** The first EU-level housing strategy will be adopted in Q2 2026, meaning implementation will begin as Ireland takes up the Presidency. Ireland should work to ensure the Plan has a specific focus on increasing the stock of housing accessible to disabled people. We can also work to change the narrative on housing - to recognise affordable and accessible homes as a fundamental right. Ireland is well-positioned given that one of its former TDs, Eamon Ryan, is Chair of the EU's independent Housing Advisory Board.
- 6. EU Accessibility Act:** The CRPD Committee's recent concluding observations to the EU, raised concerns about the limited scope and delays transposing the European Accessibility Act (EAA). The EU is obliged under UN CRPD [Article 9 on Accessibility](#), to ensure disabled people have access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, transport, information and communication, and digital services. Without full and effective implementation of the EAA, these rights remain unrealised, leaving disabled people unable to participate equally in European society.

Question 3 – How can the work of the Council during the term of the Irish Presidency make the most substantial positive impact for people, businesses and communities across the EU?

Please limit response to a maximum of 500 words.

- 1. Take a rights-based and intersectional approach:** The Presidency is an opportunity for Ireland to ensure the protection of fundamental rights is firmly on the EU agenda. To do so Ireland should lead by example, keeping the EU core values and principles central to every action and decision it takes during its Presidency term. This approach recognises and treats each individual as a rights-holder with autonomy and dignity. Moreover, it recognises each person's layers of identities e.g. age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, language, ethnicity, amongst others, which inform their diverse lived experiences. Taking a rights-based approach will have a positive impact not only on disabled people across the EU, but in fact on all communities.
- 2. Emphasise a Social Europe:** Europe and the world are undergoing turbulent times, with ongoing crises and social cohesion under threat. While in many countries (including Ireland) economic

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growth is continuing, significant swathes of the population constantly live with low incomes, in deprivation and feel marginalised. An unbalanced focus only on economic growth will not deliver social progress or support social cohesion, and risks gains being accrued by only a subset of the population. Moreover, the negative impact of austerity are still being felt by individuals and many community and voluntary organisations whose core funding has still not returned to pre-austerity levels, despite significant economic growth. Ireland can support the EU to re-focus its attention and agenda on societal, as well as economic needs. This can emphasise a return to economic progress to feed society, social development and support those who are more economically vulnerable in our society at EU level.

3. **Mainstream Disability Rights in the Multiannual Financial Framework (2028-2034):** Ireland's Presidency will take place during formative negotiations on the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). This presents an opportunity for Ireland to treat disability rights as an essential requirement across EU investment. Ireland should prioritise embedding accessibility, reasonable accommodation, universal design, and UN CRPD compliance as core funding conditions within the next MFF. The UN CPRD Committee, in its March 2025 [Concluding Observations to the EU](#), emphasised this. Equally, EU funds have been a key tool to support the employment of persons with disabilities in the open labour market across the EU. But despite the use of EU funds for this objective, the gap in employment rates between persons with and without disabilities stands at [24 percentage points and has not improved over the past decade](#).

Question 4 – How can we best communicate the values and benefits of EU membership to its citizens and create a sense of ownership, amongst citizens, over Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the EU?

Please limit response to a maximum of 500 words.

1. **Via a Disability Accessible Presidency** – considering (i) the EU is the only regional entity to have ratified the CRPD, (ii) commitments therefore under Article 9 on accessibility, and (ii) with ongoing Member State's implementation of the EU Accessibility Act, Ireland's presidency should aim to be fully accessible to disabled people. Moreover, Article 29 of the CRPD, obliges State Parties to ensure that disabled people can effectively and fully participate in political and public life on an equal basis with others. Not only will mainstreaming accessibility measures ensuring disabled people can follow the Irish presidency, but also that they can actively participate in and engage with it on an equal basis with others. Ireland has the opportunity to champion accessibility throughout the course of its presidency. This would involve ensuring all information and communication is provided in ISL (as one of Ireland's 3 national languages), plain English and easy-to-read formats e.g. on the Irish Presidency webpage. Moreover, the webpage should be screen reader compatible. This will create a sense of ownership of Ireland's Presidency by its disabled citizens. Any events held by the Irish Presidency should ensure physical accessibility, International Sign interpretation, and live captioning is provided given the international audience.

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- 2. EU supporting progress on equality in Ireland:** The EU has been a positive force for social development, equality and human rights in Europe and internationally. Many of the positive developments in Ireland's equality approach and legal frameworks etc. have their origin in the EU. The values of equality, diversity, and equity are central to the EU's foundation in post-war Europe and have been integral to Ireland's journey as member of the EU. Emphasising this when communicating the EU Presidency can help to re-affirm social values and a social agenda and orientation for the EU.

Question 5 – Any other comments

Respondents are welcome to submit additional information alongside Submission Form. However, in such cases, respondents must provide a summary of the additional information under the 'Any other comments' question. This summary should also be limited to a maximum of 500 words.

It is very challenging to summarise key concerns in 500 words, and so we would welcome the opportunity to discuss any of the issues raised above with relevant personnel working on Ireland's EU programme.

One important consideration is **adequate funding for disability and other civil society organisations** to increase awareness and engagement in Irish Presidency. Organisations operate with limited and restricted funds. As a result, to plan and run any events, or develop policy papers/inputs relevant to the presidency, without financial support is a major challenge and obstacle to greater engagement.

The following resources may be of relevance while considering the points we have raised in our submission:

[Better Europe joint submission to the EU Semester Process](#) (DFI were part of)

Pages 6-7 (which analyses the European Commission's 2025 EU Semester Report on Ireland) of DFI's [Pre Budget Submission to the Department of Social Protection](#).

The UN CPRD Committee's [Concluding Observations to the EU](#) (March 2025)

The European Parliament's recently adopted [position on the second half of the EU Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (25th November): The report clearly calls on the EU Commission to urgently develop new actions and flagship initiatives. Among other things, it urges the Commission to pay particular attention to the extra cost of living of persons with disabilities, the situation of women and girls with disabilities, mental health among persons with disabilities, and to people with invisible disabilities. Some of the proposed actions for inclusion in the second half of the Strategy include:

- An EU-funded Employment and Skills Guarantee for persons with disabilities.

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- Continued efforts to improve the freedom of movement of persons with disabilities throughout the EU.
- Strengthening the European accessibility centre [AccessibleEU](#), through the creation of a dedicated permanent regulatory agency.
- An EU directive regulating the use of artificial intelligence algorithms for managing, monitoring and recruiting workers. It would address the risks of discrimination that candidates and employees with disabilities often face from AI algorithms.
- An ambitious agreement on Regulation (EC) No 261/2004 on [air passenger rights](#).
- Revising Regulation (EU) No 1300/2014 on the accessibility of rail infrastructure for persons with disabilities in order to address and prevent the persistent challenges and discrimination faced by persons with disabilities
- Necessary legislative initiatives to ensure the equal right to vote and to stand for election of persons with disabilities
- An EU strategy on the transition from institutions to community-based care
- Making all plenary debates in Parliament available with International Sign interpretation.