



European
Commission

EUROPEAN DAY OF **PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

ACCESS CITY AWARD 2022

2 - 3 DECEMBER 2021



CONFERENCE **PROGRAMME**

#EDPD2021

#EUDisabilityRights

#UnionOfEquality

#EUAccessCity

Social Europe



CONFERENCE INTRODUCTION



The annual conference on the occasion of the **European Day of Persons with Disabilities** takes place on **2 and 3 December**. The online conference is hosted by the **European Commission** in partnership with the **European Disability Forum**.

Across Europe, persons with disabilities still face considerable barriers in their daily life:

- 4 times more persons with disabilities report unmet healthcare needs than those without disabilities
- Only 64% of persons with disabilities have an internet connection at home, compared to 88% of persons without disabilities
- Over 1 in 5 young people with disabilities leave school early, compared to 1 in 10 of those without disabilities

As pointed out in the EU's new [ten-year strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities](#), we need to scale up action to remove obstacles and allow full and equal participation of persons with disabilities in society.

This year's conference will bring together politicians, high-level experts and disability advocates to discuss current challenges, specifically in **access to healthcare** and in **digital transformation**. We will also hear about solutions and initiatives to remove barriers and create equal opportunities.

The 2021 conference will include a focus on the experiences and needs of **children with disabilities**. We will outline the EU-level initiatives in place to realise their rights, and reduce poverty and social exclusion, of all children in the EU.

By the end of the conference, you will have many ideas on how we can work together towards a Union of Equality.

Access City Award 2022 Ceremony

Join the online Access City Award 2022 Ceremony on 3 December in the afternoon to discover the winners of the **12th Access City Award**. This prestigious EU award rewards cities that are making continuous efforts to become more accessible for persons with disabilities and older people.

This year's **shortlisted cities** are, in alphabetical order:

- **Barcelona** (Spain)
- **Helsinki** (Finland)
- **Leuven** (Belgium)
- **Luxembourg City** (Luxembourg)
- **Palma** (Spain)
- **Porto** (Portugal)

CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

DAY 1 02 DECEMBER 2021

10.00–10.30

Opening session

Moderator: Emmanuelle Grange, Head of the Disability and Inclusion Unit, DG EMPL, European Commission

Opening speeches by:

[Helena Dalli](#), Commissioner for Equality, European Commission

[Yannis Vardakastanis](#), President, European Disability Forum

[Cveto Uršič](#), State Secretary, Slovenian Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities

10.30–12.00

Webinar 1: health in the EU for persons with disabilities

Moderator: Maya Doneva, Secretary-General of the European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities

The right to health, universal coverage and insurances

[Rodolfo Cattani](#), Executive Committee, European Disability Forum

European health policies and disability: the example of the EU Cancer Action

[Stefan Schreck](#), Adviser for stakeholder relations, DG SANTE, European Commission

WHO Guidance on Disability Inclusive Health

[Satish Mishra](#), Technical Manager, Disability and Rehabilitation, WHO Europe

Mental Health

[Kristijan Grđan](#), Vice President, Mental Health Europe

12.00–14.00

Break

14.00 –15.30

Webinar 2: persons with disabilities and the digital transition

Moderator: Inmaculada Placencia Porrero, Senior Expert in Disability and Inclusion, DG EMPL, European Commission

Digitalisation and Digital Transformation in Europe: Implications for Persons with Disabilities - Reflections on EU and National Strategies and Plans

[Lisa Waddington](#), Professor of European Disability Law, Maastricht University

Culture and recreation: making audio-visual media services accessible

[Humberto Insolera](#), Executive Committee, European Disability Forum

The impact of AI powered unfairness on labour markets worldwide

[Susan Scott-Parker](#), Chief Executive, Business Disability International

eGovernment National perspective

[Jakob Rosin](#), President, Estonian Blind Union

CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

DAY 2 03 DECEMBER 2021

10.30 –12.00

Webinar 3: Children with disabilities

Moderator: Pat Clarke, Vice President, European Disability Forum

UN video: Well-being and development as a girl, boy or adolescent with disabilities

[Maria Soledad Cisternas](#), *Special Envoy on Disability and Accessibility, United Nations*

Panel discussion with

[Katarina Ivanković Knežević](#), *Director for Social Rights and Inclusion, DG EMPL, European Commission*

[Elisabeth Gosme](#), *Director, COFACE Families Europe*

[Jana Hainsworth](#), *Secretary General, Eurochild*

[Nora Shabani](#), *Education Specialist, UNICEF's Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia in Geneva*

[Dominique Paquot](#), *Director, Ecole Singelijn*

12.00–12.30

Closing session

Moderator: Emmanuelle Grange, Head of the Disability and Inclusion Unit, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion, European Commission

Closing speeches by:

[Joost Korte](#), *Director-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, DG EMPL, European Commission*

[Speaker tbc](#), *Incoming French EU Council Presidency*

[Ana Peláez](#), *Vice President, European Disability Forum*

[Pietro Barbieri](#), *President, EESC Thematic study group on disability rights*

CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

14.00-15.15

Access City Award 2022 ceremony

Moderator: Tamsin Rose

Helena Dalli, Commissioner for Equality, European Commission

Adina Vălean, Commissioner for Transport, European Commission

Joost Korte, Director General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, DG EMPL, European Commission

Katarina Ivanković Knežević, Director for Social Rights and Inclusion, DG EMPL, European Commission

Yannis Vardakastanis, President, European Disability Forum

Jesús Hernández Galán, EU Jury Chair, Access City Award 2022

Ann-Marie Nilsson, Mayor, Jönköping (Sweden)



ACCESS CITY
AWARD 2022

SPEAKERS' BIOGRAPHIES

OPENING SPEECHES



Helena Dalli

Helena Dalli is the first EU Commissioner for Equality since December 2019. Her role is to deliver on the Union of Equality chapter within the Political Guidelines of President von der Leyen, by strengthening Europe's commitment to equality and inclusion in all of its senses. Prior to taking her role as Commissioner, Dalli held various political roles in Malta including Member of Parliament (1996 to 2019), Minister for European Affairs and Equality (2017 to 2019), and Minister for Social Dialogue, Consumer Affairs and Civil Liberties (2013-2017). She was also opposition Shadow Minister for public administration, equality, public broadcasting and national investments (1998-2013) and Junior Minister for Women's Rights in the Office of Prime Minister (1996-1998). Dalli holds a PhD in Political Sociology from the University of Nottingham, and lectured in Economic and Political Sociology, Public Policy, and Sociology of Law at the University of Malta.



Yannis Vardakastanis

Political scientist, Yannis Vardakastanis is President of the European Disability Forum (EDF), the umbrella organisation of the European disability movement, since 1999. Representing EDF at the International Disability Alliance (IDA) since 2007, he assumed Vice-Chair of IDA from 2010-2012, and Chair from 2012 to 2014. Following 2014, he has worked as the IDA Treasurer. Vardakastanis is also currently President of the Greek National Confederation of Disabled People (NCDP) and represents them at the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). He is also a member of Greece's Economic and Social Council (OKE), Greece's National Commission for Human Rights (EEDA) as well as being a previous member of the Board of the European Blind Union (EBU) from 1996 to 2011.



Cveto Uršič

Cveto Uršič is State Secretary of the Slovenian Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. He holds a university degree in law and a master's degree in sociology. From 2018 to 2020, he was Secretary-General of the Slovenian Caritas. Before that he worked at the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities for 13 years both as the Director-General of the Directorate for the Disabled (2005-2010 and in 2013) and as the Secretary of the same directorate. For 17 years he was also the director of one of the flagship programmes of the University Rehabilitation Institute of the Republic of Slovenia (Soča). From 2008 to 2010, he was an elected member of the first twelve-member UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. He was also a member of a variety of committees of the Council of Europe and the European Union. Furthermore, he was head and member of various working groups that drew up key regulations in the field of disability protection. In his specialist and research work over the past 30 years, he has been primarily active in the fields of enforcement of human rights for persons with disabilities and organisation of the social security system. He is also active in professional associations as well as disability and humanitarian organisations both in Slovenia and abroad. In the New Slovenia political party, he was head of the labour, family and social affairs expert committee for several years, as well as member of the strategic council.

moderated by



Emmanuelle Grange

Emmanuelle Grange is Head of the Disability and Inclusion Unit at the European Commission's Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion since November 2015. She joined the European Commission in 1995. From 2005 to 2009, she was in charge of the unit responsible for internal policy for equal opportunities and non-discrimination within the Directorate-General for Human Resources and Security. She was later appointed manager for the strategy and management of human resources at the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. Emmanuelle studied Political Science in Strasbourg and holds an MA in European Political and Administrative Studies from the College of Europe.



SPEAKERS' BIOGRAPHIES

WEBINAR 1 – 02 DECEMBER



Rodolfo Cattani

Rodolfo Cattani studied Philosophy of Science at the University of Bologna. He worked as a school teacher for 13 years and for almost 20 years he was Managing Director of the Italian National Library for the Blind. He is the Chair of the Commission for Liaising with the EU of the European Blind Union, an organisation that he has been part of since its establishment in 1984. From 1984 to 1996, Mr. Cattani occupied various positions within the World Blind Union. He has been a member of the Board of the European Disability Forum (EDF) since 1997, a member of the EDF Executive Committee since 2005, and served as the EDF Secretary General from 2009 to 2017. He has represented the EDF on many EU consultative bodies, and is currently on the European Multi-Stakeholder Platform on ICT Standardisation.



Stefan Schreck

Between 1997 and 2008, Stefan has been working in the public health directorate of the European Commission in Luxembourg, in particular in the areas of communicable diseases, health threats, and substances of human origin. In 2008, he became head of the health unit in the executive agency for health and consumers (EAHC), with responsibility for implementing the EU health programme. In January 2011, he was appointed head of the health information unit of DG SANCO, with responsibility for health information policy, and providing the secretariat for the non-food scientific committees of the European Commission. From February 2016 to November 2020, he was head of the DG SANTE unit 'health programme and chronic diseases', dealing with policies for all non-communicable diseases, planning and drafting annual work programmes of the EU health programme, and contributing to the implementation of the health cluster of the Horizon Europe. Since December 2020, Stefan is adviser for stakeholder relations in the Public Health Directorate of DG SANTE.



Satish Mishra

Over the last two and half decades, Satish has been working to improve public health in different countries of the world – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan and Thailand. His work focuses on strengthening health system and service delivery for people with disabilities, elderly, non-communicable diseases and different health conditions. Satish is the author of several publications on disability, rehabilitation and assistive technology topics. Currently, Satish works as Regional Technical Officer for the World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe and supports 53 countries in the region to strengthen policy, system, work force and service delivery on disability, rehabilitation, palliative care and long-term care.



Kristijan Grđan

I am a human rights activist and consultant, independent researcher in the legal sciences, born in Croatia, 1982. I am experienced in administrative and project management, advocacy, academic work, field work and providing direct support to persons with disabilities and victims of crimes. I have 14 years of working experience mostly in non-governmental settings, but also in international environment. I was and am serving as member of national regulatory bodies and international associations. I am currently mostly doing academic work and research.

moderated by



Maya Doneva

Maya Doneva is the Secretary General of EASPD - The European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities. Maya's professional biography consists of many puzzle pieces - being a trainer, international consultant, and lecturer on the topics of community-centered social provision, social innovation, youth empowerment and active citizenship. Maya is the founder of one of the first social enterprises in Bulgaria - The Social Teahouse Network- supporting young people who grew up in social state care institutions with long term mentorship and their first employment experience. Between 2017 and early 2021 Maya was the executive director of one of the biggest social service organizations in the Balkans- Karin dom, where she was leading the team of professionals directly working with children and developing pilot initiatives on family mediated intervention and early childhood intervention. Since the beginning of Autumn'21 Maya has the responsibility to lead the European association and the membership of social service provision in more than 47 countries.



SPEAKERS' BIOGRAPHIES

WEBINAR 2 – 02 DECEMBER



Lisa Waddington

Lisa Waddington is Professor of European Disability Law at Maastricht University (NL). The Professorship was established by the Faculty of Law at Maastricht University in collaboration with the European Disability Forum. Professor Waddington's principal research interests are European and comparative disability law, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and European and comparative equality law in general. Professor Waddington coordinated the involvement of Maastricht University in the FP7 EuRADE project (European Research Agendas expanding Disability Equality) and the Marie Curie Initial Training Network DREAM (Disability Rights Expanding Accessible Markets, 2011-2015). She is currently coordinating Maastricht University's participation in the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Innovative Training network DARE (Disability Advocacy Research in Europe, 2019-2022). She is a senior expert for a number of Networks and organisations, including the European Network of Legal Experts in the Non-discrimination Field and the European Disability Expertise network (EDE). Professor Waddington has been a visiting professor at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, the University of Melbourne and Leeds University.



Humberto Insolera

Dr Humberto Insolera studied at the universities of Padova, Bristol, Geneva and Washington D.C. He became Board Member of the European Union of the Deaf (EUD) in 2009, and was the EUD Vice-President from 2013 until 2017. He was a Member of the Expert Group on Human Rights for the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD). He also participated in the UN CRPD Ad Hoc Committee meetings in New York and was involved in the implementation and monitoring processes of the UN CRPD both in Italy and at a European level via the EUD. In May 2017 he was elected to the EDF Board of Directors and the EDF Executive Committee. He is Chairman of the EDF's ICT email expert group, member of the EDF Human Rights and Non-Discrimination Committee, and substitute for the EDF Youth Committee.



Susan Scott-Parker

Susan Scott-Parker is an internationally recognised thought leader who has made a career from challenging outdated assumptions regarding both disability as it affects business and the potential of responsible business to adapt respectfully for human reality. In 2003 Susan invented and launched the concept and language of 'Disability Confidence' – knowing that if we can change the way we talk about the world, we make it easier to change the world. Her work is distinctive in its aim to deliver practical, tangible mutual benefit for business, people with disabilities, the global economy, and wider society. Susan is now leading the 'Disability Ethical AI' campaign alongside organisations including IBM and Oxford Brooke's University's Institute for Ethical AI to address the 'disability-oblivious' nature of AI powered recruitment. Susan is Strategic Advisor to the ILO's Global Business Disability Network and has long-standing strategic alliances with organisations and initiatives including: the Australian Network on Disability, the Austrian/German MyAbility business disability network; The Valuable 500, The #PurpleLightUp movement and The Zero Project.



Jakob Rosin

Jakob is the chairman of Estonian Blind Union and board member for Estonian Chamber of Disabled People. He also works as a technology journalist. He is an accessibility expert, providing feedback and suggestions to several public and also private sector bodies in Estonia.

moderated by



Inmaculada Placencia Porrero

Inmaculada Placencia Porrero is a Senior Expert in Disability and Inclusion at the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion at the European Commission. Her unit is responsible for the coordination of the European policies for persons with disabilities. Inmaculada Placencia Porrero holds a degree in Physics and Computer Science and worked in research and development before joining the European Commission in 1991. She has worked on research programmes addressing accessibility and was Deputy Head of Unit for various disability-related units in the Commission. Her work in the “e-inclusion” unit of the Directorate-General for Information Society and Media addresses accessibility policy. While at the Directorate-general for Justice she contributed to disability-related anti-discrimination legislation. She was responsible for the Task Force for the preparation of the European Accessibility Act and remains responsible since its adoption in 2015.



SPEAKERS' BIOGRAPHIES

WEBINAR 3 – 03 DECEMBER



Katarina Ivanković Knežević

Katarina Ivanković Knežević is Director for Social Rights and Inclusion in the European Commission's Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. She is responsible for the modernisation of social protection systems and wider social policies fostering social and labour market inclusion, through the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and other relevant EU social policies. Before joining the Commission, she was a State Secretary at Croatia's Ministry of Labour and Pension System, responsible for the management and implementation of the European Social Fund and other EU instruments aiming at human resources development. Her professional interests over the past 20 years have been human rights and gender equality, social policy and employment with a focus on labour market policies.



María Soledad Cisternas

María Soledad Cisternas Reyes, Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary General on Disability and Accessibility, since 2017. Graduated in Law and Master in Political Science. Lawyer, Professor of Law and Researcher. She was President of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2013 - 2016. Elena Caffarena Award on International Women's Day, Chile, 2009. National Human Rights Award, Chile, 2014.



Elisabeth Gosme

Elizabeth Gosme is mother of two rebel girls (6 and 10 years) and Director of COFACE Families Europe www.coface-eu.org, a network of 50+ organisations across 23 countries promoting the well-being, health and security of families and their members in a changing society. Elizabeth directs the Brussels-based COFACE team and network, which advocates for legislation and policy enabling families (all types without discrimination) and their members to benefit from sufficient financial resources, available quality services and adequate time arrangements in order to live and enjoy their family life in dignity. This involves a variety of actions in the fields of work-life balance, gender equality, inclusive education, disability rights, consumer protection, financial inclusion, safer internet and more. The COFACE Disability platform for the rights of persons with disabilities and their families drives the work of COFACE advocating for family carers and independent living for all, based on the S.H.I.F.T. whole-society and whole-family approach to ensure meaningful inclusion of persons with disabilities and their families.



Jana Hainsworth

Jana joined Eurochild as Secretary General in 2006. Eurochild is the largest civil society network promoting children's rights in Europe. It counts over 170 member organisations and individuals across 33 European countries. The network covers a range of themes including early childhood development, family and parenting support, child welfare and protection reform and investing in children. In 2015 Jana was elected President of Social Platform, and is now in her 2nd mandate. The Social Platform brings together 48 European networks working towards social justice and participatory democracy.



Nora Shabani

Nora Shabani has been the Disability Focal Point at UNICEF Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia since 2015. In this role, she leads and coordinates disability inclusion at regional level and supports cross-sectoral programmes in 22 UNICEF country offices. De-institutionalization is a key UNICEF priority in the region, and Nora works closely with the regional child protection team and stakeholders, including parents and organisations of persons with disabilities, to address the specific barriers that children with disabilities face, and identify and implement policy and actions to overcome their institutionalisation, systemic discrimination and exclusion. Before joining the Regional Office, Nora worked as the Education Specialist and the Disability Focal Point in UNICEF North Macedonia for 17 years. Nora holds a MA in Inclusive Special Education from University Roehampton, London, UK.



Dominique Paquot

Dominique Paquot, who is a teacher by training, has worked in schools with active pedagogy for 20 years. Passionate about alternative education, he's now Director at the Singelijn School since 10 years, one of the first fundamentally inclusive schools of Brussels in which he has installed an active pedagogy. Welcoming children with specific requirements, whatever their needs are, is one of his daily combats, in his school as well as in society in general. He's also president of the Pedagogia asbl and provides trainings in active pedagogy in general, in supporting change and in inclusive schools.



moderated by

Pat Clarke

Pat Clarke is the Vice President of the European Disability Forum having retired as Chief Executive of Down Syndrome Ireland and Past- President of Down Syndrome International. His son, David, has Down syndrome. Pat is a past Chair of the Disability Federation of Ireland and has served on the boards of the Children Rights Alliance Ireland and on the governing body of the International Disability Alliance. He was a member of the Council of Europe Committee which investigated the involvement of persons with disabilities in political and public life. His involvement with the Disability Federation of Ireland, European Disability Forum and the International Disability Alliance gives him a pan disability perspective on all the issues. He has been a long-time advocate for the full inclusion of people with Down syndrome in particular and all people with disabilities in general in society at every level.

SPEAKERS' BIOGRAPHIES

CLOSING SPEECHES



Joost Korte

Joost Korte was appointed Director-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion in March 2018. He was previously Deputy Director-General of the European Commission's Trade Department and Deputy Director-General of the Agriculture and Rural Development Department as well as the Enlargement Department. He also spent several years in the Commission's Secretariat General as Director for the relations with the Council of Ministers, and gained extensive experience working in the offices of Sir Leon Brittan, Chris Patten and Danuta Hübner. These professional experiences within the European institutions allowed him to develop a profound understanding of EU decision-making. A lawyer by training, Joost Korte joined the Commission in 1991, following eight years of academic work on European law at the universities of Utrecht and Edinburgh.



French Presidency (TBC)



Ana Peláez Narváez

Ana Peláez Narváez is the Executive Councillor for International Relations and External Development at the Spanish National Organisation of the Blind (ONCE), executive VicePresident of the ONCE Foundation for Solidarity with Blind People in Latin America (FOAL), and Commissioner for Women's Affairs at the Spanish Committee of Representatives of People with Disabilities (CERMI). Currently Vice President of the EDF, she is also chair of the European Disability Forum (EDF) Women's Committee and a member of the EDF Executive Committee and Board overseeing gender issues. Ana Peláez Narváez was part of the official Spanish delegation to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). She has served two terms on the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. She was recently elected as an expert to the UN Committee of Elimination of Discrimination against Women and was the first woman with a disability to be elected.



Pietro Barbieri

I was studying architecture at the university when I had an accident that makes me experience disability even today. Already involved in politics since high school, the new condition imposed on me a different point of view, discovering the Italian backwardness in many fields. I understood how this produces marginalization and sometimes goes hand in hand with violence and stigma. I have experienced discrimination. However, I appreciated the richness of people's civic commitment and participation, which have always been the foundations of my life. I was a manager of the Paraplegics Association of Rome and Lazio and later the Federation of Italian para and quadriplegic associations. I also contributed to the foundation of the Italian Federation for the Overcoming of Handicap, the umbrella organization of associations of people with disabilities and their families, of which I was the president for 18 years, leaving that office to take on the commitment as spokesperson for the Forum of the Third Sector, the platform of all Italian solidarity non-profit organizations. From this last experience derives my presence in the European Economic Social Committee (EESC), the EU body representing the entire civil society, employers, trade unions gathered in the Diversity Europe Group of which I am vice president.



moderated by

Emmanuelle Grange

Emmanuelle Grange is Head of the Disability and Inclusion Unit at the European Commission's Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion since November 2015. She joined the European Commission in 1995. From 2005 to 2009, she was in charge of the unit responsible for internal policy for equal opportunities and non-discrimination within the Directorate-General for Human Resources and Security. She was later appointed manager for the strategy and management of human resources at the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. Emmanuelle studied Political Science in Strasbourg and holds an MA in European Political and Administrative Studies from the College of Europe.

SPEAKERS' BIOGRAPHIES

ACCES CITY AWARD 2022



Helena Dalli

Helena Dalli is the first EU Commissioner for Equality since December 2019. Her role is to deliver on the Union of Equality chapter within the Political Guidelines of President von der Leyen, by strengthening Europe's commitment to equality and inclusion in all of its senses. Prior to taking her role as Commissioner, Dalli held various political roles in Malta including Member of Parliament (1996 to 2019), Minister for European Affairs and Equality (2017 to 2019), and Minister for Social Dialogue, Consumer Affairs and Civil Liberties (2013-2017). She was also opposition Shadow Minister for public administration, equality, public broadcasting and national investments (1998-2013) and Junior Minister for Women's Rights in the Office of Prime Minister (1996-1998). Dalli holds a PhD in Political Sociology from the University of Nottingham, and lectured in Economic and Political Sociology, Public Policy, and Sociology of Law at the University of Malta.



Adina Vălean

Adina Vălean is the European Commissioner for Transport. Before taking office on December 1st 2019, she was a Member of the European Parliament for 12 years. As an MEP she served as the Chairwoman of ITRE Committee (July-December 2019), Chairwoman of ENVI Committee (2017-2019) and as Vice-President of the European Parliament (2014-2017). She was also a Member of the Romanian Parliament between 2004-2007. Adina Vălean holds a Master degree in European Integration Studies and Security and a bachelor degree in Mathematics.



Joost Korte

Joost Korte was appointed Director-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion in March 2018. He was previously Deputy Director-General of the European Commission's Trade Department and Deputy Director-General of the Agriculture and Rural Development Department as well as the Enlargement Department. He also spent several years in the Commission's Secretariat General as Director for the relations with the Council of Ministers, and gained extensive experience working in the offices of Sir Leon Brittan, Chris Patten and Danuta Hübner. These professional experiences within the European institutions allowed him to develop a profound understanding of EU decision-making. A lawyer by training, Joost Korte joined the Commission in 1991, following eight years of academic work on European law at the universities of Utrecht and Edinburgh.



Katarina Ivanković Knežević

Katarina Ivanković Knežević is Director for Social Rights and Inclusion in the European Commission's Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. She is responsible for the modernisation of social protection systems and wider social policies fostering social and labour market inclusion, through the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and other relevant EU social policies. Before joining the Commission, she was a State Secretary at Croatia's Ministry of Labour and Pension System, responsible for the management and implementation of the European Social Fund and other EU instruments aiming at human resources development. Her professional interests over the past 20 years have been human rights and gender equality, social policy and employment with a focus on labour market policies.



Yannis Vardakastanis

Political scientist, Yannis Vardakastanis is President of the European Disability Forum (EDF), the umbrella organisation of the European disability movement, since 1999. Representing EDF at the International Disability Alliance (IDA) since 2007, he assumed Vice-Chair of IDA from 2010-2012, and Chair from 2012 to 2014. Following 2014, he has worked as the IDA Treasurer. Vardakastanis is also currently President of the Greek National Confederation of Disabled People (NCDP) and represents them at the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). He is also a member of Greece's Economic and Social Council (OKE), Greece's National Commission for Human Rights (EEDA) as well as being a previous member of the Board of the European Blind Union (EBU) from 1996 to 2011.



Jesús Hernández Galán

Jesús Hernández Galán is a Doctor in Engineering with cum laude honours, with more than 30 years' experience working in the field of accessibility. From 1990 to 2000, he was as an accessibility consultant specializing in protected natural areas. In 2000, he was appointed General Director and CEO of the accessibility consultancy company, Via Libre. He became in 2003 the Director of Universal Accessibility and Innovation at Fundación ONCE, a position he holds to this day. He has also been a jury member of the following awards: the Access City Awards since its first edition, the Queen Letizia Awards, the Fundación Universia Innovation Awards and OTIS Accessibility Awards.



Ann-Marie Nilsson

Ann-Marie Nilsson (C) has been a municipal councillor since 2005, first with responsibility for social welfare issues for a few years and then for many years within the area of urban development where the municipality has made great progress regarding accessibility issues. In addition, she has been chairman of the Municipal Council for Disability Issues for several years. In the council politicians and the disability rights federation meet to discuss issues around accessibility. Since 2015, she is chairman of the municipal board (mayor / chair of the executive committee).

moderated by



Tamsin Rose

Tamsin Rose is the senior fellow for health at the Friends of Europe and Africa Europe Foundation. She is a facilitator, speaker and trainer with an interest in sparking new ideas to address big societal challenges. With three decades of experience in communications, and advocacy and network building, her clients range from small non-profits to international institutions and everything in between. She has led a European platform of public health NGOs, managed an EU programme to twin cities in west and eastern Europe, was a radio journalist and now connects citizens' experiences with the Brussels policy bubble.