

Autism-Europe's Advocacy at the EU level

EU Advocacy



Autism-Europe advocates for the rights of people with autism in European Union policies and supports our member organisations to advocate for better policies for people with autism at the national level.

The European Union is composed of several institutions, that each play a different role in making and enforcing laws, policies and budgets. Autism-Europe works to influence each of them in different ways.

The European Council – Setting the agenda



[The European Council](#) is the EU's top political institution; it sets the EU's goals and the course for achieving them. It is composed of the presidents and/or prime ministers of each Member State, plus the presidents of the European Commission and the European Council.

>> **Autism-Europe** supports our members to lobby their national governments regarding issues that are relevant at the EU level.

The European Commission – Proposing and implementing laws



[The European Commission](#) is responsible for initiating and implementing laws, upholding the European Union's treaties and managing the day-to-day running of the EU, including the majority of the EU's budget and programs.

When proposing legislation, the Commission consults relevant stakeholders and national governments early in the decision-making process. National governments have the power to intervene when a legislative act is still a Commission proposal.

The Commission consists of [28 commissioners](#) (one from each Member State) who are appointed by agreement among the Member States, subject to the approval of the European Parliament.

To create laws and manage the day-to-day running of the EU, the Commission employs around 23,000 staff, mainly in Brussels and Luxembourg, who work within departments called [Directorates-General](#) and Services.

The Commission is accountable to the European Parliament.

>> **Autism-Europe** responds to the [structured consultations](#) that the European Commission conducts with civil society organisations on policy matters relevant to people with autism.

>> *Autism-Europe receives some funding from the European Commission.*

The Council of the EU and the European Parliament – Making decisions



The budgets and most of the laws of the European Union are adopted through a co-decision procedure in which both the Council of the EU (representing national governments) and the [European Parliament](#) (representing European citizens through their directly elected MEPs), must agree on each proposed law and budget.

The Council of the EU (also known as the Council of Ministers) makes decisions by holding regular meetings which are attended by one minister from each of the EU's national governments, according to the subject matter (for example, agricultural ministers decide farm policy, foreign ministers are responsible for foreign policy). Each minister in the Council is empowered to commit to decisions on behalf of his or her Member State's government.

The European Parliament is comprised of 751 directly elected representatives from all 28 Member States. Each of these [Members of the European Parliament \(MEPs\)](#) are affiliated with Europe-wide political groups, according to their political beliefs and priorities. The Parliament holds its major debates at monthly plenary sessions, in Strasbourg, France, with additional sessions and preparatory work taking place in Brussels, Belgium.

>> *Autism-Europe's Charter of Rights for Persons with Autism was adopted as a written declaration by the European Parliament in 1996.*

>> *Autism-Europe monitors European laws and policies while they are still in development, and where necessary we consult our members at the earliest possible stage of policy development.*

Shared responsibilities between EU institutions and Member States



The European Union operates according to the principle of subsidiarity, which means that it only takes actions, such as creating new laws, if it is more effective than actions taken at national, regional or local level (except in the areas which fall within the exclusive competences of the EU). Thus, the European Union operates within a framework of shared competences between the EU institutions and Member States.

Exclusive EU competences: The EU may legislate and adopt binding laws regarding the customs union, the common commercial policy, competition rules and monetary policy for countries that use the euro as their currency. The role of Member States is therefore limited to applying these laws, unless the EU authorises them to adopt certain laws themselves.

Shared EU-Member State competences: The EU institutions and the Member States share competences in specified areas including economic, social, and territorial cohesion; the area of freedom, security, and justice; aspects of social policy; aspects of public health; aspects of research and technological development and space; agriculture and aspects of fisheries; the environment; internal market rules; consumer protection; transport; trans-European networks; energy; and aspects of development cooperation and humanitarian aid. The EU institutions and the Member States are authorised to adopt binding laws in these fields. However, Member States may exercise their competence only in so far as the EU has not exercised (or has decided not to exercise) its own competence.

Member State competences with support from the EU: Member States retain competences in areas related to the protection and improvement of human health; education, vocational training, youth and sport; civil protection; culture; tourism; industry; and administrative cooperation. Yet, in these areas, EU actions can support, coordinate, or supplement Member State activities. The EU can only intervene in these areas for these purposes.

The EU also coordinates economic and employment policy, and a common foreign and security policy; although these areas are managed separately from the above framework of competences.

Within this framework of shared responsibilities, most areas of law and policy that affect the lives of people with autism and their families are competences of the Member States. Therefore, Autism-Europe's member associations advocate for changes to improve the lives of people with autism at the national level. Autism-Europe provides member associations with relevant information and support in the form of advice, newsletters, position papers, toolkits and forums for mutual learning and discussion.

There is scope for the European Union to provide more support for people with autism and their families, however, and Autism-Europe also advocates for action at the EU level.

>> *Autism-Europe has also advocated for the European Union to:*

- *Collect standardised data on the prevalence and situation of people with autism across the EU;*
- *Harmonise diagnostic criteria and practices throughout the Member States;*
- *Create European standards for the provision of high quality, evidence-based support services for people with autism and their families;*
- *Promote the creation of high quality, evidence-based support services for people with autism and their families throughout the Member States;*
- *Promote the creation of evidence-based, individually tailored lifelong education for people with autism throughout the Member States;*
- *Fund high quality coordinated research that reflects a rights-focused approach to people with autism.*

>> *Autism-Europe produces reports, tool kits and other information resources, as well as facilitating the exchange of good practices among our members to promote a rights-based approach to social inclusion and appropriate care and education for people who have autism, at both EU and Member State levels.*

Advocacy for autism and other disabilities in the EU



As most of the European institutions are based in Brussels, Autism-Europe and many other similar organisations work in Brussels to influence the European Union's law, policy and budget making processes.

To maximise our impact on these processes, Autism-Europe works in [strategic coalitions](#) with organisations that share common concerns and goals. These include the European Disability Forum ([EDF](#)), the Platform of European Social NGOs ([the Social Platform](#)) and the European Coalition for Community Living ([ECCL](#)).

In recent years, the main focus of Autism-Europe and other organisations that advocate for the rights of people with disabilities in Brussels has been to ensure that the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) is fully implemented throughout Europe.

The Convention outlines the specific rights of people with disabilities and it is a legally binding document for the States Parties that have ratified it, including the European Union, which ratified the Convention in 2010.

To implement the Convention within the framework of its competences, the European Union created the [Disability Strategy 2010-2020](#), which provides an action plan for the EU to implement the Convention in eight priority areas including accessibility; participation; equality; employment; education and training; social protection; health and external action.

As part of the Disability Strategy 2010-2020, the European Commission is also currently drafting a new European Accessibility Act. The Act aims to make goods and services more accessible to people who have disabilities throughout Europe.

Autism-Europe has advocated for accessibility for people with autism within this new law, including:

- a definition of 'accessibility' that includes access to information and communications;
- accessible public information and communications (in plain language with visual supports), especially on public transport, in public places, on the internet and for emergency services;
- access to education and lifelong learning;
- access to healthcare services and the provision of reasonable accommodation within them.

*>> **Autism-Europe** participated in the European Commission's consultations, providing details of what people with disabilities need in the Disability Strategy 2010-2020 and the European Accessibility Act.*

*>> **Autism-Europe** actively takes part in the monitoring of the implementation of the Convention, for example by drafting an alternative report.*

*>> **Autism-Europe's** former President, Donata Vivanti, is also Vice President of the European Disability Forum and participates for example in high-level meetings with the Presidents of the EU institutions on the implementation of the Convention.*

>> **Autism-Europe** provides information to our members about the processes for, and progress towards, implementing the Convention within the EU.

>> **Autism-Europe** members advocate for their national governments to ensure the full implementation of the Convention in the Member States.