

Letter from the European Ombudsman to the President of the European Commission on how the European Commission accommodates the needs of staff members with disabilities in the context of the COVID-19 emergency

Correspondence - 02/07/2021

Case SI/2/2020/MMO - **Opened on** 03/06/2020 - **Decision on** 29/06/2021 - **Institution concerned** European Commission |

Ms Ursula von der Leyen

President

European Commission

Strasbourg, 03/06/2020

Subject: How the European Commission is addressing the needs of staff members with disabilities in the context of the COVID-19 crisis

Dear President,

The COVID-19 crisis and the measures put in place in response have a disproportionate impact on vulnerable groups, such as persons with disabilities. It is essential not to lose sight of the need to protect the rights of persons with disabilities and to continue to accommodate their special needs.

I am acutely aware of the huge workload placed on the Commission as a result of the crisis and have no doubt that every effort is being made to protect persons with disabilities. I was, for example, greatly encouraged to learn that the Commission just recently embarked on a review of its reasonable accommodation policy.



While that discussion is ongoing, I have decided to contact the Commission to collect information on how the COVID-19 crisis has affected its staff members with disabilities and the reasonable accommodation measures put in place to address their needs. It is also, in this context, worth exploring whether any of the solutions found and envisaged can be used to promote easier interaction with the EU administration for members of the public with disabilities.

The purpose of this exercise is to compile a list of best practices for the reasonable accommodation of persons with disabilities in times of crisis (and beyond), which could be shared and implemented more widely within the EU administration. To this end, I would appreciate it if the Commission could answer the questions in the Annex.

I will also be relying on the input of my fellow members of the EU Framework for the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) — that is the European Parliament, the EU Fundamental Rights Agency and the European Disability Forum.

I believe that this initiative will contribute to the practical implementation of the UN CRPD [\[1\]](#) [\[Link\]](#), and I would like to thank the Commission in advance for its reply.

I would be grateful to receive that reply by 15 September 2020 and, unless there are objections, would propose to publish it. The responsible case handler is Maria Moustakali who can be reached at maria.moustakali@ombudsman.europa.eu and on +32 (0)2 284 35 86.

Yours sincerely,

Emily O'Reilly

European Ombudsman

Enclosure: Annex with questions

Annex

1. What is the percentage of persons with disabilities among the Commission's staff? How many carers for persons with disabilities does the Commission employ?
2. What types of issues have been reported within the Commission about how the COVID-19 crisis has affected the living and working conditions of staff members with disabilities or carers of persons with disabilities?
3. Are there support measures, which the Commission has made available to staff members during this time, that staff members with disabilities cannot access?



4. What are the reasonable accommodation measures [\[2\]](#) [\[Link\]](#) that the Commission has implemented for staff members with disabilities during the COVID-19 crisis? In order to facilitate work from home, does the Commission make available IT equipment and communication tools that are accessible for staff members with disabilities? Is there a dedicated support line for staff members with disabilities?
5. Has the Commission provided information on COVID-19 and related measures in an accessible format online?
6. Have the Commission's medical services adjusted to the circumstances of the crisis, for instance by offering or encouraging virtual medical consultations for staff members with disabilities?
7. Has the Joint Sickness Insurance Scheme made any changes in order to accommodate the further needs of persons with disabilities during the COVID-19 crisis?
8. Has the Commission consulted individual staff members or associations of staff members with disabilities on reasonable accommodation measures?
9. Could the distance and virtual working methods currently being applied become a more permanent solution to improve accessibility for existing and future staff members with disabilities?
10. Finally, has the Commission considered whether any of the new measures or methods put in place for staff members with disabilities during this crisis could be used to promote easier interaction with the EU administration for members of the public with disabilities also in the aftermath of this crisis?

[\[1\]](#) [\[Link\]](#) The contribution from the EU's CRPD Monitoring Framework to the European Disability Strategy post-2020 is available here:
<https://fra.europa.eu/en/cooperation/eu-partners/eu-crpd-framework/resources>

[\[2\]](#) [\[Link\]](#) Included (or not) in the Commission's Decision implementing article 1d(4) of the Staff Regulations dated 21.06.2004 and/or in the Commission's Guidance on the duty to provide reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities of February 2015.