



**Maison
Solidaire
des Vacances
Accessibles**

POSITION PAPER · EUROPEAN UNION

Towards a European policy on effective access to holidays

An overlooked condition for social inclusion. Five proposals to the EU institutions.

Maison Solidaire des Vacances Accessibles

Organisation registered in the EU Transparency Register
Identification number: 4232781102359-92

October 2026
www.asso-msva.fr

A blind spot in European policy

Despite the European Union's ambitious commitments to social inclusion and to the rights of persons with disabilities, one blind spot persists: **holidays**. Being able to go away, take a break and change one's surroundings is not a trivial luxury. It is an essential component of well-being, a driver of social participation, a support for mental health and, ultimately, a concrete condition of equality. Yet effective access to holidays remains largely absent from current European policies.

In 2025, **more than a quarter of the EU population (27.5%)** reported being unable to afford one week's annual holiday away from home. The share exceeds one half among people at risk of poverty and approaches one half among people with a severe activity limitation.

The Maison Solidaire des Vacances Accessibles (MSVA) calls on the European Union to:

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- 1** **establish a European Mechanism for Access to Holidays (MEAV)**, funded by the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and the next Multiannual Financial Framework 2028-2034;
 - 2** **integrate tourism accessibility criteria into EU funding**, in particular regional funds;
 - 3** **set up a European Observatory on Tourism Accessibility**, providing harmonised, verified and comparable data;
 - 4** **develop a certified European Tourism Accessibility Label**, based on audited standards;
 - 5** **include access to holidays in the European Semester**, as an indicator of the Social Scoreboard of the European Pillar of Social Rights.
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These measures are feasible, cost-effective, consistent with EU priorities and capable of delivering a direct and measurable social impact.

2. POLICY PROBLEM

A blind spot in European social inclusion

Despite the progress made, three findings remain.

2.1. A right in theory, unequal access in practice

The European reference indicator measures the share of people who cannot afford one week's annual holiday away from home. The latest data, for 2025, reveal wide disparities.

27.5%

of the EU population cannot afford one week's holiday a year.

56.2%

of people living below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold are in this situation, rising to 57.6% in households with dependent children.

48.3%

of people with a severe activity limitation, compared with 23.9% of people without any limitation: twice as many.

41.5%

of people living in single-parent households, one of the most exposed groups.

Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC 2025, EU-27, datasets ilc_mdex02 and hlth_dm020 (data updated on 20 October 2026). At-risk-of-poverty threshold: 60% of national median income. Activity limitation: persons aged 16 and over.

These figures capture only the reported financial barrier. They do not reflect the accessibility barriers in transport, accommodation and activities, nor the situation of people who, for lack of information or support, no longer even consider going away. Actual deprivation is therefore likely to be higher.

2.2. A cross-cutting issue that fits no single portfolio

- DG MOVE is responsible for mobility, but not for personal support.
- DG GROW oversees tourism, but not inclusion.
- DG EMPL funds social policy, but not leisure.
- As a result, **no Directorate-General takes ownership** of the issue.

2.3. An economic and social loss

The lack of accessibility and resources deprives:

- citizens of essential rest;
- rural areas of visitors;
- carers of much-needed respite;
- the Union of genuine social cohesion.

3. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

Making holidays a lever for health, inclusion and local economies

Access to holidays contributes directly to several existing policy frameworks:

- the **Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030**;
- the **European Pillar of Social Rights** and its Action Plan;
- the **Transition Pathway for Tourism**;
- the 2024-2029 priorities on mental health, the fight against poverty and mobility.

In other words, the Union already has the policies; what is missing is the link that connects them to the daily lives of the people concerned.

4. MSVA PROPOSALS

A vision and how to deliver it

PROPOSAL 4.1

Establish a European Mechanism for Access to Holidays (MEAV)

OBJECTIVE

Enable people on low incomes, persons with disabilities and isolated people to benefit from one supported holiday stay a year.

IMPLEMENTATION

- A scheme inspired by DiscoverEU, which already enjoys broad political support.
- An initial budget estimated by MSVA at €150-200 million a year, drawing on ESF+ and the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) programme.
- Management delegated to Member States through local calls for proposals.
- Common eligibility criteria: income, disability, isolation.

BENEFITS

Rapid and visible social impact, a policy citizens can easily understand, and consistency with the Union's social commitments.

PROPOSAL 4.2

Integrate tourism accessibility into EU funds

OBJECTIVE	Make part of regional funding (ERDF) conditional on verifiable accessibility requirements.
IMPLEMENTATION	• A certified universal accessibility criterion in calls for proposals. • Independent audits funded by the Union. • Requirements phased in over the 2028-2034 programming period.
IMPACT	Faster modernisation of infrastructure and alignment with the European Accessibility Act (Directive (EU) 2019/882), applicable since 28 June 2025.

PROPOSAL 4.3

Set up a European Observatory on Tourism Accessibility

OBJECTIVE	Provide a reliable measurement of tourism accessibility across Europe, going beyond the financial indicator alone.
FUNCTIONS	• Harmonised indicators based on ISO standards and World Health Organization frameworks. • A public database built on verified data rather than self-declarations. • Links with independent certification mechanisms. • Integration into the Commission's reports to the European Parliament.
ADDED VALUE	Hosting the Observatory within Eurostat, in cooperation with DG GROW, would give it strong institutional legitimacy.

PROPOSAL 4.4

Develop a certified European Tourism Accessibility Label

OBJECTIVE	Identify the tourism operators that are genuinely accessible.
FEATURES	On-site audits, assessment of the whole travel chain (transport, accommodation, activities), three levels (gold, silver, bronze) and visibility on European tourism platforms.
IMPACT	Positive pressure on the sector and reliable information for travellers.

PROPOSAL 4.5

Include access to holidays in the European Semester

OBJECTIVE

Assess Member States on their capacity to reduce holiday and leisure deprivation.

PROPOSED INDICATORS

- Inability to afford one week's holiday, by income level (an indicator already produced by Eurostat by at-risk-of-poverty threshold).
- The same indicator for persons with disabilities.
- The share of public budgets devoted to respite for carers.

5. THE ROLE OF MSVA

A grassroots actor supporting the scheme

Registered in the EU Transparency Register, MSVA takes part in the European institutional dialogue on policies within its field of action. It positions itself as:

a provider of field data

a partner in public consultations

a pilot actor for experimental projects

an interface between beneficiaries and institutions

a guarantor of a realistic, operational approach

6. CONCLUSION

Effective access to holidays for all

Access to holidays is not a luxury: it is an essential dimension of health, inclusion and human dignity. The European Union has the tools to make it a reality.

The proposals of the Maison Solidaire des Vacances Accessibles provide a **clear, coherent, feasible and mobilising framework** for Europe to become the first region in the world to guarantee effective access to holidays for all.



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