keep driven

Compendium on Youth Participation

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Introduction

In the EU, people with disabilities likely represent the largest social minority, with around **80 million individuals.** However, there is no reliable data on the number of young people with disabilities, due both to their limited visibility in policy and research and to differing definitions of disability across countries.

Young people with disabilities face many obstacles to participating fully in society and in making decisions about their own lives. These physical and cultural barriers, including stereotypes and prejudice, lead to:

- **Limited real opportunities for participation:** where and how young people with disabilities can take part.
- **Intersectional discrimination:** disability may be compounded by other forms of discrimination related to gender, social status, or age.
- **Limited recognition of their views:** in many cases, the ideas and voices of young people with disabilities are not taken seriously.

This situation goes against the principles of the **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** (CRPD) and the **European Union's core values framework,** particularly as reflected in the *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union*, the *Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030*, and the *European Pillar of Social Rights*.

The right of persons with disabilities, including young people, to **express their views and participate in democratic life on an equal basis with others is a fundamental human right that must be guaranteed**.

The project

The "**Keep Driven: Fostering Knowledge, Empowerment, and Participation of Youth with Disabilities**" project was created to respond to these challenges by supporting a group of young people with disabilities in a personal growth journey.

The overall objective is to **promote the full and effective participation of young people with disabilities in democratic life**. This will be achieved by fostering **good practices for** their **inclusion and empowerment**, strengthening the capacity of organizations to engage them, and creating concrete opportunities for their **active civic and democratic participation**.

The project is implemented in **Italy, France, Latvia, and Belgium** by **CBM Italy** as the lead partner, together with **EDF – European Disability Forum**, **APF France Handicap**, **LEDHA – League for the rights of people with disabilities,** and **SUSTENTO.**

The project is funded by the European Union under the Erasmus+ programme.

The KEEP Driven pathway will support a group of young people with disabilities in becoming leaders and designers of a **European advocacy campaign** aimed at:

- **raising public awareness** of the barriers and opportunities related to democratic participation;
- **influencing European debate** and policy-making.

Key activities

- **TRANSNATIONAL SURVEY → 100 European Youth with Disabilities**

  Goal: To better understand **needs and experiences**, as well as the national, institutional, cultural, and attitudinal factors that support or hinder the **participation of young people with disabilities in civic and democratic life.**

- **STUDY VISITS → 6 European Youth with Disabilities in Latvia, Italy, France**

  Goal: To make youth aware of **good practices and positive experiences related to disability** (inclusion, accessibility, sport, participation, and activism), and to provide them with **new ideas and tools** to become protagonists of their own future and to promote youth participation in all areas of community and democratic life.

- **ONLINE DIALOGUE → 18 European Youth with Disabilities and 26 representatives of organizations, universities, and institutions**

  Goal: To identify **9 best practices** at European level for the participation of young people with disabilities in democratic and civic life.

- **TRAINING AT NATIONAL LEVEL → 30 European Youth with Disabilities in Latvia, Italy, France**

  Goal: To equip participants with the **tools to advocate and create** a digital campaign that amplifies their voices.

- **TWO-DAY WORKSHOP IN BRUSSELS → 20 European Youth with Disabilities**

  Goal: To encourage participants to interact, discuss and exchange opinions, and begin **designing the advocacy campaign.**

- **ONLINE MEETINGS → 30 European Youth with Disabilities**

  Goal: To continue exchanging and discussing the **development of the advocacy campaign** in relation to the different actions and selected target groups.

The compendium

This digital compendium aims to:

- **Promote** the **participation** of young people with disabilities
- **Support dialogue** with institutions
- **Contribute** to the national political and social **debate**
- **Encourage** the **reproduction** and adaptation of **inclusive** participation **models**.

The **compendium** presents **nine practices** identified as particularly relevant and effective. The selection is the result of a collective process, including:

- A **transnational survey** that gathered responses from young people with disabilities across several European countries to identify common challenges as well as existing participation opportunities.
- Study visits in **Italy, France, and Latvia**, where young people with disabilities observed concrete practices in real-life settings and reflected on what makes participation meaningful and accessible.

Each practice was selected based on its relevance, potential impact, transferability to different national contexts, and ability to promote meaningful participation.

The selection process followed a **participatory and practice-oriented approach** that combines quantitative and qualitative inputs and places the experiences of young people with disabilities at its center.

Practices were discussed and further refined during an **International Online Dialogue**, involving young people with disabilities, project partners and civil society actors.

Good practices for the meaningful participation of young people with disabilities

Practice 1
Inclusive youth participation and co-creation spaces

Why this practice matters

Meaningful participation of young people with disabilities is a core element of democratic life. However, participation spaces are often designed without considering accessibility or the perspectives of young people with disabilities. Inclusive participation spaces help ensure that **young people with disabilities can actively influence decisions, policies and services that affect their lives.**

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) reference

Article 29 – Participation in political and public life

Case studies

1. France – Quartier Jeunes (QJ)

Quartier Jeunes in Paris is a public space open to young people aged 16 to 30, offering guidance, meeting opportunities and access to a wide range of services. The space is organised into different thematic areas: health support, legal advice, employment and leisure, which young people can access flexibly depending on their needs and interests.

Quartier Jeunes adapts its services to individual needs, allowing **young people with disabilities** to **participate alongside their peers on an equal basis.** The model is based on open access, absence of formal barriers and personalised support.

More information: www.paris.fr/pages/qj-une-maison-pour-la-jeunesse-18241

2. Belgium – European Disability Forum (EDF) Youth Committee

The Youth Committee is composed of members, young people aged 18 to 35, representing all categories of disability. The Committee participates in high-level dialogues with EU commissioners and contributes to events. It focuses on **improving accessibility, promoting disability pride, and ensuring youth representation in decisions.** It advocates for removing barriers, increasing youth participation in policymaking, and enforcing legal rights under the UNCRPD.

More information: www.edf-feph.org/group/youth-committee

What makes it work

Both examples are effective because they embed participation within mainstream democratic and youth structures. In Quartier Jeunes, co-design and personalised support ensure that accessibility is built into the structure from the outset, allowing flexible and stigma-free participation alongside peers. The EDF Youth Committee provides structured representation and direct access to decision-makers, ensuring that young people with disabilities are not only consulted but actively influence European policy debates.

Practice 2
Large-scale inclusive events

Why this practice matters

Public debate, cultural life and civic engagement often take place through large-scale events that remain inaccessible to people with disabilities. Inclusive cultural events demonstrate that **accessibility is a prerequisite for participation** and help challenge stereotypes by making the presence of people with disabilities visible in public life.

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) reference

Article 30 – Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport

Case studies

1. Latvia – Lampa Festival

The LAMPA Conversation Festival in Latvia is an annual cultural and civic event that transforms the town of Cēsis into an open space for public debate and exchange of ideas. Created as a "festival of democracy", LAMPA aims to strengthen a culture of dialogue where people can discuss social and political issues in a respectful and inclusive way.

Accessibility at LAMPA is treated as a structural element: physical access to spaces is carefully planned, and materials are provided in easy-to-read formats, and subtitles and sign language interpretation a re available.

More information: https://eng.lampa.film

2. France – Rose Festival

The Rose Festival in Toulouse is a music and cultural festival that aims to make **culture accessible to everyone.** The Association Rose, which organises the event, is actively committed to making the festival accessible to people with disabilities, providing enhanced welcome facilities and support through Toulouse's "Villes pour Tous" label.

The festival also offers concerts with interpretation in French sign language. The event seeks to be an eco-responsible and inclusive celebration, where diversity is valued and celebrated.

More information: https://rosefestival.fr

3. Italy – Live for ALL Manifesto

Live for All Manifesto is a programmatic document and Italian petition, launched in 2024, that advocates for **the right of people with disabilities to enjoy concerts, shows, and live events in an accessible, inclusive, and non-discriminatory way.** Promoted by activists and professionals, it aims to eliminate segregated areas, barriers, and complex ticketing procedures.

Main objectives of the manifesto:

- **Simplified ticketing:** to book and purchase tickets through the same channels and dates as the general public.
- **Inclusive seating:** integrated positions with the rest of the audience (removal of isolated platforms).
- **Full accessibility:** accessible facilities, services, and pathways for all forms of disability.
- **Non-discriminatory safety:** safety rules must include people with disabilities, not create "second-class experiences."
- **Training:** Staff properly trained to assist people with disabilities.

The Manifesto calls for a **cultural and regulatory change**—a "Live for All" law—to ensure that accessibility is a priority at live events.

More information: www.youtube.com/watch?v=mBJnJqBP13c

What makes it work

All examples demonstrate how accessibility and inclusion are treated as core principles, transforming public events into inclusive spaces.

At LAMPA Festival, full accessibility allows participants to engage actively. The Rose Festival demonstrates that large-scale cultural events can celebrate diversity while being eco-responsible. In Italy, the Live for All initiative creates structural and regulatory change so that people with disabilities can participate on equal terms with others.

Practice 3
Inclusive sports and leisure for social inclusion

Why this practice matters

Sports and leisure activities play an important role in social life and community participation. When these spaces are inaccessible, young people with disabilities are excluded not only from physical activity, but also from social interaction and informal participation. **Inclusive sports initiatives create shared spaces where diversity is recognised**, and participation is based on cooperation rather than exclusion.

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) reference

Article 21 – Freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information

Case studies

Italy – Sanga Baskin

Sanga Baskin is an inclusive basketball initiative based in Milan, where **people with and without disabilities play together on the same team.** Each player has a defined role based on their functional abilities, and specific rules regulate movement, shooting and defence. Structural adaptations, such as baskets at different heights, ensure that all players can actively contribute to the game.

Baskin was designed from the outset as a cooperative sport. It is not an adapted version of traditional basketball, but a game in which diversity is built into the rules and structure, allowing every player to influence the outcome.

More information: https://www.sangamilano.it/baskin

What makes it work

This practice works because inclusion is embedded in the design of the activity itself. Equal and meaningful roles allow all players to participate actively, while cooperation replaces competition as the core value. By recognising diversity as a resource rather than a limitation, inclusive sports initiatives like Baskin foster belonging, confidence and social participation.

Practice 4
Accessible tourism, city tours and public spaces

Why this practice matters

Accessible tourism is essential for promoting inclusion and participation among all individuals, particularly those with disabilities. By ensuring that urban environments are navigable and welcoming, we **enable people with different** physical, sensory, and cognitive **abilities to engage fully in community life.**

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) reference

Article 9 – Accessibility

Article 20 – Personal mobility

Article 30 – Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport

Case studies

Italy – Embrace Experience – Urban Adventures for All

Embrace Experience is an association promoting inclusive city tours in Milan, with accessible routes and transport solutions. Tailored, multisensory and **accessible experiences** enable everyone — including people with different physical, sensory and cognitive abilities — to take part in immersive and meaningful activities.

All Embrace Experiences initiatives are developed following the **Design for All** methodology and through a co-design process involving a group of ambassadors (people with and without disabilities) and local associations.

Each activity is developed, tested and improved through concrete feedback collected in real-life contexts and with mixed groups of participants. This approach creates naturally inclusive experiences, designed to be shared by everyone, without exceptions and without labels.

More information: http://embracexp.com/

What makes it work

The success of Embrace Experience lies in its commitment to inclusivity and co-design. The combination of tailored experiences, multisensory engagement, community involvement, and a focus on continuous feedback and improvement makes Embrace Experience a leading example of how accessible tourism can enhance the lives of individuals with disabilities and foster inclusive communities.

Practice 5
Accessible communication, information and awareness raising

Why this practice matters

Access to information is a key condition for participation in civic and democratic life. When information is complex, inaccessible or not adapted to different communication needs, young people with disabilities are excluded from decision-making processes, public debates and services. **Accessible communication ensures that everyone can understand, engage and take informed action.**

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) reference

Article 21 – Freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information

Case studies

1. Latvia – Aiperons

Apeirons is an NGO that brings together people with disabilities and their friends. The association's purpose is to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities in society. The association focuses on rights advocacy and environmental accessibility, and provides various **services aimed at improving the quality of life of people with disabilities.** Apeirons also manages "Mapeirons", a digital accessibility map covering Riga and other areas of Latvia.

More information: www.apeirons.lv

2. Latvia – MyVoice

Founded in 2011 as a non-governmental organization, MyVoice facilitates public participation in decision-making processes. Its mission is to **develop and promote digital tools for advocacy, including for people with disabilities,** digital democracy, accessibility, and policy improvements. For instance, the platform allows Latvian citizens (aged 16+) to submit and sign initiatives (petitions) to change legislation, a key avenue for the disabled community to advocate for better rights and accessibility. MyVoice has also been involved in projects that highlight the need for accessible infrastructure, such as digital participation in municipal decision-making.

More information: https://myvoice.group/en/about-us/

What makes it work

Both examples are effective because they combine accessible information with concrete tools for participation. Apeirons strengthens awareness and inclusion by linking advocacy with practical solutions such as Mapeirons, which provides clear and usable information on environmental accessibility, enabling informed choices in everyday life. MyVoice offers an accessible digital platform where citizens, including young people with disabilities, can influence legislation through petitions and advocacy campaigns.

Practice 6
Civil society-municipality and multistakeholder governance

Why this practice matters

Meaningful participation of young people with disabilities requires structured cooperation between civil society organisations (CSOs), representative bodies and public authorities. When **CSOs** and institutions work together, participation becomes embedded in governance processes rather than remaining occasional or symbolic.

Multistakeholder governance strengthens democratic accountability, improves policy relevance and ensures that **disability inclusion is mainstreamed across sectors:** education, youth policy, accessibility, social services. It also creates stable channels through which young people with disabilities can influence decisions that affect their lives.

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) reference

Article 4.3 – General obligations

States Parties shall closely consult with and actively involve persons with disabilities, through their representative organisations, in decision-making processes concerning issues relating to them.

Article 29 – Participation in political and public life.

Case studies

Italy, Belgium, France, Latvia – KEEP Driven Project Partnership

The KEEP Driven project is implemented by a transnational partnership composed of CBM Italia (lead partner), EDF – European Disability Forum, APF France handicap, LEDHA - League for the rights of people with disabilities and Sustento Latvia. Each partner contributes concrete experience in multistakeholder governance:

- **CBM Italia** (Italy) works at national and international level to promote disability-inclusive development and inclusive education. In Italy, it collaborates with civil society networks, schools and institutions to mainstream disability rights within development cooperation and public awareness initiatives, fostering dialogue between NGOs and public authorities.
- **EDF – European Disability Foru**m (Belgium/EU level) represents persons with disabilities at EU level and maintains structured dialogue with European institutions, including the European Commission and the European Parliament. Through consultations, policy papers and participation in EU forums, EDF ensures that disability rights perspectives are integrated into European legislation and programmes.

- **APF France handicap** (France) combines grassroots services with national advocacy and has long engaged in dialogue with public authorities to influence disability and social policies. Its participation in broader civil society coalitions, such as the Pacte du pouvoir de vivre (Pact for the power to live), demonstrates how collective advocacy can shape public debate.
- **LEDHA (Italy)** represents the rights of people with disabilities at regional political and social institutions. It carries out activities of legal protection, of support to planning and of information and communication. It promotes and participates in training and research proposals, in particular in the field of social policies.
- **SUSTENTO Latvia** (Latvia) promotes inclusion and accessibility while engaging with local and national authorities. Experiences of cooperation with the Riga City Council illustrate how dialogue between NGOs and municipalities can improve accessibility policies and civic participation at local level.

In addition to the project partners, institutional actors such as the municipalities of Milan, Riga,and Paris, as well as schools and other civil society stakeholders, were actively involved in the project activities.

More information: KEEP Driven — Youth with Disabilities Shaping Europe

What makes it work

This multistakeholder model is effective because it operates across **multiple governance levels simultaneously** — local, national and European — ensuring coherence between grassroots needs and policy advocacy. Each partner brings complementary strengths: grassroots mobilisation, service provision, policy expertise and institutional representation. Structured dialogue with municipalities, national coalitions and EU institutions ensures that youth participation is linked to real decision-making arenas.

Practice 7
Cross-border networking, mobility and exchange opportunities

Why this practice matters

Cross-border networking and mobility opportunities allow young people with disabilities to expand their horizons, build international connections and engage in democratic life beyond their national context. For many young people with disabilities, mobility remains limited by physical, financial, communication and attitudinal barriers.

Participation in transnational programmes strengthens intercultural dialogue, fosters mutual learning and reinforces a sense of European citizenship. **Ensuring accessible international exchange opportunities is essential to guarantee equal participation** and to avoid exclusion from valuable educational, civic and professional experiences.

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) reference

Article 20 – Personal mobility

Article 29 – Participation in political and public life

Article 32 – International cooperation

Case studies

France – International Mobility with Disabilities (IMD)

Coordinated by the Erasmus Student Network France, in partnership with disability and youth organisations across Europe, and funded by the EU under the Erasmus+ Programme, the IMD project **focuses on making international mobility inclusive for young people with disabilities.** The project compiles accessible information, tools, and peer testimonials to support participants and youth workers in planning and undertaking international exchanges, while sharing good practices across partner countries.

One effective tool introduced within this framework is the inclusivemobility.eu platform, aimed at supporting students with disabilities going on international mobility. Students with disabilities can access guidance for studying abroad, including information on accessibility, support, and funding opportunities. At the same time, higher education institutions, national agencies, and ministries can create accounts to provide relevant information about their policies, accessibility measures, and available funding.
The platform covers all 48 countries of the European Higher Education Area, **ensuring full support for students with disabilities across Europe.**

In general, **Erasmus+** – the EU flagship programme supporting education, training, youth and sport across Europe – can itself be considered a best practice for promoting mobility, cooperation, and policy development among organisations and individuals, including

young people with disabilities. The programme includes specific measures to facilitate participation, such as additional financial support to cover accessibility-related costs, personalised assistance, adapted accommodation, accessible learning materials, and flexible participation formats.

More information: https://mobility-with-disabilities.org

What makes it work

These examples are successful because accessibility is embedded in the very structure of the mobility experience. By providing concrete tools, personalised support, and inclusive formats, they enable young people with disabilities to participate fully, build skills, and connect with peers and decision-makers across borders.

Practice 8
Disability storytelling

Why this practice matters

Storytelling plays a crucial role in raising awareness, challenging stereotypes, and shaping public perceptions of disability. When **stories about people with disabilities** are accurate, nuanced, and historically grounded, they **help society recognize the contributions, struggles, and rights of people with disabilities.**

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) reference

Article 8 – Awareness-raising

Case studies

France – À corps et à cris, une histoire du handicap en France (*By Body and Voice: A History of Disability in France*)

The film "À corps et à cris, une histoire du handicap en France" places the history of APF France handicap within the broader history of France, showing **how the association pioneered the fight for the rights of people with disabilities,** created concrete solutions, and contributed to major legislative advances.

The three-part film represents an essential work of remembrance, highlighting the role and activism of a pioneering organization in this shared struggle — a historical reality that has too often been overlooked.

More information: https://www.apf-francehandicap.org/corps-cris-histoire-du-handicap-france

What makes it work

The practice combines **archival documentation** with **engaging storytelling**, making the history of disability rights tangible and relatable. By focusing on both the concrete achievements of APF France handicap and the activism of its members, the film brings historical struggles to life while educating and inspiring audiences. Its professional production, clear narrative structure, and emphasis on a guiding motto ("Risk the impossible") ensure that viewers can emotionally connect with the story, while also understanding its social and historical significance.

Practice 9
Self-advocacy, peer exchange and youth-led representation

Why this practice matters

Self-advocacy and peer exchange are essential for **building confidence, leadership and a collective voice among young people with disabilities.** Youth-led representation ensures that young people are not only consulted but actively shape agendas, priorities and actions affecting their lives. These spaces strengthen autonomy, promote mutual learning and transform individual experiences into shared advocacy, contributing to meaningful democratic participation.

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) reference

Article 4 – General obligations

In the development and implementation of legislation and policies, and in other decision-making processes concerning issues relating to persons with disabilities, States Parties shall closely consult with and actively involve persons with disabilities.

Case studies

1. Italy – Anffas

Anffas (Associazione Nazionale di Famiglie e Persone con disabilità intellettive e disturbi del neurosviluppo) is Italy's largest non-profit association of families and people with intellectual disabilities and neurodevelopmental disorders. It works to protect rights, promote inclusion, and provide care, education and daily support.

Thanks to the "I, Citizen" project, Anffas launched the **first Italian self-advocacy movement:** the Italian Platform of Self-Advocates in Movement.

People with intellectual and neurodevelopmental disabilities have begun to organize themselves and speak on their own behalf to defend their rights, as well as to contribute significantly to the activities of organizations operating in the field and to influence, in an entirely new way, the socio-political changes within their communities.

More information:

www.anffas.net/it/chi-siamo/la-nostra-organizzazione/piattaforma-nazionale-degli-autorappresentanti/

2. France – MasterClass Gouvernance et Engagement (MaGE)

MasterClass Gouvernance et Engagement (MaGE) is an inter-associative **programme supporting engaged young people with and without disabilities.**

The programme aims to support young people's participation in projects and decision-making, in governance bodies and in all spaces of expression. It strengthens the role of young people within their organisations and enables them to bring the ideas they stand for to the highest level.

Over the course of one year, participants work collectively on a joint project, fostering cooperation among young people from different backgrounds and associative cultures.

More information: www.eve-mage.org/

What makes it work

Both examples combine structured support with real opportunities for leadership and representation. Anffas provides a strong national and local network where people with disabilities and their families can engage in advocacy, peer exchange and rights-based action, ensuring continuity and impact at different levels. The MaGE programme invests in capacity-building, equipping young people with concrete governance and advocacy skills.

How to use this compendium

This compendium is designed as a **practical and flexible resource**. The practices presented can be used in different ways, depending on the context and the needs of the reader.

1. **Source of practice-based evidence**
   The compendium illustrates how inclusive participation can be implemented within existing policies, services and programmes, and can inform the design, review or improvement of youth, education, culture, employment and urban policies.

2. **Tool for dialogue**
   The compendium can support discussions between young people, organisations and institutions by providing concrete examples that go beyond abstract principles. The practices can be used to initiate conversations about what works, why it works, and how similar approaches could be adapted in different national or local contexts.

3. **Context-sensitive adaptation**
   The compendium encourages readers to draw on the principles and enabling factors identified across practices, while taking into account their own institutional, social and cultural realities.

Key insights and policy implications

Across the nine selected practices, several common enabling factors emerge. They show that meaningful participation of young people with disabilities is the result of intentional design choices, inclusive cultures, and shared responsibility.

This compendium brings together **practical examples of how the participation of young people with disabilities can be strengthened in different contexts.** These insights offer guidance, support reflection, learning and exchange for policymakers, public institutions and stakeholders working on youth participation and democratic engagement.

1. **Plan accessibility from the start**
   Embedding accessibility requirements into policy design, funding criteria and public procurement ensures more sustainable and cost-effective inclusion. Accessibility is not a technical detail, but a strategic policy choice. This applies equally to public events, education, workplaces and urban environments.
2. **Meaningful participation goes beyond access**
   Participation becomes meaningful when young people with disabilities are involved as contributors, co-creators or leaders, recognising lived experience as a form of expertise. The practices demonstrate the importance of early involvement, real influence and shared responsibility in shaping programmes, services and policies.
3. **Inclusion without segregation**
   All practices show how mainstream frameworks in education, culture, employment, youth work and governance can be adapted to become inclusive and participatory. Flexibility and personalisation allow diverse needs to be addressed without creating separate pathways, supporting participation on an equal basis with peers.
4. **The importance of attitudes and culture**
   Inclusive environments are characterised by trust, openness and recognition of abilities. Positive attitudes, peer acceptance and a culture that values diversity are essential for building confidence and leadership among young people with disabilities. When participation is socially valued, it becomes sustainable.
5. **Participation thrives in connected ecosystems**
   Effective participation is strengthened through cooperation between young people, civil society organisations, public authorities and local communities. Policies that enable structured dialogue and stable cooperation frameworks are more likely to produce systemic change, increasing impact and sustainability.
6. **Inclusive participation strengthens democracy as a whole**
   The practices illustrate that when young people with disabilities are visible, heard and actively involved, decision-making becomes more responsive, public spaces more inclusive and communities more cohesive. Disability inclusion is a driver of democratic quality.

Conclusions

Young people with disabilities continue to face significant barriers to full participation in democratic and public life across Europe. According to the European Youth Portal[1], **around 8% of young people aged 16–29 in the EU**—approximately 5.7 million individuals—report a disability, yet many experience what has been described as "systematic exclusion from employment, education, mobility opportunities and political participation." Participation rates in civic and community activities also remain lower compared to their peers without disabilities, reflecting persistent structural and attitudinal barriers. Even where consultation mechanisms exist, **young people with disabilities are often not meaningfully involved,** and their perspectives remain underrepresented in decision-making processes.

In this context, **organizations working with, representing, or led by young people with disabilities** have a major two-fold role. On the one hand, they can engage with public authorities to raise awareness, strengthen accessibility, and improve the inclusiveness of their decision-making processes. On the other hand, they can work directly with young people with disabilities to build confidence, skills, peer networks, and advocacy capacity so that they can participate fully in democratic and public life, in general, and advocate for their rights. **This compendium brings together good practices** that reflect these two dimensions and is intended to **inspire organizations to adapt and apply them** in line with their own local and national contexts.

Against this background, the following practical recommendations may help organizations move from commitment to action:

1. **Invest in accessible civic education and information formats**
   Go beyond standard communication by developing civic education materials in formats that are easy to understand and engaging, such as easy-to-read content, audio, and short-form video. Co-creating materials with young people—explaining how institutions work, how to exercise rights, or how to engage with decision-makers—can significantly increase participation *(e.g. "Democracy in Easy Language" labs, youth-led content creation).*
2. **Create structured and permanent participation mechanisms**
   Move from ad hoc consultation to regular, institutionalised dialogue with young people with disabilities. Establish advisory groups, youth-led hearings, or other formal channels that ensure continuity, accountability, and visible follow-up from decision-makers *(e.g. youth advisory boards to mayors, youth-led public hearings).*
3. **Support youth-led initiatives with resources and trust**
   Provide small-scale funding, mentoring, and space for young people with disabilities to design and implement their own civic or community initiatives. This strengthens ownership, leadership, and long-term engagement *(e.g. micro-grants for activism, youth-led campaigns, podcasts, or accessibility audits)*.

1 European Commission, European Youth Portal (2023), *What are the realities of young people with disabilities in the EU?*, https://youth.europa.eu/get-involved/your-rights-and-inclusion/what-are-realities-of-young-people-disabilities-eu_en (accessed 8 April 2026)

4. **Use innovation and collaborative formats to solve participation barriers**
   Introduce interactive formats that bring together young people, experts, and institutions to co-create solutions to real challenges. These formats can make democratic participation more tangible and problem-solving oriented *(e.g. accessible civic hackathons, digital accessibility audits)*.
5. **Build practical civic skills and confidence**
   Complement participation opportunities with targeted training that equips young people with the skills needed to engage effectively in public and democratic life. Focus on practical, hands-on learning approaches *(e.g. civic skills bootcamps, public speaking, policy writing, media engagement)*.
6. **Engage mainstream actors, including political institutions and parties**
   Inclusion should not remain limited to civil society spaces. Work directly with political parties, public institutions, and elected officials to improve how they engage with young people with disabilities *(e.g. training party youth wings, adapting campaigns and meetings)*.
7. **Work through partnerships and peer networks**
   Collaborate with disability organisations, schools, and community actors to extend outreach and ensure credibility. Peer-to-peer approaches can be especially effective in encouraging participation and building trust *(e.g. partnerships with disability organisations, youth ambassadors in schools)*.

The examples and recommendations in this compendium show that **inclusive participation can take many forms**—from small-scale local initiatives to structured engagement with public authorities. What matters most is not the format itself, but the commitment to **remove barriers, share power, and invest in the capacities of young people with disabilities,** thus contributing to their full participation in public life.

Who we are

To continue the dialogue and keep in touch, please refer to the information and contact details below.

CBM Italia ETS

CBM Italy (CBM) is an international organisation committed to health, education, work and the rights of people with disabilities where they are most needed, in the world and in Italy. CBM works with national and European partnerships to promote the rights of people with disabilities and an inclusive culture. It supports people with disabilities to participate fully, effectively and fairly in society and lead their lives without discrimination. It acts to address inequalities, particularly in areas of greatest vulnerability and socio-economic disadvantage. Our vision: an inclusive society in which people with disabilities can enjoy their rights and express their full potential.

Michela Sommaruga – michela.sommaruga@cbmitalia.org

EDF – European Disability Forum

The European Disability Forum (EDF) is the umbrella organisation representing and defending the rights of 100 million people with disabilities in Europe. Run by people with disabilities and their families, EDF is the strong and united voice of the disability movement, coordinating advocacy at the EU level and supporting its national members in their policy and advocacy work. EDF also has a dedicated unit for international cooperation. Due to its broad and inclusive membership base, EDF represents the perspectives of all groups of people with disabilities, engaging the disability movement across Europe.

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APF France handicap

Founded in 1933 by four young people with disabilities determined to "challenge the impossible", known and recognised until April 2018 under the name of Association des Paralysés de France, APF France handicap carries out a general interest project based on humanist, activist and social values, with the aim of building an inclusive and solidarity-based society. The association works to ensure equal rights, citizenship, social participation and free choice of lifestyle for people with disabilities and their families. APF France handicap is committed to creating an environment in which people with disabilities can fully exercise their rights and actively participate in social and civic life, supporting systemic change in favour of an inclusive and accessible society for all.

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SUSTENTO

SUSTENTO is the only umbrella organisation in Latvia that brings together 52 organisations of people with disabilities, thus forming a direct representation of over 50,000 people with disabilities and/or chronic illnesses. The organisation's goal is to promote equal participation opportunities for all members of society, ensuring the protection of the rights of people with disabilities and promoting their social inclusion. SUSTENTO has successfully collaborated with several countries in INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS, achieving brilliant and significant results together with project partners. The organisation, with a long experience of more than 20 years, has successfully implemented and continues to manage projects on a national and European level.

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LEDHA - League for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

LEDHA - League for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, founded in 1979, is the regional federation in Lombardy of the associations of persons with disabilities and their families: it is part of the Forum Terzo Settore Lombardia and of FISH (Federazione Italiana per i Diritti delle Persone con Disabilità e Famiglie), an umbrella organisation to which some of the most representative associations committed, at national and local level, to policies aimed at the social inclusion of persons with disabilities adhere. LEDHA has the aim of defending the rights of persons with disabilities and carries out activities: of legal protection through its Anti-Discrimination Centre; of support to planning thanks to CRABA (Regional Centre for Accessibility and Environmental Wellbeing); and of information and communication through its websites and social channels; it promotes and participates in training and research proposals, in particular in the field of social policies and of a cultural nature, managing the Media Library, publishing books and articles, organising communication campaigns and the organisation of public meetings and events.

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