



**ACTIVISM  
AGAINST  
ABLEISM**

# Policy Paper

## **ACTIVISM AGAINST ABLEISM project - Promoting "Activism Against Ableism"**

**Prepared by Exeo Lab**



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## CONSORTIUM

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## Introduction to the Policy Paper

Policy papers play a crucial role in shaping discourse and influencing decision-making processes on critical social and political issues. They serve as authoritative documents that consolidate research findings, propose recommendations, and advocate for specific policy measures.

The policy paper "Activism Against Ableism" aims to explore and disseminate strategies developed within the Erasmus+ project to enhance the social and political participation of young Europeans with disabilities. Grounded in the principles of diversity and inclusion, the paper seeks to address the barriers imposed by ableism and advocate for inclusive practices across Europe. By leveraging international cooperation and educational innovation, the project identifies effective methodologies for promoting the active engagement of individuals with disabilities in societal and political spheres.

Methodologically, the policy paper utilises data collected from the project's outputs as a foundation for its recommendations. These recommendations are meticulously developed to provide clear and practical insights into fostering enablement and advancing inclusive policies. The paper undergoes rigorous internal review to ensure accuracy and reliability. Moreover, to maximise accessibility and impact, the final document will be translated into languages relevant to participating countries and made readily available on dedicated platforms.

## 1.1 The project “Activism Against Ableism”

✓ **Key Words:** project overview, society, diversity, inclusion

## 1.2 Executive Summary

### Introduction

It is vital to confront and eliminate discriminatory barriers that prevent individuals with disabilities from fully participating in society in a Europe that values diversity and inclusion. Through worldwide collaboration and innovative educational approaches, the Erasmus+ project "Activism Against Ableism" aimed to identify and promote innovative methods for the social and political inclusion of young people with disabilities.

### Background

According to the study conducted on the topic of the project consortium, people with disabilities are today facing severe impacts on their socioeconomic condition globally as well as discrimination from social, political, and professional circles. The Activism Against Ableism methodology was developed as an approach of empowering individuals with disabilities to engage in politics, thereby increasing their social awareness and highlighting their fundamental human rights.

### Methodology

This WP aims to create resources for the dissemination of the methodology developed in the previous WP among youth workers that work with differently abled young citizens and train them through an LTTA. The first activity will be focused on the development of a handbook to systematise and further disseminate the methodology. The second activity will focus on the development of the In-Service Training Activism Against Ableism for youth workers. This training aims to prepare youth workers to implement this methodology with their beneficiaries. It will be based on the experience of WP3 and on the handbook, creating



innovative and appealing resources that can be used by partner/associated organisations, the institutions part of the European and national networks and all who may be interested.

## 1.3 Context

The project "Activism Against Ableism - Activism Against Ableism" embodies the spirit of "Activism against Ableism - Promoting political participation and activism of young citizens with different disabilities." Generously funded by the European Union under the Erasmus+ program, Activism Against Ableism embarked on its journey in September 2022, slated to continue its impactful mission until 2024. Throughout this endeavour, diverse European organisations, NGOs, companies, and municipalities will collaborate, forging a collective effort towards a more inclusive future.

At its core, Activism Against Ableism aspires to foster transnational cooperation for young people with disabilities. The project's ambitious agenda includes the development of new resources aimed at empowering these individuals, facilitating their civic participation, and even inspiring them to initiate their own projects. Beyond individual empowerment, the project envisions a novel network of stakeholders, organisations, and political decision-makers at the European level. This network's purpose is to champion the interests of young people with disabilities, particularly in the realm of politics.

The ripple effect extends beyond the immediate beneficiaries. Employees of project partners and associated organisations stand to gain by integrating project results into their practices through tailored training. This dual-pronged approach not only benefits young citizens with disabilities but also heightens employer awareness of disability rights, fostering equal participation and integration within the labour market.

To maximise accessibility, all project resources will be developed in seven languages and remain freely accessible for five years post-project conclusion. An essential component of the project's success lies in the establishment of a European network comprising national organisations working with people with disabilities.

At the project's conclusion, a policy brief with recommendations to the European Union will encapsulate the collective wisdom, needs, and aspirations identified during network





meetings. Together, we are not just dismantling barriers but crafting a blueprint for a future where activism prevails over ableism.

## **Outcomes**

The overarching aims of the "Activism Against Ableism - Activism Against Ableism" project are multifaceted, seeking to foster social awareness on ableism and its challenges, prevent discrimination, and promote inclusion. The project is designed to empower young European citizens with disabilities, encouraging them to become socially and politically active through collaborative and participatory strategies. Additionally, the project aims to train youth workers, develop networks to enhance awareness and inclusive intervention, and influence policymaking in the realm of disability.

## **Results**

The outcomes of the project are strategically aligned with its aims:

### **Network with Stakeholders:**

- The establishment of a comprehensive network connecting various stakeholders.

### **Participatory Methodology - Activism Against Ableism (Activism Against Ableism):**

- Development of a participatory methodology designed to combat ableism and promote political participation.

### **Handbook and In-Service Training (Activism Against Ableism):**

- Creation of a handbook to systematise and disseminate the developed methodology.
- In-service training program for youth workers, utilising innovative and appealing resources.

### **Policy Paper (Activism Against Ableism):**

- Formulation of a policy paper offering recommendations to influence policy making.

## **Outcomes:**







The project's impact manifests through tangible outcomes, emphasising the utilisation and dissemination of developed resources:

**Utilisation by Partner/Associated Institutions:**

- Partner and associated institutions actively use and disseminate the methodology, handbook, and training course for youth workers.

**Fostering Empowerment and Political/Civic Engagement:**

- Empowerment, agency, and increased political/civic engagement of differently abled youth.

**Advocacy for Social/Professional Inclusion:**

Youth with disabilities advocating for their social and professional inclusion. As we embark on this journey, the "Activism Against Ableism - Activism Against Ableism" project strives not only to develop methodologies and strategies collaboratively created by differently abled individuals but also to instigate a transformative shift in societal perceptions and policies. By empowering young citizens with disabilities and those working with them, we aim to break down barriers, promote inclusion, and advocate for a more just and accessible future. This is not just a project; it's a movement toward a world where the voices and rights of differently abled individuals are not just recognized but celebrated.

## 1.4 Recommendations

The International Working Group's views and contributions are combined with the project consortium's research to create the following guidelines, which recommend the following actions be made to enhance professional practice in this area:

**Social inclusion**

The social inclusion of those with disabilities is paramount. It is critical that people with impairments be included in society. It is essential that every effort be made to promote the



social integration of individuals with disabilities. Crucially, this also applies to those who are frequently disregarded and have less obvious conditions like dyslexia or autism.

### **Professional Inclusion**

Businesses should be encouraged by policies to hire individuals with disabilities through tax incentives, grants, and action programs with positive impact. Moreover, it is crucial to enforce company policies requiring accommodations—like adapted equipment and flexible scheduling—and encouraging remote work options where practical are essential.

### **Accessibility**

Differently abled individuals should be given the space to speak for themselves rather than being spoken about. Additionally, professionals should consider maintaining a more casual approach to related topics in their practice, as they are often regarded as somewhat taboo and this places a burden on learners. Additionally, the current “charity model of disability views disability as a burden or a ‘problem’ that persons without disabilities must solve” (United Nations Office at Geneva, 2021).

### **Political Inclusion**

To enhance political inclusion for people with disabilities, it is essential to ensure voting stations are accessible and provide alternative voting methods, such as mail-in ballots and electronic voting. Promoting the political representation of people with disabilities by supporting their candidacies and leadership roles is equally important.

Involving people with disabilities in the policymaking process through advisory councils and consultative bodies, and regularly reviewing and updating legislation to address emerging issues and needs, ensures their voices are heard.

Supporting organisations that advocate for the rights of people with disabilities and including disability issues in broader human rights and social justice agendas are crucial for advocacy and representation.

## 1.5 Conclusion

The project Activism Against Ableism: Activism Against Ableism Erasmus+ involved developing a methodology to promote the political participation of differently abled citizens through participatory strategies. Citizens with disabilities experience sociocultural and political exclusion, and this has demonstrable impacts on their socioeconomic security.

Effective accessibility guidelines and awareness-raising initiatives may significantly reduce structural and mental barriers in the social sphere, promoting a more inclusive community. In order to achieve equal job prospects and economic empowerment for people with disabilities, it is essential that professionals respect anti-discrimination legislation, make workplace adjustments, and provide focused vocational training. People with disabilities can have a greater voice in politics and have the ability to influence laws that directly impact their lives by making voting procedures accessible and promoting political engagement.

The people with disabilities community, stakeholders, and policymakers need to collaborate together in order to successfully implement these proposals. Together, we as a society can build an inclusive society that acknowledges and appreciates the contributions of each and every one of its members, giving to every person the opportunity and support that need's for independent and fulfilling lives.

## 2.1 Reflections for practice based on the experience of developing a methodology to promote the political participation of differently abled citizens through participatory strategies

✓ **Key Words: methodology, political participation, participatory strategies**

## 2.2 Executive Summary

### Introduction

Over the lifecycle of the Activism Against Ableism: Activism Against Ableism Erasmus+ project, project partners were tasked with the development of a methodology to promote the political participation of differently abled citizens through participatory strategies.

### Background

Per the project consortium's research on the topic, citizens with disabilities are currently experiencing exclusion in sociocultural, political, and employment circles, as well as negative impacts on their socioeconomic status worldwide. The development of the Activism Against Ableism methodology was devised as one instrument by which differently abled citizens might be empowered to participate in the political process, enhancing their social visibility and underscoring their fundamental human rights.

### Methodology

The methodology itself was designed in line with participatory action research and the contributions of an International Working Group (IWG) that was established early in the project lifecycle. The contributions of two young people with disabilities and one researcher from each partner country ensured validation by end users throughout the methodology's development.

## 2.3 Context

The consortium's adoption of a participatory model of co-creation, working alongside the International Working Group to produce a methodology which would go on to serve other members of the same target group, was itself demonstrative of the wider objective of the Activism Against Ableism project - namely, the social and political inclusion of differently abled individuals. Crucially, the inclusion of differently abled citizens in the drafting of methodologies to enhance their social and political inclusion ensured that the content produced aligned with their experiences and expectations. Community-based participatory research has the potential to “combine knowledge and action to create positive and lasting social change” (Collins et al, 2018). Furthermore, this process was enriched by the testimony of all participants, whose participation and subsequent retelling of the events of the IWG contributed to project dissemination activities.

Despite the many benefits listed, there were of course a number of challenges. First among these was the selection of the International Working Group itself. To this end, the project partnership leveraged its network of relevant European organisations and each partner hosted a Welcoming Event to describe the project and its proposed outcomes. Many IWG members were identified either directly via these Welcoming Events, or recommended by attendees. Another challenge was to provide a facilitator / mediation apparatus at all meetings of the IWG; a task which was undertaken by the researchers representing the project coordinator and work package leader.

The three sessions of the International Working Group, comprising an introductory online meeting lasting three hours, an 18-hour meeting conducted over three days in Cyprus, and a three-hour finalisation meeting, provided the following general observations relating to professional practice:

**Social Inclusion:** Education is not inclusive in its current inception because of systemic ableism, with legislation sometimes being neglected or ignored.

- In cases where legislation is applied, it can further divide those with disabilities from those without. For example, when someone with a disability is admitted to a separate education class, it can be difficult for them to return to conventional education.

- It can be difficult for those with less visible conditions, such as dyslexia or autism, to be properly assessed or to receive necessary support. This failure is further exacerbated when employers either consciously or unconsciously decide against candidates with disabilities / treat differently abled staff unfairly.

**Accessibility:** Laws which ensure accessibility of public spaces must be better implemented

- There is an existing bias toward physical disabilities where adaptation of physical spaces is concerned, with insufficient measures taken to accommodate neurodivergent individuals, etc.
- Accessibility varies significantly between cities, countries, etc.

**Healthcare and Social Security Grants:** There is a lack of adequate funding for individuals with disabilities, particularly where those disabilities are invisible or not considered “severe” enough.

- Networks of professionals should be established to tackle these (and other) issues.
- Differently abled individuals should be given the space to speak for themselves rather than being spoken about.
- The use of humour to break tension should be considered, as it is inappropriate for learners to feel burdened by the topic.
- Municipalities represent key institutions for the public engagement of differently abled people.

**Strategies to Promote Activism:** Testimonials presenting different ability levels.

- Ensuring accessibility of resources (such as using audiobooks, etc.).
- Discuss ability rather than disability.
- Educate the public from a young age.
- Promote awareness through social media.

Taking these contributions into consideration, the authors have compiled a number of recommendations which are presented below.

## 2.4 Recommendations

The following guidelines combine the observations and contributions of the International Working Group with the research of the project consortium, and recommend the following measures be taken to enhance professional practice in this area:

- The **social inclusion** of those with disabilities is paramount. Every effort should be made to encourage the integration of differently abled individuals in society. Crucially, this extends especially to those with less visible conditions, such as dyslexia or autism, who are often overlooked.
- **Accessibility** must be prioritised within professional settings, with relevant legislation firmly implemented. Adaptation of physical spaces should extend to accommodate individuals with neurodivergence and so-called “invisible” conditions. This push for accessibility, as far as practically possible, should remain consistent across boundaries (municipalities, regions, states, etc.). Additionally, accessibility should extend to resources, such as using audiobooks / captioned videos, etc., in place of conventional text-based mediums.
- Professionals should research relevant grants and funding opportunities to directly support those with disabilities, and help to promote their needs to improve these offerings for future recipients.
- Differently abled individuals should be given the space to speak for themselves rather than being spoken about. Additionally, professionals should consider maintaining a more casual approach to related topics in their practice, as they are often regarded as somewhat taboo and this places a burden on learners. Additionally, the current “charity model of disability views disability as a burden or a ‘problem’ that persons without disabilities must solve” (United Nations Office at Geneva, 2021). Conversations on the subject should therefore change to focus on ability rather than disability.
- **Public engagement** of differently abled people should be a key concern, and professional practices should focus on developing relationships with municipalities, etc., that benefit their clients.

- Networks of professionals should be established to tackle these (and other) issues, similarly to the example set by the International Working Group. Critically, these professional partnerships should include and elevate the voices of those with disabilities. Additionally, every effort should be made to provide a professional mediator / facilitator for these meetings, allowing all voices to be heard.

## 2.5 Conclusion

The Activism Against Ableism: Activism Against Ableism Erasmus+ project involved developing a methodology to promote the political participation of differently abled citizens through participatory strategies. Citizens with disabilities experience sociocultural and political exclusion, and this has demonstrable impacts on their socioeconomic security. The development of the Activism Against Ableism methodology leveraged the contributions of an International Working Group (IWG), relying on the insights of those with disabilities from each partner country. Participation in the IWG was cited by all attendees as demonstrative of the kinds of transformative change that need to occur in society to better accommodate those with disabilities, enhancing their social visibility and underscoring their fundamental human rights. Therefore, professional practitioners should be encouraged to develop participatory approaches that involve those who will ultimately be most affected by their work. The capacity for transformative change in practice would be greatly enhanced by the promotion of working groups that comprise educators, persons with disabilities, and a professional mediator to oversee meetings. These working groups are vital at the concept stage of any project on the topic of disability but can, and should, be sustained long after implementation to continually review and improve the practice - thereby enhancing both the professional competences of the practitioners and project outcomes for future beneficiaries.



## 3.1 Reflections for practice based on the experience of developing a methodology to promote the political participation of differently abled citizens through participatory strategies

✓ **Key Words: methodology, political participation, policymakers**

### 3.2 Executive Summary

In today's global landscape, fostering inclusive societies is a fundamental goal, with the empowerment of differently abled citizens being crucial for their meaningful participation in political processes. This document explores methodologies to promote such participation, offering valuable insights for policymakers aiming to enact transformative change.

Central to effective policy making is a deep understanding of contextual dynamics, recognizing that challenges for differently abled individuals vary significantly across regions and demographics. Policymakers must assess socio-economic factors, cultural norms, and institutional structures that shape these individuals' realities, adopting an intersectional lens to address multiple forms of marginalisation.

Flexibility and adaptability are essential in policy development. Policymakers should refine strategies based on feedback and new insights, embracing innovations like assistive technologies and digital platforms to enhance political participation.

Collaboration with local organisations, community leaders, and stakeholders is vital for sustainable change. Including differently abled individuals in the policymaking process ensures policies are responsive to their needs and aspirations.

Education is a powerful tool for empowerment, enabling differently abled individuals to understand their rights and engage politically. Policymakers should invest in accessible learning environments, inclusive curricula, and lifelong learning opportunities.

Continuous evaluation and improvement of policies are crucial, with robust metrics assessing political participation and social inclusion. Transparency and accountability in evaluation foster a culture of learning and adaptation.

Grounding interventions in contextual understanding, embracing flexibility, fostering partnerships, prioritising education, and committing to continuous improvement, policymakers can pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable society where all individuals can thrive.

### 3.3 Context

In today's global landscape, the pursuit of inclusive societies stands as a fundamental goal. Central to this endeavour is the empowerment of differently abled citizens, ensuring their full and meaningful participation in political processes. As we delve into the reflections on the development of methodologies to promote such participation, we uncover a wealth of insights that resonate far beyond any single project. This expanded discourse seeks to amplify these insights, offering policymakers a comprehensive roadmap for enacting transformative change.

#### **Understanding Contextual Dynamics:**

At the heart of effective policy making lies a deep understanding of contextual dynamics. No two communities are alike, and the challenges faced by differently abled individuals vary significantly across regions and demographics. To craft policies that resonate with the lived experiences of these individuals, policymakers must first engage in a process of rigorous assessment. This entails examining the socio-economic factors, cultural norms, and institutional structures that shape the realities of differently abled citizens within a given context.

Moreover, policymakers must recognize the intersectional nature of disability, acknowledging that individuals may face multiple forms of marginalisation based on factors such as gender, race, or socio-economic status. By adopting an intersectional lens, policymakers can develop interventions that address the unique needs and challenges of diverse communities, fostering inclusivity at every level.

**Flexibility and Adaptation:**

In the face of ever-evolving challenges, flexibility and adaptation emerge as cornerstones of effective policy development. A rigid approach, divorced from the realities of lived experience, is destined to fall short. Instead, policymakers must cultivate a mindset of adaptability, continually refining strategies in response to feedback and emerging insights. This iterative process allows for the organic evolution of methodologies, ensuring their relevance and effectiveness across diverse settings.

Furthermore, policymakers must remain open to innovation, embracing new technologies and methodologies that have the potential to enhance political participation for differently abled citizens. Whether through the use of assistive technologies or the implementation of digital platforms for civic engagement, harnessing the power of innovation can broaden access and amplify voices that have historically been marginalised.

**Partnerships and Collaboration:**

Sustainable change rarely occurs in isolation. Collaboration with local organisations, community leaders, and other stakeholders is essential for the success of any policy endeavour. By forging strong partnerships, policymakers can leverage existing resources, tap into local expertise, and foster a sense of collective ownership over initiatives. Moreover, collaboration enables the co-creation of solutions, ensuring that interventions resonate with the lived experiences of those they aim to empower.

Beyond traditional partnerships, policymakers should also prioritise the meaningful inclusion of differently abled individuals in the policymaking process itself. Too often, decisions that directly impact the lives of these individuals are made without their input or participation. By centering the voices of differently abled citizens in the policymaking process, policymakers can ensure that policies are both responsive to their needs and reflective of their aspirations.

**Empowerment through Education:**

Education serves as a powerful tool for empowerment, enabling individuals to understand their rights, articulate their needs, and engage meaningfully in political processes. For differently abled citizens, access to quality education is often hindered by a myriad of barriers,

including inaccessible facilities, discriminatory attitudes, and a lack of specialised support services.

To address these challenges, policymakers must prioritise educational initiatives that are tailored to the needs of differently abled individuals. This includes investing in accessible learning environments, providing training on self-advocacy and civic engagement, and promoting inclusive curricula that celebrate diversity. Moreover, policymakers should recognize the importance of lifelong learning, ensuring that educational opportunities extend beyond formal schooling and into adulthood.

### **Evaluation and Continuous Improvement:**

The journey of policy development is marked by continuous evaluation and improvement. Metrics for success must extend beyond mere outputs to encompass outcomes that reflect tangible improvements in political participation and social inclusion. Through robust evaluation mechanisms, policymakers can identify areas of strength and weakness, iterate on strategies, and drive meaningful progress over time.

Moreover, policymakers should prioritise transparency and accountability, ensuring that evaluation findings are disseminated widely and used to inform future decision-making. By engaging stakeholders in the evaluation process, policymakers can foster a culture of learning and adaptation, where successes are celebrated, and failures are embraced as opportunities for growth.

As we reflect on the journey of developing methodologies to promote the political participation of differently abled citizens, it becomes clear that the path to inclusivity is both challenging and multifaceted. Yet, within these challenges lie opportunities for transformative change. By grounding interventions in contextual understanding, embracing flexibility and adaptation, fostering partnerships, prioritising education, and committing to continuous improvement, policymakers can pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable society.

As we embark on this journey together, let us remain steadfast in our commitment to empowering all individuals to participate fully in the political life of their communities. By amplifying the voices of differently abled citizens, we can build a future where diversity is celebrated, barriers are dismantled, and every individual has the opportunity to thrive.

### 3.4 Recommendations

As policymakers navigate the complexities of promoting political participation for differently abled citizens, they must draw upon a rich tapestry of research, scholarship, and practical insights to inform their decision-making. By synthesising the findings of leading scholars and practitioners in the field, policymakers can develop recommendations that are grounded in evidence-based approaches and tailored to the unique needs of their communities.

One key recommendation is to prioritise the development of inclusive policies that address the intersecting barriers faced by differently abled individuals. Scholars such as Carol Thomas (2014), in her work "Disability and Diversity," emphasise the importance of shifting from a medical model of disability to a social model that recognizes disability as a product of social, environmental, and attitudinal barriers. By adopting a social model framework, policymakers can design policies that target these barriers and create more inclusive political environments.

Furthermore, policymakers should prioritise the meaningful involvement of differently abled individuals in the policymaking process itself. As highlighted by authors such as Priestley et al. (2016) "The political participation of disabled people in Europe: Rights, accessibility and activism", the exclusion of differently abled voices from political decision-making perpetuates cycles of marginalisation and reinforces existing power imbalances. To counteract this trend, policymakers must actively engage with differently abled individuals and their representative organisations, ensuring that their perspectives and experiences are central to the development and implementation of policies.

Another critical recommendation is to invest in accessible infrastructure and technology to facilitate political participation for differently abled citizens. Research by authors such as Mallet (2011) in "Representing disability in an ableist world: Essays on mass media." underscores the importance of accessible communication channels, voting booths, and campaign materials in enabling full electoral participation. By allocating resources to improve accessibility, policymakers can remove physical and technological barriers that hinder political engagement and ensure that differently abled citizens can exercise their democratic rights on an equal footing with their non-disabled peers.

In addition, policymakers should prioritise education and awareness initiatives to foster a culture of inclusivity and empowerment among differently abled individuals. Scholars such as Tom Shakespeare (2013), in "Disability Rights and Wrongs Revisited," emphasise the transformative potential of education in challenging stereotypes, combatting discrimination, and promoting self-advocacy. By incorporating disability awareness training into school curricula, workplace diversity programs, and community outreach efforts, policymakers can cultivate a more inclusive society where differently abled individuals are valued members and active participants.

Moreover, policymakers should establish robust mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of policies aimed at promoting political participation for differently abled citizens. Policymakers can develop indicators to assess the impact of policies on voter turnout, accessibility of polling places, and representation in elected office. By regularly collecting and analysing data on these metrics, policymakers can identify areas for improvement, track progress over time, and make evidence-based adjustments to policy interventions.

Ultimately, the recommendations outlined above represent just a starting point for policymakers seeking to promote political participation for differently abled citizens. As they embark on this journey, policymakers must remain committed to ongoing dialogue, collaboration, and learning, drawing upon the expertise of scholars, advocates, and affected communities to inform their efforts. By centering the voices and experiences of differently abled individuals, policymakers can advance policies that not only remove barriers to participation but also empower all citizens to fully engage in the democratic process.

### 3.5 Conclusion

Empowering differently abled citizens to participate fully in political processes is crucial for building inclusive societies. Effective policy making begins with understanding the unique challenges these individuals face, which vary widely across different regions and demographics. Policymakers must conduct thorough assessments of socio-economic factors,

cultural norms, and institutional structures, adopting an intersectional approach to address compounded marginalisation.

Flexibility and adaptability are key. Policymakers should continuously refine strategies based on feedback and embrace innovations such as assistive technologies and digital platforms to enhance participation. Collaboration with local organisations, community leaders, and stakeholders is vital for leveraging resources and ensuring initiatives reflect the lived experiences of differently abled individuals.

Education is a powerful tool for empowerment. Tailored educational initiatives, accessible learning environments, and inclusive curricula are essential. Lifelong learning opportunities should extend beyond formal education to support continuous engagement.

Continuous evaluation and improvement of policies are necessary. Policymakers should use robust metrics to assess political participation and social inclusion, fostering transparency and accountability.

## 4.1 Recommendations for policymaking regarding the nefarious effects of ableism

✓ **Key Words:** recommendations, policymaking, effects of ableism

## 4.2 Executive Summary

The specific recommendations are developed as part of the ERASMUS+ Activism Against Ableism: Activism Against Ableism 'WP5: Promoting Activism Against Ableism'. The recommendations explore strategies and methodologies for promoting political and social participation of young Europeans with disabilities. It focuses on providing 'Recommendations for policy making regarding the nefarious effects of ableism' based on an analysis of challenges faced by people with disabilities in the policymaking processes.

## 4.3 Context

Ableism, the discrimination and social prejudice against people with disabilities, manifests in various harmful ways, affecting individuals' lives, opportunities and well-being. To counteract these effects, policymaking needs to be comprehensive and inclusive.

Importantly, incidents of ableism and social discrimination in policy-making processes against people with disabilities vary significantly among EU countries. Northern EU member-states develop stronger policy measures to protect the rights of people with disabilities, while southern member-states face more challenges in addressing them. Ableist attitudes in policy-making, that is, attitudes that show a lack of knowledge on the abilities of individuals with disabilities, ignorance or lack of empathy towards disability issues, create adverse effects in policy-making. These mainly articulate the exclusion of people with disabilities from decision-making processes or inadequate policy implementation. For example, the EU's European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 aimed to empower people with disabilities, but progress across



member states has been uneven, with significant gaps in areas like accessibility and employment. Notably, the European Commission Disability Strategy is a renewed ten-year strategy involving ways to empower persons with disabilities so they can enjoy their rights and participate fully in society and economy.

Despite the plethora of measures developed by the European Commission to combat the effects of ableism, there is still a disproportionate distribution of national measures across EU member-states to secure the rights of people with disabilities in the policy-making processes. Some of the measures developed by the EU refer to the principle 17 of the European Pillar of Social Rights which highlights that people with disabilities have the right to income support that ensures living in dignity as well as the European Disability Act which aims to secure the accessibility requirements of products produced so to be accessible to people with disabilities.

Moreover, in recent decades, the number and the impact of organisations and associations aimed at promoting the rights of people with disabilities have been increasing. These organisations as further outlined in the *ACTIVISM AGAINST ABLEISM HANDBOOK* include: the Inclusion International, the Global Partnership for Children with Disabilities, World ENABLED and at EU level: the European Disability Forum, European Association of Service providers for persons with disabilities etc.

Despite the EU policy measures to secure equal participation in society, the effects of ableism prevail in the policy making procedures. Ableism which attributes to ingrained societal biases, lack of awareness and structural barriers, can ultimately affect the policies and measures put in place aimed at securing the rights of people with disabilities.

The main effects of ableism in policymaking refer to:

- Integrating stereotypes and misconceptions in policy-making processes due to ableist attitudes, leading into the design and implementation of policies and strategies that promote a paternalistic ‘caring’ approach rather than promoting independence or empowerment of people with disabilities.

- Underrepresentation of people with disabilities in decision-making processes especially in policy areas and issues affecting their lives, hindering their voices of being heard and considered when developing policy outcomes.
- Lack of data and research across the EU on incidents of ableism and experiences and needs of people with disabilities. Ableism can also generate bias in political research undertaken, as this can be limited and biased, failing to capture the full diversity and complexity of disability experiences.
- Rigid structures and procedures in governmental processes which create a burden of accessing the state's resources, information and support to also ensure that in times of emergencies such as natural disasters, conflicts etc. the needs of people with disabilities will be understood and accommodated.
- An ableist attitude in policymaking makes policymakers prioritising other areas of spending over disability rights, viewing accommodations and accessibility measures as too costly which often leads to favouring the implementation of short-term investment programmes rather than long-term investment, resulting in the acceleration of ongoing challenges or of the stability of challenges faced by people with disabilities in the long-term across all areas such as accessibility, education, employment, healthcare, housing, transportation, social services, community inclusion, technology and legal rights and protection.
- People with invisible disabilities may face additional challenges in having their needs recognized and addressed in policy due negligence and lack of awareness and information derived from ableist attitudes.
- Additional social isolation for people with disabilities who also belong to marginalised groups based on race, gender and socioeconomic backgrounds may face compounded discrimination which is not illustrated and addressed by policies that consider intersectionality.
- Inadequate social care support to families and caregivers who at many times face state and social isolation, due to unawareness of resources, tools and skills to better support people with disabilities adding to the reduced financial support by the state which can affect the quality of life for all family members.

- Lack of policy measures in relation to the welfare system assessing and developing new strategies related to the quality of life for people with disabilities.

## 4.4 Recommendations

The primary step towards curbing the effects of ableism in the policymaking process is education. The public and more importantly, people with political authority need to be well-informed, possess flexibility skills, and be aware of disability issues and the capabilities of people with disabilities. This will enable the first step towards implementing policymaking procedures that counteract ableist attitudes in decision-making processes.

The following recommendations are proposed for policymaking to address the nefarious effects of ableism, as discussed in the previous chapter:

- Participatory Processes of people with disabilities in decision-making via the establishment of groups at local and national levels and consultation teams made by experts and individuals with disabilities.
- Transparent procedures and monitoring of decision-making processes to eliminate bias and prejudices in decision-making procedures.
- Effective collaboration mechanisms between multiple agencies and effective coordination among national and local authorities.
- Availability of funding especially regarding state funded long-term investment programmes that facilitate the daily lives of people with disabilities.
- Ensure the use of accessible communication methods in political events to include all people irrespective of abilities.
- Address the intersectionality aspect at national levels in reference to the EU legal framework in combating discrimination on various forms (Racial Equality Directive, Employment Equality Directive and Gender Equality Directive), which all strengthen anti-discriminatory policies on the grounds of religion, gender, disability, age or sexual orientation.

## 4.5 Conclusion

The recommendations provide a ground of information to policymakers and stakeholders on ways to combat ableism in the policy making procedures.

Despite efforts from the European Commission, such as the European Disability Strategy and various directives aimed at protecting disability rights, ableism manifests through exclusion, inadequate policy implementation, and a lack of comprehensive data. Disparities among EU member states further exacerbate these issues, with Northern member states generally showing stronger measures compared to Southern counterparts.

The main effects of ableism in policy-making include the integration of stereotypes, underrepresentation in decision-making processes, and the persistence of rigid structures that hinder access to state resources. Additionally, there is a lack of intersectional approaches in policies, which fails to address the compounded discrimination faced by people with disabilities belonging to other marginalized groups.

To address these challenges, it is crucial to educate both the public and policymakers about disability issues and the capabilities of people with disabilities. Recommendations include enhancing participatory processes, ensuring transparency and monitoring in decision-making, fostering effective collaboration between state's agencies, securing long-term government funding for supportive programs, using accessible communication methods in political events, and incorporating intersectionality into anti-discriminatory policies.

By implementing these recommendations, policymakers can create a more inclusive society that not only recognizes the rights and needs of people with disabilities but also empowers them to participate fully and independently in all aspects of life.

## 5.1 Recommendations for policy making regarding the social, professional and political inclusion of people with disabilities

✓ **Key Words:** recommendations, policymaking, effects of ableism

## 5.2 Executive Summary

This chapter provides a series of recommendations aimed at improving social inclusion in the employment context for people with disabilities. Despite existing legal frameworks and initiatives, people with disabilities continue to face significant barriers when entering the world of work. By addressing these challenges through targeted choices, we can promote a more inclusive society.

Recommendations include implementing comprehensive accessibility standards, enforcing anti-discrimination laws at work and ensuring accessible work facilities. These measures are key to fostering an environment in which people with disabilities can participate fully and thrive in all aspects of life.

## 5.3 Context

The EU and its Member States are committed to improving the socio-economic situation of persons with disabilities, based on the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. **Principle 17** of the **European Pillar of Social Rights** emphasises that people with disabilities have the right to income support that ensures a decent living, to services that enable them to participate in the labour market and society, and to a working environment adapted to their needs.

Despite this people with disabilities face numerous obstacles in the social and professional spheres, which limit their full participation in society. They often face major difficulties that

delay their full participation in society. People with disabilities continue to constitute a particularly vulnerable group in our societies. Too many are still exposed to marginalisation. This is particularly evident at the socio-economic level.

Regarding the workplace and the working environment, persons with disabilities experience higher unemployment rates and limited opportunities for career advancement. Discriminatory hiring practices, lack of workplace accommodations and vocational training programmes are significant obstacles. These challenges not only affect the economic independence of persons with disabilities, but also limit their contribution to the workforce and the economy at large. Additionally, people with disabilities often face limitations in their professional development and career opportunities due to persistent prejudices and inadequate understanding of their capabilities by employers.

However, despite these barriers, people with disabilities can make significant and unique contributions to the workforce and the wider economy if the right opportunities and support are provided. It is therefore essential that companies and organisations promote active inclusion policies, incentivising the adoption of flexible and accessible workplaces and implementing strong anti-discrimination policies.

The adoption of some best practices will not only help reduce employment inequalities for people with disabilities but also enrich the workforce with different perspectives and skills, contributing to greater innovation and productivity. In this way, the employment sector can evolve towards greater equity and inclusion, ensuring that every individual has the opportunity to realise their professional potential.

## 5.4 Recommendations

This chapter presents some of the recommendations aimed at promoting social inclusion in the professional context of people with disabilities. The proposed measures aim to create a more inclusive society by ensuring equal access to fair employment opportunities. The recommendations cover several areas: recruitment policies, accessibility and technology, work flexibility, professional development, support and assistance. Specifically:

### **Recruitment policies**

- Implement mandatory training programmes for all employees on diversity, inclusion and disability awareness to promote an inclusive corporate culture;
- Ensure that all recruitment materials are available in accessible formats and that recruitment procedures are free from physical and communication barriers.

### **Accessibility and technology**

- Provide assistive technologies that enable people with disabilities to work effectively, such as screen-reading software, customised hardware and improved communication systems;
- Modify workspaces to make them fully accessible, including ramps, adequate lifts, accessible toilets and clear signs.

### **Work flexibility**

- Promote flexible working policies that allow for customised working hours and remote working opportunities, when possible, to adapt to different needs;
- Work with employees with disabilities to identify and implement specific adaptations that can help them perform their tasks better.

### **Professional development**

- Ensure that people with disabilities have equal access to advanced vocational training and promotion opportunities;
- Offer clear career paths and professional development plans that take into account individual abilities and aspirations.

### **Support and assistance**

- Offer ongoing support services, such as personal assistants or sign language interpreters, to ensure that employees with disabilities can work effectively;
- Create mentoring programmes that connect new employees with disabilities to more experienced colleagues for support during integration and professional development.

## 5.5 Conclusion

The chapter discussed the ongoing challenges that people with disabilities face in the employment context despite current regulatory frameworks and support initiatives. Disability, while a significant challenge, should not be an obstacle to equal and productive participation in the world of work. The proposed recommendations aim to break down existing barriers by promoting a more inclusive and accessible working environment.

Recruitment policies, workplace adaptability, technology integration, work flexibility and professional development are all crucial aspects that need a cohesive, holistic approach. By implementing these strategies, companies and organisations will not only meet their legal obligations but also actively contribute to the creation of a diverse workforce that values the unique skills of each individual.

Encouraging diversity and inclusion in the workplace not only improves the quality of life of people with disabilities but also enriches the work environment with new perspectives and skills, driving innovation and greater collective performance. In light of this, it is imperative that all stakeholders involved work together to adopt and implement these recommendations, ensuring that every individual has the opportunity to realise their professional potential and contribute meaningfully to the broader economy.

Promoting equity and inclusion in the workplace is not just a matter of social justice but a strategic necessity that will bring lasting benefits to society as a whole.



## 6.1 Recommendations for policymaking regarding the importance of the social and political participation of differently abled people, and how to promote their empowerment

✓ **Key Words: recommendations, effects of ableism, empowerment**

## 6.2 Executive Summary

This policy paper responds to the current necessity of increasing the exposure level of disabled persons and making them empowered in the society by means of social inclusion. This discrimination and prejudice against individuals with disabilities known as ableism has profound and negative impacts on the psychological and socioeconomic welfare. As such, it is the desire of this document to offer clear and encompassing policy recommendations that would help policymakers make meaningful changes towards enabling persons with disability to lead a normal and fully integrated lifestyle, as enjoyed by any other person.

Disabled individuals experience a wide range of challenges that they face daily, such as architecture barriers, lack of equal opportunities for employment and education, attitudinal barriers, and information barriers. These barriers prevent an individual from fulfilling the roles and responsibilities that are expected within society and restrict social interaction with peers. The social effects of ableism, such as low esteem and anxiety, complicate these issues even more.

To address these problems, the policy paper explains that several strategies should be employed. More structural changes through upgrades to infrastructure and achieving universal design principles must also be pursued. Educational pursuits such as awareness creation and sensitivity making for the public can lead to change in perception towards the people. Ironically, despite the significant strides that have been made with the implementation of the Americans with Disabilities Act, information and communication technology remains an area where significant improvements could still be made – minimising

disability barriers to help empower people with disabilities. Appropriate enhancements on the legal and policy regime shall offer requisite safeguards and ensure accountability.

Furthermore, the strategies applied for enhancing social participation are provided, including legislative and educational provisions for people with learning disabilities or developmental vulnerabilities, and community involvement programs. If these recommendations are followed, then it would be possible to ensure that policymakers promote the effective integration of disabled individuals into the society. This policy paper aims to bring into focus the issue of ableism so that society at large may be improved to protect every citizen of the country who is in a way or the other disabled.

## 6.3 Context

According to various statistics, people with disabilities constitute a large part of society and have many social problems that limit their inclusion. Such issues arise from ableism, which can be physical, attitudinal and systemic in nature, among other dimensions. Across the globe, places for recreation, public use, transportation, workforce, and walking spaces are still a taboo to many disabled persons, thus limiting their everyday functioning. To meet their needs and make them active participants in social life, one needs to tackle these overlapping barriers holistically. Lack of access to physical environment by having inaccessible buildings, ramps, and forms of public transport leads to individuals with a disability disengaging from their community. Prejudice involves negative beliefs, feelings, and actions towards others based on their group memberships, while stereotyping precludes others based on negative personal or group images held by a dominant group. In addition to the above factors, there also communication barriers that hinder persons with disabilities to access the necessary information in the right formats that they would understand for instance Braille, large fonts, sign language among others. The experience of ableism makes it difficult for disabled people to be active members of society due to the limited opportunities for promotion and access to education, as well as the loss of self-esteem, increased anxiety, and feelings of helplessness. Socioeconomically, people with disabilities have less chance to attain higher quality education, employment, and overall income level than other members of society. These challenges are making it important for to come up with more and better policies and programmes in the area of Social Inclusion and Empowerment.

To harness such problems, a multi-faceted approach that not only involves eradicating barriers hiding physical and communication access but also encourages positive changes on attitude and policies should be adopted. The general rehabilitation of society for disabled people entails modification of the physical facilities within the society, changing the perception of the society towards disabled people, provision of social related communication infrastructure, and formulation of social related legal legislations. Through encouraging the existence of a tolerant community which is inclusive of all the populace, then many individuals would be encouraged to contribute their best in the societies they find themselves in.

## 6.4 Recommendations

### 1. Enhance Physical Accessibility

- **Infrastructure Improvements:** Governments and municipalities should invest in making public spaces fully accessible by retrofitting existing infrastructure and ensuring new buildings adhere to universal design standards;
- **Universal Design Standards:** Implement and enforce comprehensive universal design standards in all public and private buildings to ensure accessibility for people with disabilities.

### 2. Promote Inclusive Attitudes and Awareness

- **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Launch nationwide campaigns to educate the public about the capabilities and rights of people with disabilities, challenging and changing negative stereotypes and prejudices;
- **Training Programs:** Develop and mandate training programs for public officials, educators, employers, and service providers to increase awareness and understanding of disability issues and promote inclusive practices.

### 3. Ensure Accessible Information and Communication

- **Accessible Information Platforms:** Governments should develop and maintain websites, mobile applications, and other communication platforms that are accessible

to people with disabilities, using formats such as Braille, large print, audio, and sign language;

- **Assistive Technologies:** Promote the development and use of assistive technologies that facilitate communication and information access for people with disabilities, ensuring their integration into mainstream services.

#### 4. Strengthen Legal and Policy Frameworks

- **Inclusive Legislation:** Enact and enforce comprehensive laws that guarantee the political and social rights of people with disabilities, ensuring alignment with international conventions such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD);
- **Monitoring and Accountability:** Establish independent bodies to monitor the implementation of disability-inclusive policies, ensuring accountability and compliance with legal standards.

#### 5. Empower Social Participation

- **Inclusive Education:** Implement policies that promote inclusive education, providing the necessary resources and support to ensure that students with disabilities can fully participate in mainstream education;
- **Community Engagement:** Facilitate the active involvement of people with disabilities in community activities and organizations, promoting social integration and empowerment through inclusive community programs.

## 6.5 Conclusion

In summary, it is evident that eradicating ableism and fostering the social integration of disabled persons matters most in the pursuit of an equitable society. Despite the finding of services such as transportation, access to facilities, language, and community support for overall independence, disabled people continue to experience barriers that hinder them from participating in social activities. Such barriers are effectively denying individuals with



disabilities the ability to access and enjoy their right to public spaces and services while at the same time reinforcing stereotype and nurturing discriminative environments.

It should be understood that social inclusion is not an end, but a right, a goal that no one should surrender. It means establishing societies where the disabled individuals are expected and appreciated for what they can do and ensuring that they be granted the same chances just like any other individuals for engagement in various facets of life. A fundamental method of establishing social inclusion entails a profound shift in people's perspectives of disability, including a shift from deficit thinking to a positive disability identity.



## Final Conclusion

The guidelines developed by the International Working Group, combined with the research of the project consortium, emphasise several key actions to improve professional practice and promote the inclusion of people with disabilities in different spheres of life. These recommendations focus on social, professional and political inclusion, accessibility and wider advocacy and representation.

✓ **Social inclusion** is crucial for people with disabilities. Efforts must be made to fully integrate them into society, including those with less visible conditions such as dyslexia or autism. This includes creating accessible public spaces, implementing universal design principles in infrastructure projects, launching public awareness campaigns to reduce stigma, integrating disability awareness into school curricula, and providing community support services such as sign language interpreters and personal assistants. Increasing funding for disability services and promoting the development of assistive technologies are also essential.

✓ **Professional inclusion** requires policies that encourage companies to hire people with disabilities through incentives such as tax breaks and grants. It is essential to enforce company policies that require accommodations, such as adapted equipment and flexible scheduling, and to encourage remote working where feasible. Vocational training programmes tailored to people with disabilities should be provided, along with inclusive education and professional development opportunities.

Strengthening laws against discrimination in the workplace and establishing mechanisms to deal with discrimination and harassment are necessary steps towards an inclusive working environment.

✓ **Accessibility** must be a priority in professional settings, extending to physical spaces and resources to accommodate people with neurodivergent conditions and so-called invisible disabilities. Professionals should consider a more casual approach to discussing related issues, as the current charity model of disability often places an undue burden on people with disabilities. Conversations should shift to focus on abilities rather than disabilities. Professionals should also research grants and funding opportunities to support people with disabilities and promote these needs to improve provision for future recipients.

✓ **Political inclusion** covers ensuring that polling stations are accessible and providing alternative voting methods such as postal voting and electronic voting. Promoting the political representation of people with disabilities by supporting their candidacy and leadership is equally important. Involving people with disabilities in the policy-making process through advisory councils and consultative bodies ensures that their voices are heard. Regularly reviewing and updating legislation to address emerging issues and needs is essential. Supporting organisations that advocate for the rights of people with disabilities and including disability issues in broader human rights and social justice agendas are essential for advocacy and representation.

Providing accessible civic education programmes tailored to people with disabilities and encouraging political parties to include disability issues in their platforms can significantly improve political inclusion.

✓ To address ableism in policy making, **education** is paramount. Policy makers and the public need to be well informed about disability issues and the capabilities of people with disabilities. This includes local campaigns to raise awareness about ableism, acceptance and understanding of different disabilities, especially invisible disabilities. Establishing participatory processes that involve people with disabilities in decision-making at local and national levels is essential. Ensuring transparent procedures and monitoring decision-making processes can help to eliminate bias and prejudice. Accessibility of government structures to meet the needs of persons with disabilities and effective inter-agency cooperation mechanisms are essential. Long-term funding for programmes that facilitate the daily lives of people with disabilities, including education, employment and social care services, is essential.

**By following these guidelines, policy makers and stakeholders can create a more inclusive society that recognises the rights and needs of people with disabilities. This approach not only empowers persons with disabilities, but also enriches communities by valuing diversity and promoting the full participation of all members of society.**

**Effective accessibility guidelines, awareness-raising initiatives and continuous evaluation and improvement of policies are essential steps towards this goal. The combined efforts of governments, civil society organisations, businesses and individuals are needed to challenge entrenched prejudices and systemic inequalities and ultimately promote a world where everyone can live with dignity, respect and opportunity.**



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