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It starts with me

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It starts with me

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IN LOVING MEMORY OF ANASTASIA TASOULA.

SHE JOINED THIS PROJECT WITH A FIRE THAT INSPIRED, CHALLENGED, AND MOVED THINGS FORWARD. SHE STOOD FOR WHAT MATTERS AND LIVED WITH COURAGE, BRINGING CURIOSITY AND A WILLINGNESS TO QUESTION THAT ENRICHED OUR WORK IN COUNTLESS WAYS. WE MOURN HER ABSENCE, BUT ABOVE ALL, WE HONOUR THE LIGHT AND ENERGY SHE SHARED WITH US.



PICTURE BY @BEVISIBLEBEYOU



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1. Introduction

Welcome to this guide, designed to empower individuals and organizations to create meaningful, inclusive, and accessible opportunities for disabled people. This guide serves as a practical resource, offering insights, tools, and methodologies to promote active participation and leadership by disabled people in all aspects of project design and implementation.

Organisations

Meet the project teams:

- **Aġenzija Sapport (Malta)**

Aġenzija Sapport is Malta's national agency dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for disabled people. Established originally in 2001 within the Foundation for Social Welfare Services, it became an autonomous entity in 2016. The agency provides a wide range of personalized support services including social work, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, community and residential services, and day centers. Its core philosophy is to empower disabled individuals by offering support that promotes independence, community living and co-production.

One of its services, Sharing Lives, was launched in 2017 to foster social inclusion and improve the quality of life for disabled adults. Sharing Lives focuses on connecting disabled people to the community by facilitating participation in leisure, cultural, arts, and sports activities. It works closely with volunteers and local NGOs to build social networks and meaningful relationships, challenging stereotypes and promoting integration.

Currently serving over 250 clients - mostly young adults - Sharing Lives collaborates with more than 100 volunteers and various national organizations. The team managing Sharing Lives is experienced in volunteer coordination and European-funded project management, enabling continuous development and outreach. Through innovative programs, we strive to ensure disabled people live full, engaged lives within their communities.



• The Institute for youth, sports and tourism Trbovlje (Slovenia)

The Institute for youth, sports and tourism Trbovlje is a public institution that was established on 17. 4. 2020 based on the decree on establishment by the municipality of Trbovlje. With the decree, the municipality of Trbovlje establishes and regulates the operation of the public institution of the Institute for Youth and Sports Trbovlje, which was created by merging the public institution Youth Center Trbovlje with the public institution Institute for Sports Trbovlje.

The purpose of the institution is to implement and coordinate various activities in the field of youth and sports. On 29th of June 2024, the tourism activity was also added to the institution. The purpose of the institution is to implement and coordinate various activities in the field of youth, sports and tourism.

In the field of youth, the Institute collects and provides information for young people, coordinates and implements activities for young people with an emphasis on permanent priorities within the framework of the national youth program and European cooperation in the youth field, provides service activities (technical, organizational, professional and advisory assistance), and organizes and implements activities of wider importance and acquires funds for them.

In the field of sports, the Institute is responsible for managing sports facilities, preparing facilities for training and competitions, maintaining facilities and playgrounds, organizing and participating in the implementation of sports and recreational activities for young people, implementing an annual program related to sports, and coordinating the program of interest activities with the programs of mandatory pedagogical sports classes. In addition to its basic activities, the Institute for youth, sports and tourism Trbovlje also operates a café and hotel.



- **Roes Cooperativa (Greece)**

Roes Cooperativa is a social cooperative enterprise of the '20s created by professional trainers, social workers, project managers and informal groups aiming to create an alliance that hosts innovative, experiential and non-formal education approaches.

Their vision is to create an open world where everyone has learning opportunities to develop and grow. In simple words, more educational approaches, more options for people to grow. Their mission is to redefine experiential learning by offering fresh and professional learning programs through customized methods and approaches.

All Roes Coop activities are based and thrive towards four pillars:

- *Personal growth*: allowing the development of personal fulfillment, interpersonal skills, well-being and healthy lifestyle.
- *Professional development*: enhancing Entrepreneurship skills, employability skills, teamwork and communication skills and experiences.
- *Sustainability*: promoting sustainability as a holistic idea of environmental protection, mindful use of resources and healthy relationships.
- *Social inclusion*: ensuring and stimulating an inclusive and solidarity society open to everyone beyond gender, sexual/romantic orientation, social, racial, political and heteronormative boxes.

More specifically, their engagement in It starts with me focuses on empowering young disabled people by fostering their active participation, amplifying their voices, and creating inclusive learning spaces. Through interactive tools, co-created methodologies, and non-formal education approaches, they aim to equip participants with the skills and confidence needed to become facilitators and advocates within their communities. By actively involving young disabled people in the design and implementation of the project's activities—such as the development of an interactive questionnaire, workshops, and digital resources—they ensure that their perspectives and requirements shape the outcomes. This participatory approach reinforces their commitment to inclusion, accessibility, and meaningful social change.



• **On & Off (Spain)**

On & Off was founded in 2000 with the mission of offering young people in La Rioja a platform for personal development and growth. Established as an independent, non-profit entity, we have consistently harnessed theatre as a tool for driving social change and promoting cultural activism. Twenty-four years later, On&Off remains steadfast in its commitment to these goals, operating with greater expertise, enhanced organization, and a stronger position to achieve them. Our core team comprises three dedicated professionals, supported by an extensive network of collaborators who share and exchange best practices in the fields of theatre and the performing arts.

On&Off operates through three primary pillars:

- *International non-formal education initiatives*
- *Community initiatives*
- *Cultural initiatives*

The organization's initiatives are built upon these pillars, designed and implemented in alignment with strategies developed in the areas of Culture, Non-Formal Education, and Social and Political Engagement. While young individuals remain a key target group, the organization has broadened its focus since last year to include a wider range of beneficiaries beyond solely youth.

• **Caprifolens Voltigeklubb (Sweden)**

Caprifolens Voltigeklubb has a long-standing tradition of promoting social inclusion by uniting individuals with and without impairments, in mixed groups. The club operates across two main areas: sports and culture, with horses as the central theme that ties these together. Caprifolens uniquely combines the elegance of horses with nature, the excitement of the circus arts, the rhythm of music, the elegance of dance, the power of drama, the importance of training and the therapeutic practices of horses.

Through years of dedicated work, Caprifolens has become a welcoming space where social inclusion is not just a goal but a core value. Its mission focuses on boosting self-esteem and fostering a sense of belonging among participants. The committed team of youth workers and staff regularly organize diverse activities such as musicals, competitions, daily training sessions, and camps, creating a vibrant and inclusive environment. Operating under the motto "vaulting for all," Caprifolens prioritizes inclusivity over elitism.



Through its involvement in Erasmus+, the club has expanded internationally, transforming into a global meeting place in the beautiful South Forest of Sweden. Here, people from around the world come together to share knowledge, exchange experiences, and celebrate cultural diversity. Caprifolens has not only made vaulting accessible to everyone but has also become a global hub of unity, encouraging collaboration and understanding across different communities.

• Calypso (Italy)

Calypso is an NGO founded in 2006, with the main aim to support people in active citizenship and participation. Calypso works in the field of community development and it cooperates with schools, community hubs, ngos, libraries, using theatre techniques and processes in order to empower people and groups. They work with groups of different ages, from toddlers to elders, based in Pavia, Piacenza and South Milano area.

Calypso usually involves people of the community as stakeholders for organizing and supporting activities and events in order to reach and engage a wider audience that doesn't consider theatre or art as means of participation. Since 2007 the organization has been working with mixed groups, both disabled and non disabled, using theatre, performances and creative writing. In all these projects (shows, public events and creative workshops) inclusion is the main focus, since participants are supported in developing their skills in a process of cooperation towards shared goals.

The background of Calypso's trainers, which belong to the world of social theatre, of movement dance therapy and of teaching, provides an educational approach to each project that gives more emphasis on the process rather than on the final result. Each individual path is conceived through the collective group narrative that inhabits it, in a shared experience of reciprocity and both personal and collective growth.



1.1 Project overview and objectives

This guide is part of an innovative project focused on redefining how disabled people are involved in research, planning, and facilitating activities. By embedding the voices of disabled people into every phase, this project aims to challenge societal prejudices, foster inclusion, and create models of best practices for others to follow.

Objectives are linked to the horizontal priorities - inclusion and diversity in all fields of education, training, youth and sports since we will be highlighting the need of disabled people to become facilitators of their own activities.

The objective is also addressing the horizontal priorities - digital transformation through development of digital readiness, resilience and capacity as we aimed to create a digital platform with tools that can help young disabled people to increase their visibility and make their voices heard.

1.2 Importance of inclusive research

Traditional research often marginalises the very individuals it aims to serve, involving them only at the end stages or not at all. This project recognizes the transformative power of inclusive research, where disabled people are not just participants but co-creators. Inclusive research allows for more authentic, impactful, and representative outcomes that resonate with the lived experiences of the target group.



Common barriers in traditional research	vs	Benefits of interactive and accessible approaches
Lack of representation of disabled people		Empowerment: involving disabled people as facilitators and decision-makers
Activities designed without considering the specific requirements of the target group		Relevance: ensuring activities are tailored to the requirements of the target group
Limited accessibility in tools and methodologies, excluding individuals from fully engaging		Inclusivity: promoting a sense of belonging and encourages active participation
		Scalability: providing replicable tools and frameworks for use across diverse contexts

When entire communities are left out of research, the knowledge we produce becomes partial and often flawed. Including people from different backgrounds, abilities, and life experiences leads to findings that are more accurate, more relevant, and more useful to society as a whole.



Recent studies highlight how traditional research approaches have often excluded disabled people, not just as participants, but as co-creators of knowledge. This exclusion has real consequences. It leads to interventions that don't work, technologies that aren't accessible, and policies that overlook the needs of those most affected (Fleming et al., 2023). As researchers working within disability-inclusive paradigms point out, inclusion isn't just about ethics—it's about quality. When disabled people are involved in shaping the research agenda, the questions asked tend to shift. New priorities emerge. Assumptions get challenged (Yergeau et al., 2023).

Inclusive research also has a powerful ripple effect. It shifts power. It recognizes lived experience as a valid and valuable form of expertise. And it creates research environments that are more collaborative, respectful, and open to change. This, in turn, strengthens the relationship between research and the communities it serves.

There's also a practical side to this. Diverse research teams are often better at problem-solving. They ask better questions, spot different patterns, and come up with more creative solutions. Inclusion fosters innovation, in real, measurable ways. At its core, inclusive research is about responsibility. It means listening to those who are usually left out, and making sure that research is something done with people, not just about them.

Fleming, J., Kelly, D., Katsui, H., & Shakespeare, T. (2023). Disability inclusive research: Better science and better outcomes. Lancet Public Health, 8(2), e96–e97.

Yergeau, M., Mankoff, J., Branham, S. M., Devendorf, L., Keating, B., Hayes, G. R., ... & Ringland, K. E. (2023). Crippling research: An approach to disability justice-oriented research in HCI. ACM Transactions on Computer-Human Interaction (TOCHI), 30(3), 1–33.



1.3 Who can use this guide? And how?

This guide is designed for youth workers, facilitators, organisations, educators, and anyone committed to creating environments where inclusion and accessibility are at the centre. It offers both foundational principles and hands-on tools – from step-by-step instructions on how to design interactive questionnaires to practical guidance on building workshops where people with disabilities can take the lead as facilitators, decision-makers, or experts by experience.



Sylvie (Italy) holding a powerful speech for politicians and decisionmakers on a target group meeting in Spain



Olle from the Swedish focus group who helped to create the Swedish workshops, and spoke during dissemination in Sweden for decisionmakers

Beyond serving as a toolkit, this guide challenges traditional ways of working. It encourages readers to rethink power structures, question long-standing assumptions, and embrace methods that truly value diverse perspectives. Inclusion is not achieved by simply inviting people into a room – it requires intentional planning, accessible communication, and an openness to share leadership. By highlighting real examples, tested methods, and lessons learned from the It Starts With Me project, this guide aims to inspire organisations to strengthen participation, build trust, and create meaningful opportunities for leadership among people with disabilities.

Ultimately, this guide is more than a resource – it is an invitation to collaborate, to listen, and to design processes where everyone not only has a voice, but is heard. Together, we can create a future where every individual has a seat at the table and the support they need to thrive.



2. Creating accessible questionnaires

(Disability) it's a socially and culturally constructed category, in relation to the way as the societies establish access to the resources and practice policies of inclusion or marginalization. At the same time, however, the concept of disability outlines an existential condition that relates to concrete individuals who live in a physical space and in a social context, with all the ensuing problems, among them also the physical and cultural obstacles, in everyday life, hindering the usability of that space and of that context.

In the first phase of the project, the aim was the creation of an accessible questionnaire to promote a reflection on leadership. It was important to deconstruct the idea that leadership is something that not everybody can have access to, by bringing in the idea that a more flexible and open definition of what constitutes 'leadership' might empower marginalised groups to take on formal decision-making roles. The questionnaire was created in order to be implemented with different local groups, in a wider survey that would have given a more vivid image of the particular perceptions and possibilities about leadership in a non-ableist dimension.

The structure of the questionnaires was conceived in different phases: first, we had sessions with the different groups in each partner country to explore topics connected to leadership. Then, we discussed partners starting from reflections and perspectives that had arisen from participants and to sketch a first draft of the structure of the questionnaire. The third phase was again with local groups: participants were called to validate the proposal from the staff, and to adjust it according to different requirements, to make it accessible to everyone.

In this way, the leadership topic was explored at different levels, and especially the last one, in which practical arrangements about words, expressions and how to make them accessible were discussed.

2.1 Engaging participants as co-creators

In the process, the main point was to give the participants the possibility to be co-creators of the research, more specifically, to shape the tool that would have organised the research itself.

Each partner devoted some sessions with their local focus groups to check and improve the questions that were sketched, and to organise them with more specific expressions, more suited to the different requirements and points of view of the participants.



Anastasia and Danai (Greece) explaining their method of leadership

The idea of leadership took a long time to be (not) defined: in the end, we decided on an open definition of a leader as a person who can guide or inspire others. This dimension of leadership was wide enough to contain all the different perspectives.

In Spain, creating the questionnaire was challenging for many participants, especially when faced with abstract questions and concepts. This difficulty reflects how little attention leadership has received in society. To make the questions more concrete, they explored scenarios where participants could naturally take the lead in activities and experience the absence of leadership. Based on these observations, they tested different wording to find what resonated best and provided clarity. Later, the drafts underwent an Easy Reading evaluation, an essential step to ensure accessibility for everyone.



In Sweden, the process was insightful and helped us understand participants' needs and expectations. While management teams debated theoretical aspects of leadership, participants had very different ideas of what being a leader meant. Through discussions with the target group and partner teams, they identified key elements that mattered most to participants. These criteria shaped the final questionnaire, making it accessible and easy to understand.

One point of interest for the questionnaire creation was the reflection about how to deal with different types of impairment: different requirements call for different approaches, and each of the partners has been involved with different groups. This was a critical phase but also a great opportunity to enrich the final questionnaire and to collaborate with local partners.

In Slovenia, the process was harder because they didn't know what they didn't know and lacked clear approaches at the start—mainly because they hadn't defined the target group and their disabilities right away. In the end, collaboration with a local institute helped them move forward. Including people with mental impairments and preparing videos for deaf participants were significant steps toward inclusivity. They also saw opportunities to adapt materials for blind participants. We learned many new things and appreciated guidance from other project partners.

In Greece, developing the questionnaire required time, reflection, and continuous feedback. Working together as partners was essential to its success.

In Italy, engaging participants as co-creators was not easy at first. However, as the process evolved, involving everyone in decision-making became natural. Once the group established trust and open dialogue, participants began to propose ideas themselves. Responsibilities were shared, and each person took ownership of meaningful tasks, contributing to the success of the whole group.



It was a natural process, fostered by openness to dialogue, exchange, free expression, and initiative. This led to the election of a co-group leader who, starting from the end of the first year of the project, began to work alongside the person who had initially led the activities alone. Over time, this role was taken on by many others for the implementation of both small and large projects, activities, and events.

These efforts were put to the test during the partnership's first exchange in Sweden, when every participant was encouraged to lead their own workshop. This initial meet-up laid the foundation for defining leadership for this project and all our participants.

2.2 Designing the questionnaire

Designing the questions meant above all to make it as understandable as possible. At first, we looked for plain questions to be very open, about leading activities and how and in which contexts.

From the moment the project has a European dimension, website creators designed a button about languages, which allows people to access the questionnaire in the language they are most comfortable in. Language can create huge barriers, and English as the only possibility would have made the questionnaire inaccessible to many potential respondents.

As a second step, visuals and symbols were used to make the platform more intuitive and accessible, taking inspiration from AAC languages mixed with a strategic usage of very well-known symbols in social media communication. Taking into account possible difficulties in reading, for each of the questions, a short video was recorded, in some cases with the support of sign language.

In structuring questions, the key point was to keep them simple and to have them in such a sequence that facilitates respondents in increasing their awareness about themselves as leaders. Some of the questions give multiple options to support participants in narrowing down the field, focusing on some dimension. At the same time, optional spaces were created for those who wanted to add more details and explanations to their answers, so that this stays as a possibility and not as a strict structure, creating subtle discrimination.

In keeping with these principles of simplicity and self-reflection, questions were designed to encourage the project participants to reflect on aspects of leadership they otherwise may not have considered. Examples of these questions include:

- *WOULD YOU LIKE TO SHOW OTHERS YOUR ACTIVITY?*
 - Click on icon YES (Thumbs up) or NOT (Thumbs down)
- *DO YOU FEEL GOOD IN FRONT OF AN AUDIENCE?*
 - Click on icon YES (Thumbs up) or NOT (Thumbs down)
- *DO YOU WANT TO BE A LEADER?*
 - Click on icon YES (Thumbs up) or NOT (Thumbs down)
- *WHAT KIND OF SUPPORT DO YOU NEED TO BE A LEADER?*
 - TABLET, ASSISTANCE, FRIENDS, INTERPRETER, TRANSLATOR, ACCESSIBLE SPACE, TRAINING, I DON'T NEED SUPPORT

By incorporating thumbs up and down as well as images with each answer, we ensured that the questionnaire would be accessible with visual language difficulties. Together with the use of videos, each question was designed to be both a tool for understanding what constitutes leadership as well as which form of leadership each participant would feel most comfortable with.



The first meeting in Slovenia for the project team – building a common vision for project journey



2.3 Technical aspects

Recommended accessibility tools for youth workers

Supporting young people with disabilities requires a toolkit of accessible technologies and strategies. Below is a curated list of recommended tools, organized by type of disability and use case, to help youth workers foster inclusion and independence.

Tools for visual impairments

- Screen readers: software that converts text to speech or Braille. Popular examples include:
 - JAWS (Job Access With Speech)
 - NVDA (NonVisual Desktop Access)
 - VoiceOver (built into Apple devices)
- Screen magnifiers: software or hardware to enlarge content, adjust contrast, and improve cursor tracking for low-vision users.
- Accessible website widgets: text resizing, color contrast adjustments, alt text in your images, and keyboard navigation to websites

Tools for hearing impairments

- Captioning tools: automated or manual captioning for videos and live events.
- Live transcription apps: convert spoken language to text in real time.
- Mono sound & visual alerts: features in operating systems to help users with partial hearing

Tools for physical impairments

- Sip-and-puff systems: allow users to control devices by inhaling or exhaling into a straw-like device
- Hands-free mouse tracking: solutions like FaceMouse (uses head movements) or Lomak (laser pointer interface) enable cursor control without hands
- Adaptive keyboards and mice: includes trackballs, joystick mice, and head pointers for easier navigation
- Voice control: speech recognition software for hands-free device operation

Tools for cognitive and learning Impairments

- Task management apps: visual planners like Todoist, Trello, or Notion help organize tasks and routines
- Focus and time management: tools such as Time Timer provide visual countdowns to support concentration
- Reading and writing aids: dictation software, word prediction, and text-to-speech tools support reading and writing
- Accessible fonts and layouts: widgets that allow users to select dyslexia-friendly fonts, adjust spacing, and simplify layouts

Web and digital accessibility evaluation

- Accessibility Testing Tools: Ensure your digital content is accessible to all
 - WAVE Web Accessibility Evaluation Tool
 - axe-core
 - WebAIM Contrast Checker
- Guidelines & toolkits: refer to resources like the UNICEF Accessibility Toolkit and W3C's evaluation tools list for best practices

Regarding physical accessibility, youth projects require accessible venues, transportation, and physical environments. For instance, the SALTO Youth project checklist emphasizes assessing physical accessibility of venues for mixed-ability groups, covering ramps, signage, and sensory-friendly spaces.



Amanda from the Swedish focusgroup presenting the project and the questionnaire on her workplace (Daily activity center Frösunda), also helping her co-workers to answer the questionnaire



The European Accessibility Act (EAA) is a landmark EU directive aimed at improving the accessibility of key products and services across all member states by harmonizing accessibility requirements. It targets everyday items and services such as computers, smartphones, ATMs, transport services, banking, e-commerce, and audiovisual media, ensuring they are accessible to persons with Impairments and elderly people. The Act aligns with the UN Convention on the Rights of Disabled People and aims to remove barriers caused by differing national regulations, facilitating a more inclusive internal market.

Recommendations for reading

<https://www.handtalk.me/en/blog/alt-text/>

SALTO-YOUTH. (2015, September 29). Checklist for ensuring the accessibility of international youth projects. <https://www.salto-youth.net/tools/toolbox/tool/checklist-for-ensuring-the-accessibility-of-international-youth-projects.1684/>

European Commission. (2025). European Accessibility Act. Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/disability/union-equality-strategy-rights-persons-disabilities-2021-2030/european-accessibility-act_en



Working with the questionnaire with the spanish focus group



2.4 Conclusion

The principal objective of this research lay in enabling participants to act as co-creators by actively shaping the foundational research instrument—the questionnaire—itsself. This process was inherently collaborative, requiring each partner to conduct sessions with the local focus-groups to refine and organize questions, ensuring they were appropriately sensitive to the diverse requirements and perspectives of all participants.

A significant challenge involved grappling with the abstract concept of leadership, which ultimately resulted in the adoption of an open, inclusive definition: *A leader is a person who can guide or inspire others*. This struggle to define the term, which included playing with scenarios and subjecting question drafts to Easy Reading evaluation, proved vital for ensuring genuine accessibility and intellectual clarity. Collaboration between partners was essential in addressing the requirements of participants with different types of impairment, from providing videos with sign language for deaf individuals to creating accessible content for those with mental impairments.

The final design of the questionnaire was rooted in principles of simplicity and self-reflection. Beyond offering a choice of languages to dismantle potential barriers, the platform utilized visuals, symbols (like the thumbs up/down icons), and short videos for each question to overcome visual and reading difficulties. Questions were strategically sequenced to gradually facilitate a participant's awareness of their own potential for leadership, using examples that subtly shifted the focus to practical actions like showing others an activity or reflecting on necessary support. This design ensured the questionnaire served a dual purpose: it was both an evaluative tool and a pedagogical instrument.

All these conceptual and design efforts were put to the test during the partnership's first exchange in Sweden, when every participant was encouraged to lead their own workshop. This initial meet-up served as the crucial capstone for the process, laying a firm, practical foundation for defining leadership for the project and all participants.



3. Creating interactive workshops

The creation of interactive workshops is a core component of the project, and this section will focus on the development, implementation, and outcomes of these workshops. The workshops are designed to enable young disabled people to become facilitators themselves, foster empowerment, inclusivity, and skill development.

3.1 Planning and structure

Setting objectives and outcomes: the main objective of these workshops is to enable the target group to not only participate but also take leadership roles as facilitators. This aligns with the overarching goals of the project, such as promoting active citizenship, social entrepreneurship, and challenging societal prejudices. The workshops were based on the feedback collected through an interactive questionnaire, ensuring that they are relevant and engaging for the target audience.



Raoul trying out swedish workshop together with Klara from the swedish group



Davide trying to be a leader using the pony Max in Sweden



Justin and felicia (Malta) trying out Patrik's (Sweden) workshop

Steps to take while planning your workshop:

- **Define clear goals:** identify the purpose of your workshop and the specific changes you want to create. Goals may include strengthening leadership skills, improving communication, supporting self-expression, or building confidence. For organisations, goals might involve strengthening participation, improving accessibility, or expanding inclusive practices.



Amanda from the swedish focus group leading a workshop she created with ribbons and dance— adapted for people in wheelchairs



- *Identify expected outcomes for participants:* participants should leave the workshop with concrete, practical skills. These may include:
 - confidence to take on leadership roles
 - the ability to facilitate group discussions
 - improved communication skills
 - understanding how to create inclusive and non-judgmental spaces
 - tools for expressing their ideas, opinions, and lived experiences
 - a sense of empowerment and belonging
- *Prepare accessible methods and materials:* ensure all tools – questionnaires, instructions, visual aids, activities – are simple, inclusive, and adaptable. Use clear language, multiple formats (visual, verbal, written), and flexible ways for participants to contribute.
- *Create the right environment:* a safe and non-judgmental atmosphere is essential. Plan how to build trust, encourage participation at different levels, and ensure everyone feels respected. Consider accessibility needs from the beginning, not as an afterthought.
- *Allow space for participants to lead:* the goal is not only that participants take part – but that they can shape the workshop. Build in moments where they can lead tasks, guide discussions, present ideas, or support peers.

3.2 Accessibility in workshop design

During the first target group meeting in Sweden, each participant from the focus groups had the opportunity to lead a workshop they had prepared in advance. Some chose to lead on their own, while others worked in pairs or small groups – depending on what felt most comfortable for them. The group was a mixed-ability group, including participants with intellectual disabilities, visual impairments, hearing impairments, and other support needs.

This diversity presented challenges, but it also offered valuable learning experiences. It strengthened our understanding of why this project is needed and showed us that we were only beginning to understand the full depth of inclusion. Throughout the workshops, participants supported one another, adapted their methods, and actively looked for ways to ensure everyone could take part.



This experiment proved highly valuable for the project and shaped the direction of the journey ahead. During the exchange, we discussed what the participants need in order to lead a workshop successfully, how to design questionnaires that are accessible, and whether the target groups in all partner countries had the support they needed. We reflected on whether expectations were met, and how we could learn from this experience to strengthen the next steps of the project.

Each participating organisation independently designed its own workshops. Since the planning needed to be completed before the second target group meeting in Spain, we created an Excel file where each participant could enter their accessibility requirements. This allowed every group of co-facilitators to take those needs into account during the design process, making the workshops more accessible and inclusive.

These workshops formed the basis of the leadership programme aimed at supporting people with disabilities to become leaders. The team decided on six key subjects that were important to explore within a leadership context:

1. Communication
2. Initiative
3. Planning & Organisation
4. Facilitation & Structure
5. Public Speaking
6. Challenging Inclusion (Understanding Disability)

All partner countries selected one of the six subjects and the focus groups created a workshop around it by/for the target group meeting in Spain, where all workshops would be tested and evaluated.



Alessia from Italy explaining her ideas using images



Focus group in Spain leading activity to gather answers for their questionnaire

Space setup and comfort

The physical environment plays a crucial role in the success of the workshops. The spaces used for the workshops should be adaptable to the requirements of the participants, particularly those with mobility challenges. Each workshop location must be equipped with accessible seating, ramps, and clear paths of movement. Additionally, the use of accessible materials such as easy-to-read documents or braille is essential for inclusion.

- *Practical considerations:*
 - Ensure that seating arrangements are flexible, with options for wheelchairs and comfortable rest areas.
 - Choose venues that are fully accessible, including bathrooms and entry points.
- *Sensory considerations* (lighting, sound, breaks): Some people may have heightened sensitivity to light, sound, or other environmental factors. The workshop space should be designed to accommodate sensory requirements, with control over lighting and sound levels. Regular breaks will help participants stay engaged without becoming overwhelmed.



Raoul instructing David in the Italian workshop "Statues" during the TGM in Spain



- *Tools to ensure comfort:*
 - Soft, lighting and adjustable sound systems.
 - Timely breaks and quiet spaces for those needing rest.
- *Using assistive technology:* Incorporating assistive technology can greatly enhance the accessibility of the workshops. This includes tools such as speech-to-text software, audio descriptions, or visual aids, enabling all participants to engage fully in the activities.
 - Assistive tech suggestions:
 - Use of apps for real-time captions or sign language interpretation.
 - Incorporation of tactile materials or audio devices for those with visual impairments.

3.3 Inclusive facilitation techniques

3.3.1. Empowering participants as co-facilitators

One of the most transformative aspects of these workshops is the opportunity for participants to take on the role of co-facilitators. This approach not only empowers young disabled people but also fosters a strong sense of ownership over the learning process. Participants are encouraged to lead activities, moderate discussions, and help ensure that each session remains inclusive and accessible for everyone.

Reflections from the process

Facilitating workshops became an important milestone for all participants. Early on, several shared challenges were identified – such as nervousness around public speaking, fear of being judged, or uncertainty about how others would respond. To address these concerns, the partner organisations worked together to create supportive structures that helped build confidence and a sense of safety for everyone involved.

Across all partner countries, the organisations contributed knowledge gained from many years of working with inclusion, accessibility, and youth participation. By exchanging methods, sharing practical tips, and reflecting together, the partners were able to offer guidance that helped strengthen participants' leadership and facilitation skills. This collaborative approach ensured that no single organisation led the process – instead, it became a shared effort grounded in mutual learning.

Collaborative creation of content

All workshops were co-designed with the target group. Feedback was gathered continuously, and participants' ideas were integrated into the workshop structure. This process ensured that the sessions were relevant, meaningful, and truly connected to the lived experiences of the people they were created for. The collaborative design not only improved the quality of the workshops but also deepened participants' engagement and sense of ownership.



3.3.2. Examples of activities and exercises tailored to the target group

The workshops can incorporate a variety of methods designed to make learning accessible, creative, and engaging. Techniques from applied drama – such as Forum Theatre or Theatre of the Oppressed – can be used to help participants explore real-life situations in a safe and supportive environment. These methods encourage active participation, self-expression, and collective problem-solving.

Interactive exercises

- *Forum theatre*: participants act out real-life situations where they may encounter challenges related to inclusion, accessibility, or leadership. The group then works together to explore different strategies and alternative outcomes, fostering empathy and problem-solving.
- *Joint problem-solving (GP)*: participants collaborate to solve practical or hypothetical problems. This strengthens teamwork, communication, and community spirit, while allowing each individual to contribute from their own strengths.

Integration of feedback and evaluation

The workshops should not only be shaped by the interactive questionnaire but must also evolve through continuous participant feedback. Participants should have regular opportunities to evaluate the sessions, share their experiences, and suggest improvements. This iterative process ensures that the workshops remain dynamic, relevant, and fully adapted to the needs of the target group.

During our project, we organised two Target Group Meetings (TGM): one in Sweden and one in Spain.

Feedback process

- After the first round of workshops: feedback is collected to refine and improve the content, structure, accessibility, and clarity of the activities.
- At the second TGM: final revisions are made. Workshops are tested again, ensuring they are as inclusive, easy to understand, and empowering as possible for participants across all partner countries.

Across the project, the partner organisations designed a broad variety of inclusive activities aimed at strengthening leadership skills among young people with disabilities. Although the approaches differed, several common themes emerged – creativity, accessibility, and shared leadership. Many workshops used elements such as theatre, improvisation, movement, problem-solving and culturally rooted games to create safe and engaging learning spaces.



Some workshops explored leadership through discussion and reflection, where participants talked about what makes a good leader, shared personal experiences, and explored how leaders can foster inclusion. These discussions often led to small group tasks where participants designed their own mini-workshops on topics such as helping others, planning ahead, or understanding accessibility needs.

Other workshops used playful group games inspired by childhood traditions, reinterpreted to be fully accessible. Activities like “red light, green light,” blindfolded games with support partners, tactile guessing games, or cooperative versions of classic movement games helped participants practice communication, trust, and quick decision-making – all within a joyful environment.

Several organisations integrated theatre-based methods, including improvisation, “Yes, and...” exercises, character scenes, and sensory or movement-based tasks. These activities helped participants explore spontaneity, emotional expression, and teamwork. Exercises such as mirror work, living statues, guided walks, or creating simple scenes allowed each participant to practice leading and following in a supported way. Warm-ups and structured closing rituals helped frame the sessions, making them predictable and accessible for all.

Workshops focusing on accessible communication encouraged participants to experiment with different ways of expressing themselves. Examples included variations of the telephone game (spoken, gesture-based, tactile drawing), group tasks about asking for help in unfamiliar situations, and role-play scenarios such as ordering food, finding a bus, or introducing oneself. These activities highlighted how communication can be adapted to different needs and environments.

Some workshops focused on sensory exploration and embodied leadership, where participants guided each other through movement routines, morning rituals, or abstract physical tasks such as shaping “living sculptures.” In these moments, participants practiced giving clear instructions, checking consent, and adapting to different abilities – essential skills for inclusive facilitation.

Across all workshops, participants were continuously encouraged to take on leadership roles, whether by guiding warm-ups, explaining games, moderating reflections, or leading short moments within longer activities. This shared leadership approach built confidence and gave every participant the chance to discover their personal facilitation style.

Feedback and evaluation were integrated throughout the process. After the first round of workshop testing, participants reflected on clarity, accessibility, and enjoyment. Their comments informed improvements ahead of the second round of workshops. This iterative process ensured that the final activities were more coherent, inclusive, and meaningful – shaped not only by facilitators but directly by the young people themselves.

Overall, the workshops created a rich blend of creativity, structure, cultural expression, and accessibility, reflecting the diverse strengths of the partner organisations. By combining theatre, movement, communication exercises, games, and reflective discussions, the programme offered participants multiple entry points into leadership – allowing them to grow, take risks, support one another, and ultimately step forward as confident co-facilitators.

3.4 Conclusion

The interactive workshops are central to the project's goals of fostering active citizenship and social entrepreneurship for young disabled people. Through the collaborative design process, inclusive facilitation, and ongoing feedback loops, these workshops provide participants with meaningful opportunities for self-expression, leadership, and community building. They also serve as a model for future initiatives aimed at creating inclusive spaces where young disabled people can thrive.



Developing workshops in Spain

Beyond strengthening individual confidence, the workshops support the development of practical skills such as communication, problem-solving, decision-making, and teamwork. Participants learn how to navigate challenges, adapt activities to different abilities, and take responsibility for guiding others – experiences that translate directly into leadership roles within their communities.

The workshops also act as a catalyst for shifting attitudes, both among participants and within the organisations involved. As young disabled people take on facilitation roles, their voices, ideas, and capabilities become highly visible, challenging stereotypes and demonstrating the importance of accessible environments where everyone can participate fully. This not only empowers the individuals involved but inspires families, educators, and professionals to reimagine what inclusive leadership can look like.



Moreover, the workshop model promotes sustainability. By equipping participants with tools they can reuse and adapt, the project encourages ongoing engagement beyond the formal programme.

Many activities can be replicated in youth clubs, schools, community centres, or other grassroots settings, ensuring that the impact extends far beyond the project timeline. The shared methods developed by all partner organisations form a growing pool of inclusive practices that can be transferred, scaled, and incorporated into future programmes across Europe.



Caroline from the Swedish focus group leading a workshop in gymnastic during the TGM in Sweden

In this way, the workshops not only build skills – they nurture a culture of inclusion, belonging, and shared responsibility. They lay the foundation for long-term participation, active citizenship, and leadership, showing that when young disabled people are trusted with space, support, and creative tools, they can shape stronger, more inclusive communities for everyone.



From left to right: Carlos (Spain), Isaac (MAAata) and David (Spain) having a good time working on their leadership skills, at the target group meeting in Spain



4. Tools and resources

4.1 Recommended tools for accessibility

To make workshops accessible for all participants, simple and affordable tools can be used. Below is a short overview of practical tools that support communication, participation, and inclusion – without requiring expensive apps or equipment.

Communication support

- Google Live Transcribe
- Real-time speech-to-text for participants who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- Google Translate (free)
- Useful for multilingual groups and simplified language support.
- Built-in phone tools
- Most phones include free text-to-speech, voice recording, and visual transcription features

Visual aids

- Picture cards or symbol boards
- Can be printed or handmade; supports non-verbal communication.
- Easy-to-read materials
- Large font, high contrast, simple icons.
- Whiteboards, flipcharts, markers
- Helps visual learners and group collaboration

Sensory & physical accessibility

- Noise-cancelling ear defenders (low-cost versions available)
- Supports participants with sensory sensitivities.
- Tactile objects (balls, ropes, fabrics)
- Enhances engagement for participants who benefit from sensory feedback.
- Flexible seating (chairs, cushions, standing options)
- Ensures comfort for different mobility needs



Digital inclusion tools

- Padlet
- Easy for sharing ideas, photos, and reflections
- QR codes
- Links to instructions, audio versions, or visual guides
- Simple video recording on phones
- Useful for role-plays or reflection

Facilitation tools

- Timers, bells, or simple sound signals
- Helps structure activities
- Emoji or traffic-light feedback cards
- Provides accessible ways to share opinions

Assistive tools

- LetMeTalk AAC app
- Supports alternative communication with pictures and symbols
- Built-in accessibility settings on phones/tablets
- Including magnifiers, captions, colour contrast, and screen readers



Caroline from Sweden on her way to Spain with her Ipad, which she used for communication with other participants



A lot of communication during the target group meeting was done using images and pictures — a natural and intuitive medium for many

4.2 Methods and tools used within the partnership

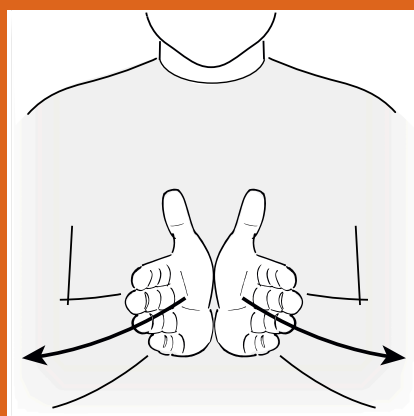
Several partner organisations contributed specific accessibility methods based on their national practices and long-standing experience. One example is the use of Sense of Coherence (SOC/KASAM), a framework applied to strengthen predictability, understanding, and meaningfulness in activities. By structuring workshops so that participants know what will happen, why it matters, and how they can take part, the Sense of Coherence approach helped increase confidence and reduce stress.

A notable method used in Sweden was TAKK (Signs as Augmentative and Alternative Communication). TAKK supports communication through simple manual signs and is widely used in Swedish disability services and education. It was particularly helpful for explaining instructions, reducing misunderstandings, and enabling participants with different communication needs to follow and lead activities.

Since TAKK is specific to Sweden, partner organisations in the other countries used their own national systems and communication methods based on local practice and accessibility standards. These included a mix of simplified language approaches, local sign or gesture-based support, visual communication tools, and easy-to-read adaptations that reflected each country's established methods for inclusive communication.

Across the partnership, visual supports played a central role. Picture cards, symbol-based instructions, and step-by-step visual guides were used to make information clear and predictable. Several organisations also used short video demonstrations to introduce activities before participants engaged in them. These videos helped reduce uncertainty, build understanding, and offer a clear model of what was expected.

Together, these approaches – KASAM, TAKK in Sweden, and equivalent national communication tools in other partner countries – created an accessible, predictable, and supportive workshop environment. They ensured that participants could engage in ways that matched their communication strengths and feel fully integrated into the learning process, ultimately supporting the project's goal of true inclusion and mutual understanding.



Elias from Sweden helps the team to learn to communicate using TAKK.

Elias mom helped create the visual TAKK-sign videos for the questionnaire



5. Results – participants' feedback

The feedback collected through the questionnaire across Greece, Italy, Malta, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden reveals a rich and nuanced picture of how disabled people perceive leadership, their personal aspirations, and the barriers they face. While the responses vary widely, several recurring themes emerge – especially around confidence, opportunity, and the emotional landscape of leadership.

Perceptions of leadership and self-confidence

In Greece, two distinct profiles emerged: the Greek-speaking group showed low self-confidence and limited exposure to leadership roles, while the English-speaking group – many of whom were already involved in accessibility and leadership initiatives – demonstrated high confidence and active engagement. A pie chart from Greece showed that 72% of participants felt they had no leadership opportunities, while only 28% said yes.

Italy's responses were highly diverse, with participants ranging from those who felt overly confident to those who were unsure or afraid. Leadership was often linked to creative or social activities, such as theatre, cooking, or organizing events.

Slovenian participants revealed unexpected comfort with public speaking and group facilitation. Many had already taken on leadership roles in informal settings – leading workshops, teaching peers, or representing user groups – without necessarily identifying as leaders.

Spain reported that 70.6% of participants wanted to be leaders, and 58.8% were not afraid of leading. A pie chart titled “Recuento de SOLO” illustrated that only three participants did not want to show their activities to others, and the same number felt uncomfortable in front of an audience.

Malta found that 35 out of 50 participants expressed a desire to be leaders, while 18 reported fear – mostly related to public speaking, responsibility, and lack of support. Interestingly, some participants associated leadership with everyday symbols of competence, such as using a laptop or speaking confidently.

Sweden's responses offered a similarly rich picture. Over 50 completed questionnaires revealed that around two-thirds of participants wanted to be leaders, while a smaller group expressed fear – typically related to “doing it wrong,” “being in the centre of attention,” or “not knowing what to do.” Most participants felt confident showing others what they do and were comfortable in front of others. Leadership was often seen as an extension of everyday actions, such as helping in training sessions, deciding group activities, or guiding peers.

Emotional responses and personal reflections

Participants across countries shared personal reflections that reveal how leadership is experienced emotionally and socially. In Italy and Slovenia, leadership was often described through creative and collaborative activities. In Spain, responses showed self-consciousness mixed with bravery, while Malta highlighted how perceptions of leadership are shaped by real-world observations and personal experiences. In Sweden, leadership was described as relational and practical. Participants said they felt like leaders when they helped others, explained tasks, or contributed to group decisions. One participant wrote: “A leader should be kind and listen to everyone.” Another shared that they felt proud when they could support someone who was struggling. These reflections suggest that leadership is often experienced as a form of care, guidance, and mutual respect.



David (Spain) doing his speech for politicians and decisionmakers on theatre during the target group meeting in Spain

Quotes from all countries illustrate the informal nature of leadership:

- “I helped lead dance rehearsals” (Slovenia)
- “I felt like a facilitator when doing theatre” (Italy)
- “I applied to be a user representative” (Slovenia)
- “I’d like to be picked as leader again” (Spain)
- “I feel like a leader when I help others with their tablet” (Malta)
- “I feel like a leader when I explain things to my friends” (Sweden)

These reflections show that leadership is deeply personal and often expressed through everyday actions and relationships.



Leadership traits and support needs

Across all six countries, participants consistently emphasized that leadership is not defined by authority or control, but by relational qualities that foster trust and inclusion. When asked what makes a good leader, the most valued traits were kindness, the ability to listen, and a willingness to support others. These qualities were mentioned repeatedly, often accompanied by reflections on how leaders should treat people with respect and empathy.

In Spain, participants described ideal leaders as those who are kind, attentive, and confident – someone who listens and creates space for others. Malta echoed this sentiment, with participants highlighting the importance of being supportive, knowledgeable, and emotionally present. Italy and Slovenia added that leaders should be approachable and able to guide without dominating, while Greece emphasized politeness and active listening as essential traits.

Sweden reinforced these themes, with participants describing good leaders as kind, knowledgeable, and confident, but also capable of being firm when needed. One participant captured the collective sentiment by saying, “A leader should be kind and listen to everyone.” The Swedish responses also reflected a balanced view – valuing both emotional intelligence and practical competence.

When discussing what kind of support participants would need to take on leadership roles, several common themes emerged. Many expressed the importance of peer support and friendship – having someone to encourage and stand beside them. Training and practice were also frequently mentioned, especially in contexts where participants felt unsure or inexperienced.

Accessible environments played a key role in enabling participation. This included physical spaces that are easy to navigate, but also digital tools such as tablets or simplified interfaces that make engagement easier. In Malta and Sweden, participants noted that having access to interpreters or assistance when needed could make a significant difference. Others emphasized the need for emotional reassurance – someone to help them feel confident and capable.

While a few individuals across countries felt they could lead without additional support, the majority expressed that having the right structures in place – whether technical, social, or emotional – was essential. Barriers such as fear of public speaking, nervousness, or lack of knowledge were commonly cited, but participants also showed a strong willingness to overcome these challenges if supported appropriately.

Taken together, these insights suggest that leadership among disabled people flourishes in environments that are inclusive, empathetic, and responsive. The traits they admire in leaders are the very qualities they seek to embody – and with the right support, many are ready to step into those roles.



Participant testimonials



Emma Svanberg, Sweden:

“Through the training and my participation in the project, I have become more confident in different situations and feel that I am a bigger part of society.”



Eleftherios Mavris, Greece:

“Through the project and the training, I was able to put into words what a leader is and how you can inspire others to see that even a person with a disability can become a leader – if society is open to seeing possibilities rather than obstacles.”



Samuel Psiala, Malta:

“I developed skills I never thought I would be able to.”



Stella Čebin, Slovenia:

“Everyone was able to lead workshops when the right conditions were in place and the proper preparation was done. Creating a non-judgmental environment was crucial for ensuring that everyone could both lead and participate.”



Raoul De Rosa, Italy:

“In this project we truly felt accepted, without any ifs or buts. We felt free to say what we thought. We are sad that it has come to an end, because we had gotten used to the continuity it offered. We hope it can continue in some way!”



Maria Lorente Saenz, Spain:

“When we meet politicians they often forget that they also can talk to us and ask us questions.”



6. Implementation and dissemination

6.1 How to use the booklet locally and internationally

This booklet was created to be used by groups, NGOs and everyone who wants to promote greater opportunities for disabled people in their communities, both locally and internationally. The contents, ideas and reflections can be a starting point to conceive and implement a new project, but also to organize a debate to discuss topics such as ableism, welfare, leadership and independent living opportunities for disabled people. The dissemination of the booklet can be a good opportunity to open up these issues and to look at them from different perspectives and ideally to pair theoretical discussion with workshops and experiences, organised and led by mixed groups of disabled and non disabled people.

6.2 How to create a project starting from questionnaire results

Considering the results of a survey as a starting phase for a new project means to create a solid base on the chart of different points of view on a topic. In this way it is possible to bring out requirements and necessities, but also skills and willingness, and tailor the project on these real data. Key point would be to involve in the phase of project design representatives of what will be the target group, breaking the traditional patronizing configuration.



Italian dissimination event



6.3 Lessons learned and replicable models for wider use

The piloting process across Greece, Italy, Malta, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden generated a range of thoughtful recommendations for how to support leadership development among disabled people in future phases of the project. While each country offered context-specific suggestions, several shared priorities emerged – particularly around co-creation, gradual skill-building, and the importance of emotional and social support.

One of the most consistent recommendations was to include examples of leadership on the platform itself. Greece emphasized that showcasing relatable models—especially those rooted in everyday experiences – could help participants envision themselves as leaders. Seeing others who have taken initiative in familiar contexts may spark curiosity and motivation, particularly among those who have never considered leadership as a personal possibility.

Italy proposed the development of structured but gradual pathways for leadership. These would allow individuals to take on facilitation roles in meaningful contexts, supported by tutors or experienced peers. The emphasis was on avoiding paternalistic approaches and instead creating opportunities where leadership can emerge naturally – through small moments of guidance, collaboration, and shared responsibility.

Slovenia recommended co-designed workshops that focus on participants' strengths and interests. Peer-led training sessions and mentorship programs were seen as valuable tools for building confidence and reducing hesitation. The Slovenian team also highlighted the need for easy-to-read materials, interpreters, and technological aids to ensure that communication does not become a barrier to participation.

Spain brought forward the idea of collective leadership, suggesting that facilitation can be shared among peers or small groups. Their experience showed that co-leading – especially in workshop settings – can be empowering and inclusive. They expressed strong interest in a second phase of the project, specifically focused on leadership in workshop facilitation. For many of their participants, this was a life-changing experience, and they advocated for giving others the same opportunity.

Malta contributed a comprehensive vision for future development. They proposed the creation of a Leadership Skills Programme, tailored to the needs and abilities of people with intellectual impairments. This would include modules on communication, decision-making, and group facilitation, delivered in accessible formats. Additionally, Malta recommended establishing peer mentoring systems, where individuals who have already participated in leadership activities can support others in their journey. They also suggested forming user-led committees within service organizations, giving participants a formal space to express opinions, influence decisions, and take on representative roles. During the recent Sharing Lives Annual General meeting, the first Sharing Lives Committee was officially elected!



Vanessa Schembri from Aġenzija Sapporit, head of the organisation's international department, explained:

"Through It starts with me, we were able for the first time to select a committee within Sharing Life where persons with disabilities themselves take on leading roles. It was a historic moment – those who were elected were so proud, and their friends cheered. It clearly showed how important and necessary it is to create spaces where people with disabilities can lead and be believed in. They have the ability – but they must be given the chance."

She also pointed out that although the organisation has 300 members, only 40 participated in the election.

This shows that there are still barriers in attitudes and a lack of trust, both among people with disabilities themselves and among their parents, that must change for participation and leadership to become a reality on a broader scale.

"This new committee aims to foster co-production and empowerment in teamwork and leadership bringing together both members and volunteers to shape the future of Sharing Lives. All committee members completed a Leadership Training Course inspired by the EU Project "It starts with me", giving every graduate the opportunity to stand as a committee candidate. The new committee made up of 5 members and 2 volunteers will meet regularly to plan and create activities throughout 2026."



Through our work with the project, Sharing Lives within Agenzija Sapport have over the past two years, come to recognize the need for more inclusive understanding of what it means to be a leader. It has become clear that disabled people are not only willing to lead, but also eager to support others and make a meaningful difference in their communities.

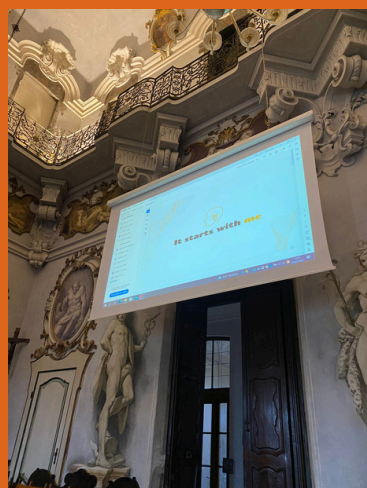
From our perspective, leadership is not something a person is born with; it is a journey of personal growth and continuous development. When disabled individuals lack the necessary spaces, encouragement, and support to pursue their ambitions, their potential often remains unseen and underutilized. Leadership is not a title to be claimed, but a commitment – an ongoing investment in one's own growth with the intention of contributing positively to others and to society.

This commitment is visible in everyday actions: the motivation to organise an activity, the willingness to take initiative, or the readiness to support peers. At Agenzija Sapport, they consistently witness the capacity and determination of disabled people to take on leadership roles. While practical skills such as planning or coordination can be strengthened over time with proper guidance, the heart of leadership lies in the desire to share, collaborate, and work toward common goals.

We have seen time and time again that when disabled people are believed in and provided with the support they need, they often surpass expectations. In doing so, they contribute to shaping more inclusive and vibrant communities – communities that more accurately reflect the diversity and strength of society as a whole.

Caprifolen (Sweden) highlighted the importance of regular leadership training built on practical exercises, peer mentoring, and hands-on experience. They emphasised the value of working within participants' own environments, where familiar surroundings reduce barriers and strengthen confidence. Their recommendations included the use of easy-to-read materials, short instructional videos, and concrete real-life examples to make leadership more tangible and accessible.

Across all partner countries, there was a strong focus on continuity and sustainability. Leadership development should not be viewed as a single workshop or isolated activity, but as an ongoing process supported by inclusive environments, trusted relationships, and adaptable tools. Participants need spaces where they can reflect on their strengths, explore their potential, share experiences, and grow at a pace that feels right for them.



Dissemination event for politicians and decisionmakers during Italian project meeting

In summary, the next steps should focus on:

- Embedding leadership stories, examples, and lived experiences into the platform
- Designing gradual and supported pathways into facilitation roles
- Co-creating workshops and training content together with participants
- Promoting peer-led and collective leadership models
- Developing structured programmes and mentoring systems
- Ensuring accessibility across all formats – linguistic, technological, and emotional



A big working group during the target group meeting in Sweden



Patrik enjoying being a leader and happy with the results from his own drama workshop

These recommendations reflect a shared belief: that leadership begins not with authority, but with connection, encouragement, and the opportunity to be heard.

By continuing to listen, adapt, and work alongside participants, we can build inclusive spaces where disabled people are empowered to lead in ways that are authentic, collaborative, and transformative.



7. Appendices

7.1 Glossary of terms

- **AAC**

Augmentative Alternative Communication (AAC) means all of the ways that someone communicates besides talking. People of all ages can use AAC if they have trouble with speech or language skills. Augmentative means to add to someone's speech. Alternative means to be used instead of speech. There are different types of AAC, and they can involve low tech options (gestures and facial expressions, writing, drawing, spelling words by pointing to letters, and pointing to photos, pictures, or written words) or high tech options (using an app on an iPad or tablet to communicate, using a computer with a "voice," sometimes called a speech-generating device)

- **Sign language**

Any means of communication through bodily movements, especially of the hands and arms, used when spoken communication is impossible or not desirable. Wherever vocal communication is impossible, as between speakers of mutually unintelligible languages or when one or more would-be communicators is deaf, sign language can be used to bridge the gap. At the moment, there is no universal sign language that can be used to communicate with all Deaf people

- **Ableism**

Type of discrimination in which able-bodied individuals are viewed as normal and superior to those with a disability, resulting in prejudice toward the latter. The modern concept of ableism emerged in the 1960s and '70s, when disability activists placed disability in a political context.

(Source: Britannica website)



• Social model of disability

The Social Model of Disability was developed by Disabled people and describes people as being disabled by barriers in society, not by our impairment or difference. If modern life was set up in a way that was accessible for Disabled people, then we would not be excluded or restricted.

The social model of disability helps us recognise barriers that make life harder for Disabled people. These barriers are identified as being the physical environment, people's attitudes, the way people communicate, how institutions and organisations are run, and how society discriminates against those of us who are perceived as 'different'. Removing these barriers creates equality and offers Disabled people more independence, choice, and control.

Language is an important part of the Social Model of Disability because language reflects the cultural assumptions and thinking of the society around us. Language is never purely descriptive - it shapes how we see each other, the value we place on different identities, and sometimes how we behave.

In the past, Disabled people were described in a way that reflected a negative or medical view of disability. These terms, such as 'cripples', 'handicapped' and 'wheelchair bound' reinforce a negative view of Disabled people and often show us as powerless 'victims' or 'objects'.

However, Social Model language rejects this negative or medical language and replaces it with more positive language that sees us as human beings. For example, "Disabled person", "wheelchair user", and "person with learning impairments". The Social Model of Disability states that people have impairments, they do not have disability. According to the social model of disability, the term 'disabled people' is said to confuse impairment and disability and implies disability is something caused by the individual, rather than society. A Disability is caused by society's unwillingness to meet the requirements of people with impairments. As a result, the term 'Disabled people' is used to describe people with impairments who are disabled by barriers constructed by society.

Using the word 'Disabled' before 'people' signifies identification with a collective cultural identity and capitalising the 'D' emphasises the term's political significance.



Using the term 'Disabled people' or 'Disabled person' is therefore a political description of the shared, disabling experience that people with impairments face in society. It brings together a diverse group of people and helps to identify the causes of our discrimination and oppression, communicate shared experience and knowledge, and create social change.

Most organisations that work with disabled people relate to the language of the social model and use this at a policy level to help them to influence and improve rights for disabled people. However, at a more individual level some Disabled people may not relate to this language. It is therefore essential that organisations also engage in regular conversations with disabled people to find out an individual's preference around disability and the use of language.

(Source: Disability rights UK website)

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It starts with me



A successful exchange in Spain where everyone got to try out and learn more about being a leader



Co-funded by the
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