

Contribution – EU Youth Strategy post-2027

For an inclusive EU Youth Strategy: young people with intellectual disabilities and their siblings

The next EU Youth Strategy is an opportunity to ensure that young people among the 20 million people with intellectual disabilities and their families in Europe¹ are fully part of Europe's youth policy. Too often, they and their siblings are left out.

Building on the Strategy's ambition to Engage, Connect and Empower every young person, and on the European Pillar of Social Rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Inclusion Europe calls for a Youth Strategy that is inclusive by design — delivering concrete actions for inclusion and equal opportunities throughout their lives.

The situation of young people with intellectual disabilities and their siblings

Work rarely opens its doors. Young people with intellectual disabilities grow up facing a labour market that seldom lets them in: only around 1 in 10 have a job on the open labour market, and in 22 EU Member States few or none are employed there.² This reflects a wider divide — in 2024 the EU disability employment gap stood at 24.0 percentage points, and 28.8% of persons with disabilities were at risk of poverty or social exclusion, against 17.9% of those without a disability.³

Independent living is still out of reach for many. More than 1 million people with intellectual disabilities still live in institutions in the EU — often placed there as children, unable to grow up alongside their peers or learn what everyday life offers.

Education separates instead of including. Around 570,000 children with intellectual disabilities are in segregated special schools across the EU, set apart from other children and from the friendships and skills that open the door to an ordinary adult life.

¹ Inclusion Europe — 20 million people with intellectual disabilities and their families in Europe.
www.inclusion.eu

² Inclusion Europe, Inclusion Indicators 2025 — figures on the employment, institutionalisation and education of people with intellectual disabilities in the EU.

³ Eurostat, Disability statistics 2024 — the EU disability employment gap stood at 24.0 percentage points; 28.8% of persons with disabilities were at risk of poverty or social exclusion, against 17.9% of those without.

Siblings remain invisible. They are absent from most youth and family policies, yet face challenges specific to them — many becoming carers as their parents age, and living with anxiety about a future rarely planned with them.⁴

Some feedback on the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027

Inclusion Europe closely followed the implementation of the current strategy and participated in some of its initiatives. This feedback concerns the initiatives we took part in.

Youth Policy Dialogues

The EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 offers good opportunities for increased participation of young people in policymaking and mainstreaming of youth policies into EU policies.

Self-advocates recommended by Inclusion Europe provide their input on upcoming EU policies, sharing the views of the movement. Tamara Byrne attended the Youth Dialogue with Commissioner Lahbib as part of the consultation on the 2nd phase of the EU Disability Strategy, highlighting the need for more inclusive employment⁵. Andreea Herbei participated in the Youth Policy Dialogue with Commissioner Micallef, highlighting the role of inclusive sport⁶.

Participants appreciated the opportunity to engage and be heard by Commissioners. We acknowledge that Commission staff put a lot of effort into making events accessible, including the use of an easy-to-read agenda for the Youth Policy Dialogue on disability. However, there is a need for continued engagement after the Youth Dialogues and to improve accessibility of these events and their outputs.

Erasmus+ capacity building for disability-inclusive youth work

Erasmus+ capacity-building grants are intended to strengthen youth and disability organisations, but in practice they are disproportionately accessed by professionalised grant-applicant organisations and service providers with the administrative capacity to navigate complex application procedures. This limits the extent to which funding reaches the organisations closest to young people with disabilities, including organisations led by young people with disabilities themselves.

We would also note that the current programme design tends to channel funded projects into a narrow, recurring set of activities — needs analyses, pilot trainings, training delivery — largely irrespective of whether this sequence is the most relevant response to the issue at hand, or whether similar analyses and trainings have already

⁴ Inclusion Europe, “We had a normal relationship, but people treated us differently” (2025) and the ongoing survey of young families and siblings of people with intellectual disabilities.

⁵ Inclusion Europe, [Tamara Byrne contributes at meeting of young disability activists with EU Commissioner Lahbib](#) (2025)

⁶ Inclusion Europe, [Inclusion in sport is very important for people with intellectual disabilities](#), 2025

been carried out multiple times in the same field or region. This reduces the programme's capacity to fund the kind of activity actually needed (e.g. long-term structural support, mentoring, advocacy capacity, or follow-up to existing findings) rather than repeating the same template.

Ten actions for an inclusive Youth Strategy

Structured around the three pillars of the current Strategy — Engage, Connect and Empower — with new proposals where they are needed.

Engage — participation and voice

1. **Name young people with intellectual disabilities** in the new Strategy because they face very specific issues when it comes to accessing education, employment and support.
2. **Turn EU Youth Dialogues into sustained participation**, including participation of young self-advocates across the whole policy cycle, with structured feedback — moving beyond a one-off consultation.
3. **Recognise young siblings** of people with support needs as a distinct group, starting with a dedicated EU Youth Dialogue for siblings.
4. **Include in the Youth Check a systematic analysis of the** impact on young people with disabilities and their siblings, in particular young people with intellectual disabilities and their siblings.
5. **Communicate about the Strategy and its implementation in accessible ways**, including in easy-to-read and plain language, so that more young people can understand it and take part.

Connect — bringing people together

6. **Introduce a new objective — “Belonging: bringing people together”**, connecting young people with their communities, other generations, employers, support services, universities and decision-makers. This new objective would facilitate connections and create further opportunities and enabling environment for inclusion.
7. **Make Erasmus+ and DiscoverEU reach young people with intellectual disabilities**, through:
 - accessible and easy-to-read information;
 - support to cover the costs of the personal support needed during mobility projects;
 - dedicated support for people-led and self-advocacy projects, so young people learn to advocate for their rights and inclusion throughout their lives.

Empower — rights, autonomy and jobs

8. **Issue guidance to Member States on supporting employment for young people with disabilities**, in particular intellectual disabilities, to find and keep a job on the open labour market, transition from school to employment,

addressing issues such as the loss of disability benefits when starting a new job.

9. Improve capacity building for disability-inclusive youth work in Erasmus

- simplify application and reporting requirements so that grassroots youth and disability organisations can access capacity-building funding on equal footing with professional grant-applicant organisations;
- allow greater flexibility in eligible activities, so that funding can respond to an organisation's actual stage of development rather than a fixed activity template;
- build in a mechanism to check, before funding a new needs analysis or pilot, whether comparable work already exists and could instead be built upon or implemented.

10. Support the transition from segregated to inclusive settings — in education, employment and independent living — in line with the EU's commitment to deinstitutionalisation and community-based services.

If you need more information about this contribution, please do not hesitate to contact Freddy Jussien (Advocacy Lead) at freddy@inclusion.eu.

Inclusion Europe

July 2026

www.inclusion.eu



Inclusion Europe is co-funded by the European Union.
The EU bears no responsibility for the contents of this document.