



ASSIST NEWSLETTER — ISSUE 1 – APRIL 7, 2025

# Spotlight on Inclusive Maternal Care on World Health Day

## Raising Awareness on World Health Day

Welcome to the first edition of the **ASSIST Project** newsletter, released on World Health Day 2025 (April 7), which carries the theme “Healthy Beginnings, Hopeful Futures”—a day dedicated to raising awareness of key global health issues. This year, we are proud to use this occasion to highlight the unique challenges faced by mothers with disabilities in accessing healthcare.

In this issue, we’ll share insights from the research data collected under **Work Package 2 “Combatting healthcare-related discrimination against Europe’s mothers with disabilities”**, which focuses on understanding and addressing these challenges.

## About the project

The **ASSIST Project** is a three-year initiative co-funded by the EU under the Erasmus+ Programme, aiming to reduce discrimination and attitudinal biases among healthcare professionals when treating women with disabilities during motherhood.

The project will train medical students and healthcare professionals to provide more inclusive and welcoming care, supported by a Digital Ecosystem using a Virtual Learning Environment and 3D simulations. It also promotes advocacy to drive policy change and strengthen NGO capacity, emphasizing positive behavior and inclusive practices in healthcare. To achieve these objectives, the **ASSIST Project** has

brought together a consortium of three higher education institutions from Italy and Greece, as well as seven organizations from Greece, Belgium, Italy, Norway, and Ireland, focusing on the rights of mothers, persons with disabilities, education, and digital innovation.

[🔗 Learn more about the project on our website! 🔗](#)

## Want to make a difference? Here’s how you can contribute!

- **Subscribe** to our newsletter and follow us on social media to stay informed and engaged.
- **Advocate** for the rights of mothers with disabilities by raising awareness and speaking up for equal healthcare access.
- **Participate** in events and discussions organized within the ASSIST Project framework.
- **Connect** with us to explore collaboration opportunities or share valuable insights.

💡 **Every action counts—join us in driving change today!** 💡



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## BREAKING BARRIERS: ADVANCING INCLUSIVE MATERNITY CARE FOR MOTHERS WITH DISABILITIES

### INTRODUCING THE THREE-PART SERIES ON WORK PACKAGE 2: COMBATTING HEALTHCARE-RELATED DISCRIMINATION AGAINST EUROPE'S MOTHERS WITH DISABILITIES

The **ASSIST Project** is committed to identifying and addressing systemic gaps in maternity care for mothers with disabilities. Work Package 2 “combatting healthcare-related discrimination against Europe's mothers with disabilities”, has undertaken a triangulated research approach, combining policy analysis, qualitative insights, and quantitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by this demographic. This article marks the first in a three-part series focusing on our policy and protocol research findings across Ireland, Belgium, Italy, Greece and Croatia.

#### Unveiling the Policy Gaps in Maternity Care

Our comparative policy analysis has revealed a striking lack of concrete implementation measures to support mothers with disabilities despite the existence of international frameworks such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the EU Disability Strategy. Many policies reference accessibility and inclusion in broad terms but fail to establish operational guidelines that translate into real-world impact.

#### Key Findings

⇒ Physical and sensory accessibility barriers persist within maternity facilities. While Italy has made some progress in adopting universal design

principles, these have to be fully integrated into maternity services.

- ⇒ Policies in Ireland, Belgium, and Greece mention accessibility but lack clear enforcement mechanisms.
- ⇒ Psychological and emotional support tailored to mothers with disabilities is largely absent, despite the recognition of mental health as critical in maternal care.
- ⇒ Economic and socioeconomic barriers, such as financial constraints and geographic inequality, further compound access to care, with limited financial aid or transportation support.
- ⇒ Accountability and enforcement mechanisms are lacking across all reviewed countries, with policies at risk of being ineffective without independent oversight and monitoring.
- ⇒ Emergency preparedness plans do not adequately address the needs of mothers with disabilities, even though Italy integrates disability considerations into general disaster preparedness.

#### Driving Policy Reform: The Path Forward

The **ASSIST Project** calls for urgent reforms to address these systemic shortcomings. Our recommendations include:

- ⇒ The implementation of universal design standards across all maternity facilities to ensure accessibility.
- ⇒ The development of targeted mental health programs for mothers with disabilities, recognising their unique psychological needs.
- ⇒ The introduction of financial assistance initiatives, including direct subsidies, transportation support, and telehealth services.
- ⇒ The establishment of policy accountability mechanisms that enforce maternity care provisions through independent oversight bodies.

⇒ The integration of emergency preparedness plans prioritising the inclusion of mothers with disabilities in crisis response strategies.

## A Call for Collaborative Action

To create an equitable maternity care system, healthcare providers, policymakers, and advocacy organisations must unite to implement these recommendations. The **ASSIST Project** remains dedicated to fostering meaningful policy changes that uphold the rights and dignity of mothers with disabilities.

The second edition of the newsletter will contain the next instalment in this series, which will delve into the qualitative and quantitative research findings on the lived experiences of mothers with disabilities.

## Latest updates

### ASSIST Project calls for Bridging the Maternal Healthcare Gap for Women with Disabilities

On International Women's Day 2025, the **ASSIST Project** highlights the compounded barriers faced by women with disabilities in maternal healthcare—issues often overlooked in European healthcare systems. The project calls on national governments and the European Union to build a truly inclusive maternal care system. Policies and practices must evolve to ensure that every woman can experience motherhood with dignity, as outlined in international conventions like the CRPD and other human rights frameworks.

### ASSIST Partners meet in Athens

On January 20-21, 2025, the **ASSIST Project** team gathered in Athens, Greece for a Transnational Project Meeting (TPM). Hosted by the MSc Global Health – Disaster Medicine program at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, the meeting marked

a key milestone for the project. Consortium partners came together to discuss project updates, refine strategies, and align goals as we continue working towards a more inclusive future in maternal health. The next meeting will be held in Dublin in July 2025.

### ASSIST Project at the Global Disability Summit 2025

The **ASSIST Project** was promoted at the Global Disability Summit, a worldwide event held in Berlin, Germany from April 1-3, 2025. The summit brought together key stakeholders from the disability community. During the event, the World Federation of the Deafblind (WFDB), one of our project partners, actively participated in promoting the project and its efforts to enhance inclusive healthcare for women with disabilities.

## Stay Connected with the ASSIST Project

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