



ASSIST NEWSLETTER — ISSUE 2 – JULY 31, 2025

Celebrating Disability Pride Month: focus on women with deafblindness

Disability Pride Month

Welcome to the second edition of the **ASSIST Project** newsletter, released in celebration of Disability Pride Month, an annual observance held throughout July to honour the diversity, strength, and contributions of the disability community.

In this issue, we want to focus on women with deafblindness, following the adoption of a historic resolution by [the United Nations General Assembly](#) proclaiming 27 June as the International Day of Deafblindness, to be observed annually.

We also bring you the latest news and updates from our consortium partners, highlighting progress, collaboration, and shared efforts in advancing inclusive maternity care for mothers with disabilities.

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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CELEBRATING MOTHERS WITH DEAFBLINDNESS IN THE ASSIST PROJECT

27 JUNE 2025: A HISTORIC MILESTONE

27 of June 2025 marked the first official celebration of International Deafblindness Day, recognised last month by the United Nations General Assembly. While the deafblind community has long honoured this date—commemorating the birth of Helen Keller (1880–1968)—this new global recognition brings unprecedented visibility to the lived experiences and rights of persons with deafblindness.

Helen Keller was an American author, educator, and trailblazing advocate who became deafblind at 19 months old. With the support of her teacher Anne Sullivan, she became the first person with deafblindness worldwide to earn a university degree. Her legacy—advocating for disability rights, education, and inclusion—continues to inspire generations worldwide.

The UN resolution not only acknowledges the unique human rights challenges faced by persons with deafblindness, but also formally recognises the red and white striped cane as a key symbol of mobility, safety, and identity for the deafblind community.

Shining a Light on an Overlooked Group: Mothers with Deafblindness

To mark this occasion, the ASSIST Project is shining a light on a particularly underrepresented group: mothers with deafblindness.

Despite international frameworks such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the EU Disability Strategy, our comparative

policy analysis reveals a striking lack of implementation measures specifically addressing the needs of mothers with disabilities. Policies often refer to accessibility in broad terms but lack concrete, operational guidelines that would create meaningful impact.

Spotlight on Croatia: A Groundbreaking Contribution

As part of the ASSIST Project's Work Package 2, The World Federation of the Deafblind (WFDB), in collaboration with its Croatian member organisation DODIR, conducted in-depth research into the experiences of mothers with deafblindness.

Through a combination of literature review, focus groups, surveys, and in-depth interviews, the researchers uncovered systemic barriers that disproportionately affect women with dual sensory impairments.

What emerged was a clear pattern: mothers with deafblindness are routinely excluded from maternal healthcare planning, communication, and service design. Their experiences shed light not only on physical and informational inaccessibility but also on the absence of inclusive care protocols across Croatia's healthcare system.

"No one even considered how I would understand the procedure."

— Mother with deafblindness, Croatia

"Doctors talked over me, not to me. It was like I wasn't there."

— Mother with deafblindness, Croatia

This finding, echoed across qualitative and quantitative data, underscores a critical gap—not just in communication support, but in recognition, respect, and rights. The Croatian case study stands as a powerful call to action: any effort toward inclusive

maternal healthcare in Europe must centre the voices of those most systemically excluded.

“No one asked how I was feeling after the birth—not once.”

— Survey respondent (mother with deafblindness, Croatia)

Despite these challenges, participants also shared powerful moments of dignity—often thanks to individual professionals who went out of their way to listen, adapt, and offer respectful care.

“One midwife stayed with me the whole time, learned some signs, and treated me like a human being. That changed everything.”

— Mother with deafblindness, Croatia

“It was only when I met a nurse who knew tactile signing that I felt safe.”

— Mother with deafblindness, Croatia

Key findings of the Croatia Case Study

The Croatia case study revealed the following key findings:

- ⇒ Communication barriers led to feelings of isolation, anxiety, and dismissal
- ⇒ Many felt their reproductive decisions were not respected.
- ⇒ Most reported no discussions about family planning with healthcare providers.
- ⇒ 100% of deafblind respondents were not screened for postpartum depression or anxiety.

Why this matters

These findings do more than document hardship. They reveal systemic design failures—not individual missteps. They highlight a lack of inclusion in policy, data collection, and provider training that must be urgently addressed. Most importantly, they offer a roadmap for reform grounded in lived experience.

Key recommendations

The research team has issued clear recommendations for governments, healthcare systems, and advocacy groups. These include:

- ⇒ Integrating disability-specific maternal health policy which includes the perspective of mothers with deafblindness.
- ⇒ Training all healthcare providers in inclusive communication.
- ⇒ Ensuring that women with deafblindness are included in healthcare planning and data.
- ⇒ Making mental health a core pillar of maternal care.

A call to action

We call on all stakeholders—policymakers, healthcare providers, and communities—to recognise the rights, needs, and lived realities of mothers with deafblindness.

These women are not invisible—they are being overlooked. Through initiatives like the ASSIST Project, we are working to ensure their voices are heard, their needs acknowledged, and their rights upheld.

“I want my daughter to grow up in a world where her mother’s voice matters.”

— Mother with deafblindness, Croatia

Join us in advocating for inclusive maternal healthcare—and in celebrating the strength, dignity, and resilience of mothers with deafblindness around the world.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to our project partner WFDB and its member organisation DODIR for their contributions and for bringing the unique perspectives of women with deafblindness to the forefront.

Latest updates

Successful ASSIST meeting held in Dublin

On July 1st and 2nd, the consortium partners of the ASSIST Project gathered in Dublin for a two-day Transnational Project Meeting (TPM). The meeting was an opportunity to review progress across all work packages, align on next steps, and reaffirm our shared objectives for the months ahead.

On Day 2, partners also met with representatives [Disabled Women Ireland](#), a disabled persons organisation advocating for the rights of self-identified women, girls and non-binary/genderqueer/gender non-confirming people with disabilities in Ireland and [The Irish Maternity Support Network \(IMSN\)](#), a non-profit organisation set up as a resource to provide information and support to all accessing and involved with the Irish Maternity Services. This exchange of knowledge and lived experiences provided invaluable insights into the realities faced by mothers with disabilities, helping ensure the project remains inclusive, impactful, and guided by real voices. We extend our sincere thanks to REDIAL, one of the project's consortium partners, for hosting and creating such a memorable experience. We look forward to the next TPM, which will take place in Salerno, Italy, in early 2026.

Conference “Human, Too Human” in Turin

Our consortium partners, the University of Turin, participated in a training day on the topics of sexuality and disability named the “Human, Too Human” held in Turin, Italy, on 22 May 2025. During the day, psychologists, educators and activists with disabilities took the stage. During all the talks, the Visual Recording technique was used, which allows the contents of the talk itself to be translated in real time into images and key words, thus making it possible to visualise the concepts and connections between the topics discussed.

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