

Spotlight on International Woman Day

International Women's Day: Celebrating the Right to Motherhood Without Barriers with Project ASSIST

Welcome to the fifth edition of the **ASSIST Project** newsletter, released on **International Women's Day** 2026 (March 8).

On the occasion of **International Women's Day**, we would like to highlight a reality that is often overlooked: the experiences of **mothers with disabilities**.

In the European Union (2024) approximately 40 million women and girls live with some form of disability—representing 16% of the female population. Despite medical and societal progress, the journey to motherhood for these women remains hindered by physical barriers, clinical biases, and systemic discrimination.

The Challenge: Dismantling Healthcare Prejudice

Research shows that many mothers with disabilities encounter discouraging and judgmental attitudes from healthcare providers. These range from pity to the outright questioning of their parenting abilities. In some cases, grave human rights violations such as forced contraception or sterilization have been reported within institutions.

Furthermore, even when medical facilities provide accessible entrances, the equipment inside often lacks the necessary updates to be fully inclusive.

This is why **ASSIST** was born: <https://assistproject.eu/>

Concrete Actions for Change

The ASSIST project goes beyond theory by providing innovative tools and resources:

1. **3D Simulation:** A virtual inclusive clinical environment to train healthcare workers on accessible equipment.
2. **Digital Ecosystem:** A learning platform featuring academic modules and micro-credentials.
3. **Advocacy Training:** Empowering mothers and their support networks to effectively claim their rights.
4. **Policy Connection:** Engaging with over 100 policymakers to ensure long-term systemic change across Europe.

"Motherhood is a right, not a privilege contingent on physical or cognitive ability. Through ASSIST, we are working toward a Europe where the healthcare system is an ally, never an obstacle."



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Join Our Journey

Change begins with awareness. We invite you to follow our progress and access our multi-lingual resources:

- **Visit our Website:** [: <https://assistproject.eu>]
- **Read the National State-of-the-Art Reports:** [<https://assistproject.eu/it/external-sources/>]
- **Follow us on Social Media**

This March 8th, help us build a future where every woman is free to choose motherhood, supported by a healthcare system that empowers rather than excludes.

Happy International Women's Day from the ASSIST Team.

Assist makes a stop in Salerno: the (3D) future is almost here!

We have returned full of energy and new visions from the coordination meeting held on **February 9th and 10th**, hosted by the University of Salerno.

It was a pivotal moment for the partnership: two days of intense work to define the strategies that will give even more strength and impact to the results of ASSIST. But the most exciting news is something else...

A LOOK INTO THE FUTURE: THE 3D SCENARIO

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 **Website:** <https://assistproject.eu>

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We have refined the **3D interactive scenario**, an innovative tool designed to break down barriers and offer concrete, immersive support. It will be available to the public very soon!

Assist's journey towards more inclusive motherhood continues, one step (and one pixel) at a time.

Stay tuned so you don't miss the official launch!

The Journey of Assist

The journey of **ASSIST** (Support for Mothers with Disabilities) continues at full speed! Over the past few weeks, we have traveled across Europe to share our progress, meet with professionals, and launch new digital tools.

Here are the highlights from our recent Info Days.

IRELAND: ASSIST AT THE "BE WELL, TOGETHER" RESET FESTIVAL

On January 21, 2026, the **Redial** team took part in the *Reset Festival* at the prestigious *LinkedIn Community Space* in Dublin.

During a dedicated info session, we had the opportunity to:

- **Promote inclusive healthcare** for mothers with disabilities.
- **Present the latest support materials** developed by the project.
- **Engage participants**, inviting them to stay involved in the upcoming phases of the project.

It was a valuable moment to remember that well-being and inclusion must always go hand in hand.

ITALY: MOTHERHOOD, DISABILITY, AND EMPLOYMENT

On February 18, the Department of Psychology at the **University of Turin** hosted an InfoDay titled: *"Motherhood, disability and employment: an intersectional perspective"*.

The event served as a hub for knowledge exchange between academics, professionals, and representatives from the disability community. Key moments of the day included:

- **Digital Platform Launch:** We officially presented the innovative platform featuring

training modules and immersive 3D scenarios.

- **Roundtable Discussion:** An intense debate that adopted an intersectional perspective to address the delicate balance between motherhood, career, and disability.
- **Direct Dialogue:** Both the milestones achieved and the daily challenges faced by women and professionals in the field were highlighted.

Greece: From Evidence to Action: Maternal Inclusion, Empowerment & Digital Innovation

ASSIST InfoDay took place on 12 February on the Medical School Campus and was organized to present the project's scope and progress, including its main objectives, key activities, and expected impact. The Info Day featured an overview of the research findings with a specific focus on the Greek context, followed by a live showcase of the project's digital ecosystem, highlighting the platform's core functionalities, access pathways, and benefits for target users. The event also included a Policy & Community Dialogue on maternal inclusion and empowerment and concluded with a moderated exchange of good practices and project outcomes, fostering open reflection and collective learning.

Belgium: Addressing discrimination against Mothers with disabilities

The Info Day in Brussels, Belgium, was held on 12 February 2026 at [Amazon asbl](#). The event organized by MMM with support of Readlab Brussels brought together mothers

with disabilities, policy actors, NGO representatives, health professionals, and other key stakeholders. To ensure inclusivity and reflect Belgium's linguistic diversity, the session was delivered in English, French, and Dutch. Participants were introduced to the State-of-the-Art reports on healthcare-related discrimination against mothers with disabilities, with a specific focus on Belgium, as well as the transnational comparative report. The six modules of the ASSIST training course and the digital learning platform featuring interactive 3D scenarios were also presented. Participants strongly acknowledged the project's added value and relevance. There was a clear call to improve the visibility of the project's outputs and to expand access to the ASSIST course, particularly by encouraging more health professionals to enroll as part of their continuous professional development. Stakeholders emphasized the need for governments and health institutions to better align professional practice with competencies in inclusive and respectful care, especially for women and mothers with disabilities.

THE FUTURE IS DIGITAL (AND INCLUSIVE)

Thanks to these meetings and info days, our community is becoming more aware and better equipped. The new platform and 3D scenarios are ready to transform the way we think about maternal care, finally making it tailored to every woman.

"Together, we are building a future where no mother has to feel invisible."

Best regards, **The ASSIST Project Team**

Stories that inspire the ASSIST project

As part of the **ASSIST** project (Support for Mothers with Disabilities), we are committed every day to breaking down barriers and supporting every woman's right to fully experience her motherhood. Today, we want to share a powerful testimony of Pina Esposito with you. It is an interview that speaks of invisible challenges, visceral love, and the unwavering determination of a mother who never gave up.

Could you tell us something about yourself and your journey as a mother?

I was born with a rare disability, neurohypophyseal diabetes insipidus, discovered at the age of four. As a child I had to learn to live with an intense and continuous thirst, with daily rhythms different from others and with the often judgmental gaze of my peers. I faced a serious accident at 15, a long and painful rehabilitation and, later, a complex pregnancy related to my pathology. Despite everything, I have built a full, intense life, full of passions and commitment.

Motherhood came as an immense gift: my daughter is now my point of reference and my strength. I have always experienced the maternal role as something natural, deeply rooted in my history: since I was a child, being the eldest of six children, I have taken care of the youngest, developing a strong sense of responsibility and care.

Another very difficult moment in my life was when I discovered that I had a tumor in my vocal cords. It

was a heavy period to face, not only for the disease itself, but for everything it entailed: the surgeries, the coma, the voice that changed, the difficulty in communicating. But the strength to face everything that was happening to me came to me thinking about my daughter, I thought about all the things she would do in life like celebrating her 18th birthday, the day she would graduate, the day she would decide to get married and she would have to choose the wedding dress and I couldn't bear the idea that I couldn't be there with her to give her support. In those days my family was closer to me than ever My daughter, who was fifteen years old at the time, was brought to me whenever possible: it was enough to hear her enter the room for the pain to subside a little. She was still a little girl, yet her presence gave me immense strength, as if her voice – while mine wavered – could support me.

"There are battles that are won not alone, but thanks to those who love you without fear."

Even that moment, like others in my life, I overcame it with determination, clinging to the love of my daughter and the awareness that, as long as I can fight, my story does not stop.

What does it mean to you to be a mother?

Being a mother means everything. It is the center of my life, my first thought at all times. I have a very strong, almost visceral bond with my daughter: I catch the change in her voice, in a message, in a feeling. I have always accompanied her, listened to her and protected her, trying to really be there, not just "being a mother".

For me, being a mother is *"being there with the heart, even before with the hands"*.

Have you ever felt questioned as a woman or as a mother because of your disability?

Yes, especially from my mother-in-law. She never fully accepted my independence, my strength, my ability to do everything despite my disability. She has often criticized and judged me, even when I was the one who took care of them 24 hours a day, to allow my husband to work.

This attitude made me suffer, because behind my gestures there were real sacrifices: the collapse of pressure, fatigue, and the loss of salts. But despite everything, I have always faced things with patience and determination.

Did you encounter any barriers or obstacles in exercising your role as a mother?

More than as a mother, often as a woman. I had to fight against deep-rooted prejudices: for example, when I turned to shops or technicians and was told to "send a man", as if a woman could not understand repairs or manual work. Or the idea that a mother with disabilities could be less capable or autonomous.

But my character has never allowed me to stop: *"if I find a barrier, I will asphalt"*. I did it for myself, for my daughter and also for other people, such as when I supported and defended a young university colleague in difficulty, so that she had the same rights as others.

What would you say to those who think that a woman with a disability cannot be a good mother?

I would say that he/she is profoundly wrong. A woman with a disability, from direct experience, often develops a unique sensitivity: empathy, the ability to read what others do not see, attention to the nuances of children's emotionality.

"Disability does not take anything away from love: on the contrary, it refines it."

And I add: many mother with disabilities think that it is enough to feed, send their children to school or make them play sports. But being a mother is much more. It is listening, grasping a discomfort, noticing a change. And on this, we who have suffered and fought a thousand battles, often have an immense advantage.

What support would you need most (emotional, social, practical, political)?

A more conscious institutional and social support would be valuable: services that really understand diversity, that do not force you to justify yourself all the time or to have to "prove" your value. A cultural environment that favors the participation of women with disabilities, which sees them as resources, not as exceptions, would also be important.

What would you like the world to know about being a mother with a disability?

I would like them to understand that disability does not limit motherhood: it transforms it. It makes it deeper, more attentive, more aware. I would like it to be known that *"we are not disabled: we are differently abled"*, as I teach the students of the H laboratory and as I have tried to convey even to those who live in difficult times.

How could maternal care become more inclusive?

With adequate training, with operators who know the different pathologies and who do not go "by trial and error", as happened to me during pregnancy. We need clear protocols, listening, and personalization. We need health personnel to have tools, but also sensitivity.

What makes you proud to be a woman and a mother with a disability?

The fact that I never stopped. It makes me proud that I have always transformed every limit into another possibility: studying, working, creating, organizing fashion shows, registering a brand, sewing historical clothes, dancing with my husband, starting over every time. I am proud of the empathy I have developed and the strength I have transmitted to my daughter.

"My life has not been easy, but it has been full. And full means alive."

