



ARTELEVATE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

This document presents a set of evidence-based policy recommendations designed to enhance the visibility of artists with intellectual disabilities, strengthen institutional responsibility, and ensure the long-term sustainability of cultural accessibility—both in terms of access to cultural experiences and participation in cultural creation. The recommendations are informed by national and EU legislation, statistical data, sectoral research, and documented practices from Slovenia, Italy, Denmark, and other European countries.

Background

The policy recommendations presented in this document have been developed within the framework of ArtElevate, a Creative Europe project implemented by three organisations with complementary expertise: ASPIRA (Slovenia), project coordinator with long-standing experience in inclusive education, media arts, and accessible digital tools; GAIA Museum (Denmark), (Denmark), a leading institution in outsider art and professional visibility for artists with intellectual disabilities; and Uniamoci APS (Italy), specialised in inclusive practices, creative workshops and community-based cultural engagement.

Supported by the Creative Europe programme, ArtElevate strengthens the creative and professional participation of artists with intellectual disabilities within Europe's cultural sector. The project addresses a persistent structural gap: although European policies increasingly promote cultural inclusion, artists with intellectual disabilities remain underrepresented in mainstream artistic environments and face significant barriers in accessing opportunities, visibility, and professional recognition.

ArtElevate responds to this challenge by building a digital ecosystem where artists with intellectual disabilities can create, learn, and showcase their work; where established artists receive training to become mentors; and where inclusive professional networks are actively supported.

Beyond artistic training and exhibitions, ArtElevate is committed to advocacy and policy engagement. By collaborating with cultural institutions and policymakers, we want to promote long-term structural change, ensuring that accessibility, diversity, and inclusion become integral components of cultural policy and practice across Europe.



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Inclusion in the arts is not only a cultural priority: it is a matter of rights, recognition, and social transformation.

This background provides the foundation for the policy recommendations that follow, which aim to address systemic barriers and support the full participation of artists with intellectual disabilities in Europe's cultural landscape.

- EU general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation
- European Disability Strategy 2021–2030
- EU Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2021–2030)
- European Accessibility Act (2019)
- Art 30 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD): the convention has been ratified by DENMARK 2009, ITALY in 2009; SLOVENIA in 2008.

Premises

Although these recommendations are primarily addressed to national governments and ministries, they may also serve as guidance for private cultural organisations and institutions — including those that operate on self-financed or mixed-funding models — wishing to strengthen their diversity management practices or voluntarily align with inclusive cultural standards.

Priority Areas for Action

The ArtElevate consortium, drawing on an in-depth internal analysis of cultural participation among a cluster of persons with disabilities from Italy, Denmark, and Slovenia, on the feedback provided by the artists involved in the workshops and exhibitions, and on dedicated research activities, advocates for a more concrete and structural commitment to the following cultural rights.



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EQUAL ACCESS TO CULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES

Policy Objective

Ensure equal access to exhibitions, festivals, residencies, and publicly funded cultural programmes for artists with intellectual disabilities.

Evidence Base

UNESCO — through the Road Map for Arts Education (2006) and the Seoul Agenda (2010) — highlights how culture and the arts are essential components of a comprehensive education that leads to the full development of the individual. Furthermore, the Summary Report on the Role of the Arts in Improving Health and Well-Being, published in 2019 by the World Health Organization (WHO), places health within its social and cultural context, defining it as a state of physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. The WHO report demonstrated that visiting museums can support sensory activation, emotional engagement, cognitive stimulation, social interaction, and stress reduction. It is therefore evident how important it is to ensure that every person can fully access art and cultural heritage.

All EU Member States have laws, guidelines, and regulatory frameworks designed to ensure accessibility to culture for persons with disabilities. For illustrative purposes, we highlight a few national examples:

- Italy:

Accessibility Rights (Law 104/1992) guarantee social inclusion. Art venues and museums are required to remove architectural and sensory barriers to ensure full access to cultural heritage.

The 2001 Guidelines issued by the Ministry of Culture state that museums must allocate adequate resources to ensure full accessibility to all services, including educational activities. This encompasses access to scientific and cultural programmes as well as to the documentation preserved within the institution.



The 2018 Circular No. 26, Guidelines for drafting the Plan for the Elimination of Architectural Barriers (PEBA) in museums, monumental complexes, archaeological areas and parks introduced an innovative technical-operational approach that places the individual at the centre, considering the different moments of their life and their various conditions. It promotes the removal not only of physical barriers but also cultural, cognitive, and psychosensory barriers, expanding the concept of accessibility.

Copyright Exceptions (Art. 71-bis, Law 633/1941) allow the reproduction and use of protected works for the benefit of persons with disabilities. This is permitted exclusively for personal use, without commercial purposes, and only when directly connected to the disability (e.g., audiobooks for blind persons or adapted formats).

Anti-discrimination Protection (Law 67/2006) prevents and sanctions any form of discrimination, including situations where a person with disabilities is unable to access artistic spaces or cultural events, physically or culturally.

- Denmark:

Museum Act (Museumsloven) – Section 14(1)(13) requires state-recognised museums to “endeavour to ensure the greatest possible accessibility for persons with disabilities.” The provision establishes accessibility as part of the responsibilities of museums and is relevant to removing barriers to participation in museums and cultural institutions. Accessibility is not limited to physical access but supports the broader obligation of museums to make their activities and services accessible to persons with disabilities.

The Danish accompanying-person scheme (Serviceloven §97) supports participation in self-chosen cultural and leisure activities by providing an accompanying-person scheme for eligible persons with significant and permanent physical or mental disabilities without having to depend on family or friends for assistance.



Danish Act on Equal Treatment and Anti-Discrimination / Disability Discrimination framework establishes the general principle that persons with disabilities should have equal opportunities and protection against discrimination. Together with the employment discrimination legislation and accessibility legislation, this provides the legal framework for preventing barriers to participation in society and cultural life.

- Slovenia:

Slovenian Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities Act (ZIMI), in Article 8 (Accessibility of Information and Services) explicitly prohibits discrimination in accessing public services. It mandates that public institutions (museums, festivals, and galleries) must present information in formats that are understandable to all; in article 15 (Access to Cultural Goods) mandates that persons with disabilities must be provided access to cultural goods in forms that respect their specific needs, actively overcoming communication and environmental barriers.

Construction Legislation and Adaptation Deadlines: Under statutory provisions, all public-use buildings in Slovenia must be fully adapted for people with various forms of disabilities. Failing to meet these environmental standards now triggers strict misdemeanor proceedings and financial penalties.

Resolution on the National Programme for Culture 2024–2031 explicitly emphasizes the social inclusion of persons with disabilities and minority-experience groups. The document mandates capacity building and training for cultural stakeholders to work more inclusively with diverse needs, setting financial and regional accessibility. However, available statistics show that the existence of such legal frameworks does not automatically translate into effective cultural inclusion, as significant barriers persist in practice.

- Time to Act (2021) is a study conducted by On the Move across forty European countries (including Italy), highlighting how many barriers — both physical and mental — still represent a serious obstacle for audiences in accessing cultural life.
 - 82% of people with disabilities in Europe report having faced barriers when trying to access cultural events due to unresolved obstacles created by organisers
 - 73% felt discriminated against when attempting to participate.



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- The Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities Act (ZIMI, Articles 8 and 15) in Slovenia prohibits discrimination in access to cultural goods, yet a systemic gap persists between physical accessibility and cognitive/content accessibility: by failing to provide easy-to-read (lahko branje) program guides, accessible language, and simplified, non-bureaucratic public funding applications, institutions are creating an illegal "communication barrier" under Articles 8 and 15 of ZIMI.
- ISTAT (2021) reports that only 10.8% of museums in Italy offer programmes for people with cognitive disabilities; IQVIA (2023) highlights organisational and informational barriers limiting cultural participation.
- A 2023 ruling by the Danish Board of Equal Treatment confirmed discrimination in ticketing procedures for audiences with disabilities.
- Uniamoci's board members highlight cases in which they couldn't attend cultural activities as puppet theatre or circus show because of the extremely low number of wheelchair users; on many occasions its beneficiaries compelled that the procedures for requesting accessible seating at concerts are too complicated and or the responses often arrive very late, or the accessible

Policy Recommendations

- All publicly funded cultural institutions must adopt a Double-Layered Labeling System to guarantee the cognitive accessibility of their content, ensuring that every person can fully understand and engage with their cultural offer. Cognitive accessibility is as essential as physical accessibility. Curators can no longer rely solely on complex, academic and small sized text to describe art or historical contexts. Instead, every primary display must feature a secondary, simplified "Easy-to-Understand" (E2U) version that complies with official AccessibleEU cognitive frameworks. To guarantee these contents effectively serve their purpose, regulations will mandate that all simplified guides be user-tested and officially co-certified by paid focus groups of self-advocates with intellectual disabilities before an exhibition opens to the public.
- Cultural websites and physical venues must provide clear, predictable information and tools that support neurodivergent audience members in planning and enjoying their visit safely and comfortably. Under a digital "3-Click Rule," every publicly funded cultural event website must host a downloadable Pre-Visit Sensory Map and Easy-to-Understand guide accessible within three clicks of the homepage. These files must adhere to WCAG 2.2 AA web accessibility standards to work seamlessly with screen readers. On-site, physical venues must actively remove environmental barriers by offering free sensory kits—containing tools like noise-canceling headphones and visual schedules—at a minimum ratio of one kit per 50 daily visitors.

- Accessible ticketing procedures — including guaranteed seating and timely communication — must be standardized across the country and throughout Europe to ensure equal access for audiences with disabilities. Ticket booking systems must end the discriminatory practice of forcing audiences with disabilities into long, manual email chains for seats that others can buy instantly. All major ticketing platforms and municipal box offices must integrate the EU Disability Card Verification API directly into their online checkout flows. This allows a user to input their card number to instantly unlock accessible seating and automatically apply a 100% companion discount online in under two minutes. Additionally, a minimum 2% venue capacity floor must be locked exclusively for digital accessibility booking, and any manual email requests must receive a binding 48-hour response confirmation, or the booking is auto-approved at the venue's expense.
- Governments must restructure public cultural funding frameworks to require institutions to allocate resources to accessibility rather than treating it as an optional expenditure. Every public grant application should include a mandatory 10% Accessibility Ring-Fence, reserving at least one-tenth of awarded funds exclusively for cognitive translations, sensory accessibility tools, and staff inclusion training. To ensure compliance, funding bodies will withhold the final 15% of the grant until the institution successfully completes a post-project accessibility audit. Failure to meet these requirements will result in permanent withholding of the remaining funds, the activation of a financial clawback, and a three-year suspension from eligibility for future public funding.



INCLUSIVE MUSEUMS, GALLERIES, AND CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS

Policy Objective

Promote inclusive cultural institutions through accessible programming, participatory practices, and structural planning.

Evidence Base

We believe that creating an inclusive museum is not simply a matter of installing ramps or lifts; it also requires changes to communication, interpretation, staff competences, sensory environments and the way museums understand their audiences. The overall objective is to enable people with disabilities to experience cultural heritage together with other visitors and as equal participants in mainstream cultural life, rather than through separate or segregated cultural offers.

A systematic mapping on museum accessibility promoted by Fondazione Cariplo and Abbonamento Musei was presented at the Triennale di Milano during the conference The Welcoming Museum: Scenarios and Challenges of Accessibility in Cultural Spaces. The survey involved 255 museums across Lombardy and Piedmont in Italy, offering a multifaceted picture that alternates encouraging signs with persistent critical issues. Measures related to physical accessibility are now widely implemented: 77.3% of museums have accessible restrooms, and 63.1% offer routes without architectural barriers or equivalent solutions. Economic accessibility also shows consolidated attention, with 91.4% of institutions guaranteeing free admission for people with disabilities and 81.2% extending this benefit to accompanying persons.

The main critical issues concern instead the tools that enable an autonomous museum experience: multisensory supports, tactile maps, captions in simplified language, and accessible information are still not widespread. More than half of museums do not provide multisensory tools, and nearly 80% lack tactile maps. According to the research, the challenges are linked not only to financial resources but also to the absence of structured planning: almost half of the institutions still do not have a dedicated accessibility officer, and the topic rarely appears in strategic documents.



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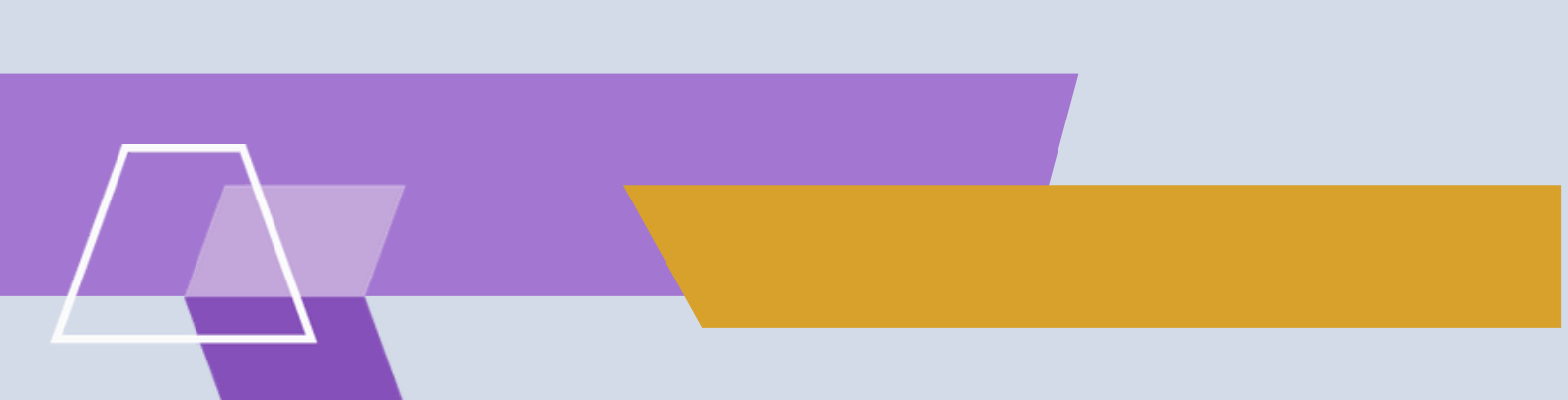
The concept emerging from the research is clear: accessibility cannot be considered a set of additional or exceptional interventions, but must become a structural element of museum planning. Follows some examples of how accessible programming, participatory practices, and structural planning can be realized.

- **Slovenia** - Access of Vulnerable Groups to Cultural Heritage is an initiative led by Slovene Ethnographic Museum (SEM). It shifted the role of Slovene national museums from passive exhibition sites into active spaces of social inclusion. SEM remains a benchmark for embedding continuous disability access directly into daily museum workflows. Sensory Accessibility of Museums is a publication that outlines exactly how to transform gallery spaces. It targets cognitive accessibility by teaching museum workers how to lower cognitive barriers through multi-sensory exhibits and tactile translations.
- **Italy** – Museo per tutti– Accessible to people with intellectual disabilities guarantees the right to culture for people with intellectual disabilities by making museums, sites of historical-cultural interest, and natural heritage accessible through specific pathways and tools that enrich the educational offer of participating institutions and promote a culture of inclusion. Museo per tutti is a project created in 2015 by the association L'abilità, in collaboration with and supported by Fondazione De Agostini, with the goal is to build an inclusive society — one in which people with disabilities are supported in accessing all everyday environments — while challenging prejudices and stereotypes about their ability to engage with culture. In each museum or cultural venue participating in the project, Museo per tutti develops an educational pathway to support the understanding of collections or artistic heritage, offering visitors a new and enriching experience. Staff members are trained so they are prepared to welcome and interact with this audience. The main support tool is an accessible guide that allows visitors to carry out the visit independently or with museum staff, either individually or in small groups. The aim of Museo per tutti is to create an inclusive visit — one in which people with disabilities are supported in accessing cultural spaces together with other visitors, feeling part of a group, while their caregivers can enjoy a shared experience.



In 2026 Fondazione Cariplo launched a €3 million call dedicated to the universal accessibility of cultural venues. The measure aims to support museums and cultural institutions not only in introducing technological solutions or removing architectural barriers, but above all in fostering a deeper transformation: rethinking the museum as an open, welcoming space that can be genuinely accessed and experienced by diverse audiences: "Accessibility should not be seen as an additional element, but as a natural component of cultural design." (Rebaglio in an interview for corriere della sera)

- **Denmark – Museum uden h mninger – Gammel Estrup Danmarks Herreg rds museum** is a project carried out by Gammel Estrup in collaboration with Djurslands Folkeh jskole and supported by the Danish Agency for Culture and Palaces. Rather than simply improving physical access, the project focused on psychological and cognitive accessibility and developed practical tools together with people with intellectual disabilities themselves. The project produced a set of methods and resources covering psychological accessibility, accessible exhibition texts, collection interpretation and the creation of welcoming museum environments. The project is an important Danish example of museums working with users to change how cultural heritage is communicated and experienced, rather than expecting visitors with disabilities to adapt to existing museum practices. SMK – The National Gallery of Denmark is an example of a major national museum working with accessibility across several dimensions. In addition to physical accessibility, the museum provides information for visitors with different needs and has worked with AutismGoTo to create an autism-friendly social presentation that helps visitors understand what to expect before and during a museum visit. SMK is also part of the Danish accessibility mapping work carried out by BKF's Artists with Disabilities network, where artists with physical and psychological disabilities assess accessibility from their own perspective. This demonstrates a move towards understanding accessibility as a visitor experience rather than simply as compliance with physical building requirements.

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- **Croatia - The "Kultura svima" Initiative** in Croatia is a pioneering model for mainstreaming grounded in inter-institutional collaboration. Led by the organization Filmaktiv, this platform has successfully moved inclusion away from isolated "special programs" and integrated it directly into elite, publicly funded cultural institutions. A core achievement includes their "Kazalište svima" (Theatre for All) initiative, which established a permanent inclusive theater subscription program embedded within the mainstream seasonal repertoire of the Croatian National Theatre Ivan pl. Zajc. Furthermore, their systemic collaboration with the Natural History Museum Rijeka—which won the ICOM Croatia Award—serves as concrete evidence that institutional capacity-building and content adaptation (such as multi-sensory and translated storytelling) elevate the artistic and professional standards of public institutions while meeting the legal mandates of the UN CRPD.

Policy Recommendations

- **Every publicly funded cultural institution must legally elevate accessibility from a discretionary afterthought to a core, structural component of its strategic planning. To achieve this, museums and cultural institutions must adopt comprehensive accessibility plans capable of ensuring that their spaces, services, and cultural experiences are genuinely inclusive and welcoming for all audiences.** Recent analyses conducted within Fondazione Cariplo's reference territory show that, in many museums, accessibility is still approached through fragmented interventions or isolated measures rather than as a standard design principle embedded in spaces, content, and internal policies. This evidence confirms that physical and economic accessibility alone cannot guarantee an autonomous cultural experience without parallel investments in cognitive, sensory, and communicative accessibility, and without rethinking the museum as an open, welcoming space that can be genuinely accessed and experienced by diverse audiences. Ministries of culture must require all national and regional cultural institutions to develop and implement a formal Three-Year Accessibility Master Plan. This plan must be fully integrated into the institution's strategic governance documents and overseen by a dedicated, salaried Accessibility Officer. Compliance will constitute a mandatory condition for maintaining public accreditation and securing operational state funding.



- **Frontline cultural workers, curators, and guides must undergo mandatory, continuous professional training in inclusive mediation and communication.** Following successful practice models like Italy's Museo per tutti and Croatia's Kultura svima, institutions can no longer rely on untrained staff to welcome diverse audiences. Governments must fund standardized National Disability Equality & Cognitive Accessibility Certification Modules. Completing this training must be a legal prerequisite for all public-facing museum roles and curatorial staff, with mandatory renewals required every two years. Training must focus heavily on lowering psychological and cognitive barriers, mastering Easy-to-Understand standards, and deploying multi-sensory tools effectively during daily museum workflows.
- **Accessibility Governance and User-Experience Compliance must be ensured.** Regulations must require every museum to reserve at least one paid advisory seat on its curatorial or exhibition board for self-advocates or artists with disabilities. In addition, no public exhibition or permanent-collection reinterpretation may be opened to the public without first undergoing a formal User-Experience Audit, co-certified by paid focus groups composed of individuals with diverse intellectual, psychological, and sensory needs.
- **Structural funding must be allocated for accessible content transformation and participatory programming.** State funding bodies must require a strict 10% accessibility ring-fence on all public cultural grants, legally obligating institutions to reserve one-tenth of their budgets exclusively for sensory and easy-to-understand adaptations, tactile translations, and inclusive programming. To end the practice of treating accessibility as a discretionary luxury, governments must link funding directly to compliance by withholding the final 15% of any grant until the venue successfully passes an independent accessibility audit. Institutions that fail this audit or reallocate these protected funds must face an immediate financial clawback and a mandatory three-year suspension from eligibility for future public funding.



FAIR REPRESENTATION IN MAINSTREAM CULTURAL EVENTS

Policy Objective

Ensure fair representation of artists with intellectual disabilities within mainstream cultural events, avoiding segregated or “special” programmes.

Evidence Base

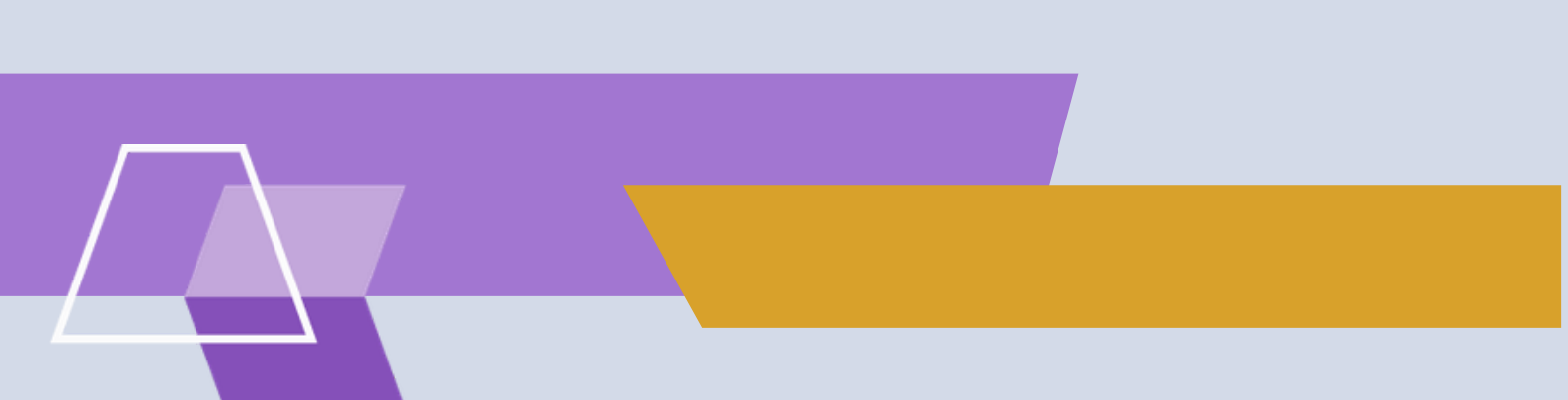
Artists with disabilities have historically often been approached primarily through the lens of disability, social inclusion or therapy rather than through their artistic practice. This can result in their work being presented within separate or specialised programmes rather than being included in the ordinary programmes of museums, galleries, festivals and cultural institutions.

Time to Act (2021) is a study conducted by On the Move across forty European countries (including Italy), highlighting how many barriers — both physical and mental — still represent a serious obstacle for artists with disabilities accessing cultural life.

- 87% of festivals do not involve artists with disabilities in decision-making;
- 87% of cultural institutions do not adapt their communication materials to accessibility standards.

Despite these critical gaps, several local and international initiatives demonstrate that change is possible and already underway.

- Europe Beyond Access (2018–2023) - the largest programme in the world focusing on arts and disability, demonstrates that artists with disabilities contribute significantly to artistic innovation when included in professional circuits.
- Inclusive Festivals such as PÅ TVÆRS and KLANG in Denmark and Pythika – Giochi Pitici, the first inclusive international artistic competition for talents with and without disabilities in Italy, have successfully created spaces where artists of all abilities can perform, exhibit, and be recognised for their professional value. These initiatives move beyond labels and promote the full normalisation of disability within the artistic context.

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- **Annual public calls aimed at promoting accessibility to live performing arts activities for artists with disabilities by the Italian ministry of culture** - The call supports 12 projects that promote the professional inclusion of artists with disabilities in the live performing arts sector. It funds initiatives that involve their direct participation in creative and production processes, encourage accessible working conditions, support the circulation of works, and ensure inclusive communication. The aim is to expand artistic opportunities, remove barriers, and enhance talents and skills within the national cultural landscape.



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Policy Recommendations

- **Cultural institutions must integrate artists with disabilities into their standard programming rather than relegating them to parallel or segregated tracks.**

Public funding bodies must require that at least 10% of each institution's core seasonal programme feature artists with disabilities fully embedded within mainstream curatorial and artistic activities. Programmes that frame the artistic work of people with disabilities as therapeutic or recreational rather than as professional cultural production must be explicitly excluded from eligibility for public funding. Institutions that fail to meet this integrated representation threshold within their primary programming calendar will incur an immediate 15% reduction in state funding for the subsequent cycle.

- **Cultural institutions must include measures that ensure the representation of artists with disabilities in curatorial boards, selection committees, and advisory groups. Governments must require all public cultural selection committees, juries, and curatorial boards to reserve at least one paid, voting seat for an artist or self-advocate with a disability.** Decisions regarding artistic selection, programming, grant allocations, and accessibility adaptations can no longer be made exclusively by non-disabled professionals. Cultural institutions that fail to structurally diversify their decision-making panels should be automatically disqualified from applying for national and European public cultural grants.

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- **Ministries of culture must legislate that all publicly funded institutions adopt and enforce formal anti-ableism guidelines across all public communication, programming, and marketing.** These guidelines must translate into concrete, enforceable standards that reshape how cultural institutions design, present, and promote their work, including:



- **Inclusive language standards:** mandatory use of respectful, non-stigmatizing terminology, avoiding infantilizing, medicalizing, or “inspirational” framing of people with disabilities;
- **Accessible communication formats:** provision of Easy-to-Understand materials, captions, transcripts, audio descriptions, and alternative formats;
- **Non-segregated programming principles:** artists with disabilities must be included within mainstream programming; no segregated or “special” exhibitions that frame their work as therapeutic or secondary;
- **Representation requirements:** ensuring artists with disabilities, curators, and advisors are visibly and structurally present in public communication;
- **Ethical image and media guidelines:** banning pity-based imagery, tokenistic representation, or visuals that portray people with disabilities as passive recipients rather than cultural contributors;
- **Complaint and redress mechanisms** — transparent procedures for reporting ableist communication or programming, with mandatory corrective actions.

Failure to implement these communication and programming standards must trigger temporary suspension of public funding and the imposition of mandatory corrective action plans.

- **State funding architectures must establish a permanent, dedicated subsidy mechanism to financially reward and support festivals that actively implement inclusive programming models.** This targeted funding must be legally restricted to covering the direct costs of professional accommodation, accessible backstage and rehearsal environments, and specialized communication tools for artists with disabilities. To incentivize systemic change, governments will grant an automatic 20% budget bonus, in addition to standard public funding allocations, to any festival that demonstrates full compliance with inclusive curation standards.



PROFESSIONAL RECOGNITION OF ARTISTS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

Policy Objective

Ensure formal recognition of artists with intellectual disabilities as professional artists with valuable artistic contributions.

Evidence Base

- **Slovenia** - The concept of recognizing artists with intellectual disabilities as professional peers with valuable artistic contributions is a deeply challenging and emerging topic. Historically, the country has operated within a medical and charitable framework—treating neurodivergent creativity purely as "occupational therapy" or a pastime rather than serious, collectable contemporary art. In most public frameworks, artistic production by persons with intellectual disabilities is managed by social welfare organizations like VDC (Varstveno delovni centri / Occupational Activity Centers) or specialized NGOs. While these centers support high-quality creative work, the art is rarely evaluated by curators on its standalone contemporary merit. It is often labeled as "art crafts by people with disabilities" and shown in closed social loops, preventing these creators from obtaining the official national status of a professional self-employed artist in culture.

Anyway there are some examples of good practice, as **the Koroška Gallery that launched a dedicated Summer Lecture Series entirely focused on "Outsider Art" – Art Outside Mainstream Creative Flows**: they used their academic authority as a regional museum center to validate self-taught and neurodivergent art. Instead of discussing these works through a patronizing lens of "therapy", their lectures evaluated the raw aesthetic merit and "original expressive power" of outsider creators, forcing the mainstream art world to take them seriously as artists first.

Italy – Diana Anselmo, an activist from Al.Di.Qua Artists, the first Italian association of and for artists and cultural workers with disabilities, in an [interview for exhibart](#) complains about the lack of skills and knowledge about artists with disabilities and when accessibility is discussed, it is often understood only in relation to audiences, never in relation to those who need access to backstage areas or dressing rooms. This stems from the persistent prejudice that people



with disabilities are merely “passive” subjects of cultural production, never active contributors. This is the same situation Uniamoci faced when organising theatre performances in Palermo: we found it extremely difficult to identify accessible stages within accessible buildings, often ending up with the unprofessional workaround of having performers act in front of the stage.

Daina Anselmo continue, saying that the few examples of performers with disabilities on stage are usually managed by non-disabled authors, who reproduce outdated narratives and the situation is even more critical in organisational and decision-making roles, where the presence of people with disabilities becomes increasingly rare, to the point of disappearing altogether.

- Denmark – The recognition of artists with intellectual disabilities as artists with valuable artistic contributions is developing, but remains closely connected to the broader Danish discussion about disability and access to the professional art world. Historically, artistic activity by people with intellectual disabilities has often been situated within social care, sheltered employment or specialised cultural institutions rather than within the mainstream professional art system. This can create a distinction between “artists” and “people with disabilities who make art”, even when the artistic quality and ambition of the work cannot be reduced to the social context in which it is produced.

Several established museums have presented exhibitions and initiatives dedicated to what is broadly referred to as Outsider Art. While these initiatives have undoubtedly contributed to greater visibility, they can also work counterwise by reinforcing the narrative that Outsider Art is not inherently part of our understanding of art and culture, but rather something that can merely visit the established art world. By placing such work within a separate category, the distinction between “mainstream art” and “art made by outsiders” can consequently be maintained rather than challenged.

GAIA Museum Outsider Art represents one of the most established Danish examples of challenging this distinction. Founded in Randers in 2002, GAIA is a museum, gallery and art environment dedicated to Outsider Art and Art Brut. Its collection includes works by Danish and international artists, while GAIA Academy provides artists with disabilities with an environment for artistic development, education and production. Artists present their own work, while GAIA Gallery sells Danish and international Outsider art, supporting recognition and artists’ economic independence.



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Policy Recommendations

- **Accessibility of stages and dressing rooms must be ensured. Ministries of culture must enforce mandatory physical accessibility standards for backstage areas, dressing rooms, and stages as a strict requirement for public venue licensing.** Ramps and lifts cannot be limited to audience spaces; they must be fully integrated into performer zones to end the exclusionary practice of forcing performers with disabilities to act in front of un-adapted stages. Any public cultural building or any auditorium/theater that fails an independent backstage accessibility audit will have its public operation permit suspended until full physical modifications are completed.
- **State funding and educational bodies must establish strict non-discrimination quotas guaranteeing equal, barrier-free admission for artists with intellectual disabilities into public art academies, residencies, production grants, and programmable cultural spaces.** Educational institutions, residency organizers, and cultural space managers must adapt their admission and application procedures to eliminate bureaucratic and cognitive bias, ensuring full accessibility across every step of the process — from initial information materials to application submission, evaluation, and selection. This includes introducing alternative, practice-based portfolio reviews and adopting accessible formats, timelines, and communication channels. These same principles must apply to any call for artists, meaning that all publicly funded open calls must be designed, communicated, and evaluated through fully accessible procedures that guarantee equal opportunity for artists with intellectual disabilities to participate and compete on an equal footing. Any state-subsidized academy, residency programme, or publicly funded call that fails to implement these inclusive entry pathways will incur an immediate 20% reduction in its annual public funding allocation.

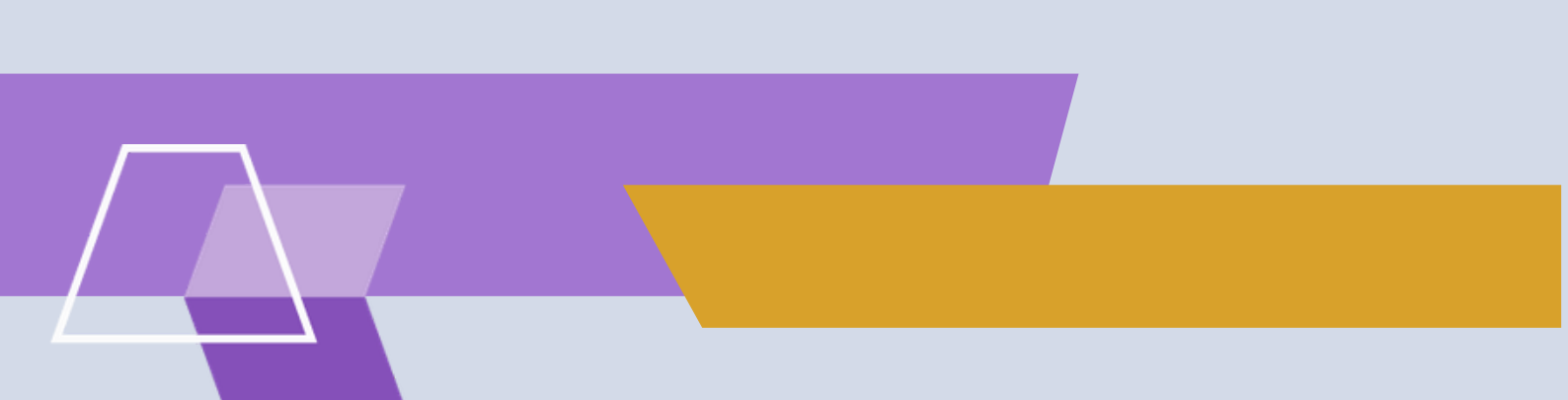


- **Governments must implement measures to raise sector-wide awareness that artists with disabilities are professional cultural practitioners whose work must be valued on artistic merit rather than framed as charitable or social initiatives.** Public cultural stakeholders must ensure that artists with disabilities are welcomed into institutions and festivals on the basis of their artistic contribution, and must remove all patronizing or paternalistic terminology from communication and marketing materials. Cultural actors must evaluate artistic work exclusively through recognised academic, professional, and contemporary curatorial lenses, applying the same standards used for all other artists. Suggested measures to be implemented by governments and ministries of culture are:
 - National awareness campaigns: coordinated communication campaigns highlighting artists with disabilities as professional cultural contributors, promoted across museums, festivals, academies, and media outlets.
 - Guidelines for professional terminology: official guidance banning patronizing, charitable, or paternalistic language in marketing materials, press releases, and public communication.
 - Visibility programmes for artists with disabilities: government-supported initiatives that showcase artists with disabilities in mainstream festivals, exhibitions, and national cultural events.
 - Public recognition programmes — awards or certifications for institutions that demonstrate exemplary professional inclusion of artists with disabilities.



Governments must ensure the economic sustainability of artistic careers for artists with disabilities by establishing dedicated funding mechanisms that offset the additional accessibility-related costs incurred by cultural institutions when engaging artists with disabilities.

Most artists work as freelancers and therefore artists with disabilities cannot benefit from existing labour-market incentives available to employers of workers with disabilities: ministries of culture and labour must co-design targeted financial measures that extend equivalent forms of support to festivals, cultural institutions, and production houses contracting freelance artists with disabilities. These measures may include accessibility grants (including accessible rehearsal and backstage environments, adapted technical equipment, and personalised support services), tax incentives, or dedicated reimbursement schemes that guarantee equal access to professional opportunities and promote long-term economic independence for artists with disabilities.



SUSTAINABLE OPPORTUNITIES BEYOND THE PROJECT

Internal Policy Objective

Ensure long-term continuity of inclusive ArtElevate practices through a set of structural measures that will remain active beyond the project's duration

Ongoing Actions and Future Commitments

- **Long-term continuity of inclusive artistic mentoring for artists with disabilities** will be guaranteed through:
 - Long-term availability of the MentorArts training programme: *the online programme MentorArts: The Educational Hub for Inclusive Artistic Mentorship will remain accessible and regularly updated. It will continue to provide professional artists in visual arts, performance, photography and film with specialised training to become mentors for artists with intellectual disabilities.*
 - Maintenance and continuous updating of the European Gallery of Explore Certified Mentors: *the European Gallery of certified mentors, available on the ArtElevate website (<https://artelevate.eu/mentorship/>), will be preserved and periodically updated. It will remain a stable, open directory through which artists with disabilities can directly contact trained mentors for professional support.*
 - Continuation of partners' internal mentoring activities: *GAIA Academy will integrate the project's insights into its ongoing mission of inclusive artistic training; Uniamoci APS will continue mentoring actors with disabilities through its theatre activities, including the new comedy production that will be performed in local theatres in 2027.*

- **Collaboration agreements with local cultural organisations**

Each partner established cooperation agreements with two cultural organisations or institutions in their local context, ensuring that the ArtElevate principles becomes embedded and replicated within local cultural ecosystems.

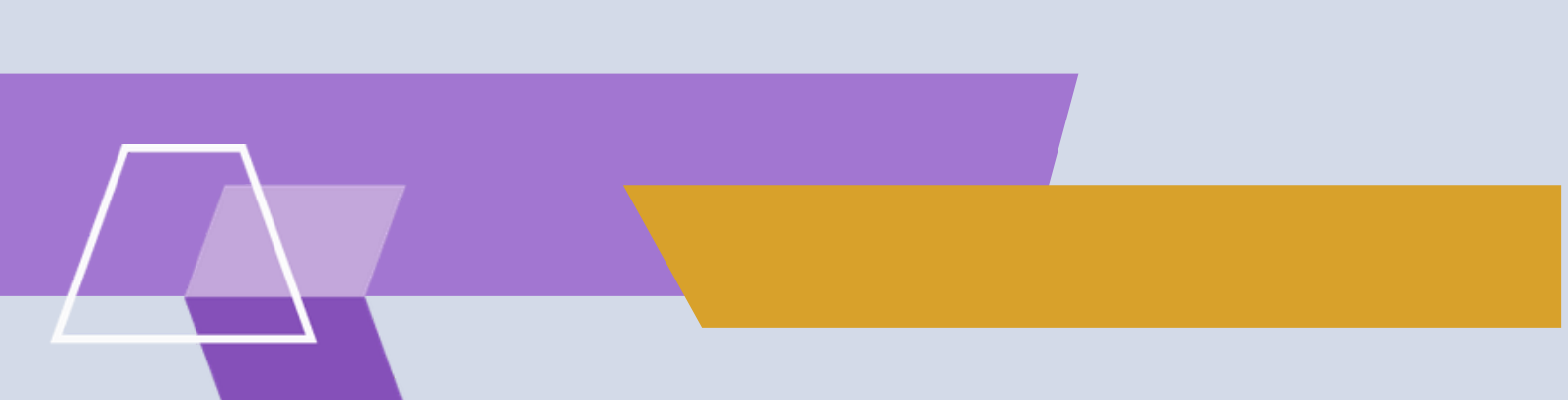
- **New funding opportunities and expansion of the transnational network**

The project coordinator, Aspira, is preparing a new project application aimed at deepening and expanding the achievements of ArtElevate, ensuring continuity, growth, and consolidation of the ArtElevate European movement.



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CONCLUSION

Creating a truly inclusive cultural sector requires more than opening the doors of existing institutions. It requires changing the conditions under which artists are recognised, supported, presented and given the opportunity to build sustainable artistic careers.

The evidence and experience gathered through ArtElevate point to a clear conclusion: artists with intellectual disabilities should not be treated as beneficiaries of culture alone, but as active cultural professionals and creators. Their participation must extend beyond occasional inclusive projects or specially designated programmes and become part of the everyday structures of the cultural sector — from open calls, funding and education to exhibitions, festivals, professional networks and artistic collaboration.

This requires responsibility at several levels. Policymakers can create the frameworks and funding conditions that remove structural barriers. Cultural institutions can embed accessibility and inclusive participation into their regular practices. Professional artists and mentors can contribute through knowledge, collaboration and meaningful artistic relationships. Most importantly, artists with intellectual disabilities must have a genuine voice in shaping the opportunities and environments in which they participate.

ArtElevate demonstrates that change is possible when visibility, artistic development, mentorship and access to professional opportunities are addressed together. The project's digital platform, mentoring resources and collaborative artistic practices provide practical foundations that can continue beyond the lifetime of the project.

The next step is therefore not to create a separate cultural system for artists with disabilities, but to make the existing one more open, accessible and representative. Inclusion should no longer depend on individual projects, exceptional institutions or personal goodwill. It should become a standard of cultural practice and public responsibility.

Ultimately, this is not only about giving more people access to art. It is about recognising who gets to make art, whose work is taken seriously, and whose voice is given space in our shared cultural landscape.

Art is art, always.



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