INCLUDE

Inclusive Leadership and Democratic Engagement for Persons with Disabilities

REPORT ON INSTITUTIONAL CONSULTATIONS

Consultations with institutions and organisations – summary of views, experiences and recommendations

Work Package 2 · Task T2.1 · Participatory Research

Prepared by: Equality NGO

Project: 101252776 · CERV-2025-CITIZENS-CIV

Executive Summary

As part of the INCLUDE project, consultations were organised with relevant institutions and organisations to examine existing practices, barriers, and opportunities for more active participation of persons with disabilities in public and political life. The discussions addressed institutional responsibilities, experiences, challenges, and proposals for improving inclusive leadership and participation.

The consultation process gathered perspectives from representatives of local self-government, state institutions, public bodies, civil society organisations, academia, and other relevant stakeholders. A total of 22 contributions from institutional and organisational representatives were consolidated. The analysis indicates awareness of the importance of inclusion, but also a need for clearer and more permanent mechanisms for participation in decision-making.

Particularly prominent are the need for accessible participation mechanisms, clear institutional accountability, sustained funding, and measurement of actual influence on policies. The findings are relevant to the development of practical tools and the Handbook within INCLUDE.

Consultation Method and Scope

The consultations took place in October 2026, primarily through email exchanges and telephone communication, depending on the availability and professional commitments of institutional representatives. The discussions focused on several common themes: institutional responsibilities, cooperation with persons with disabilities, barriers to participation, good practices, and expectations regarding the INCLUDE tools. The views and opinions gathered were grouped thematically, and the contributions included institutions and organisations from Skopje, Kumanovo, Kriva Palanka, Kičevo, Gevgelija, Bitola, Prilep, Kavadarci, Kočani, and other communities. The report summarises their views without assuming that all the practices mentioned have been independently verified or that the findings apply to every institution.

1. Main Findings

1.1. Institutional Mandates and Responsibilities

The consultations revealed different experiences of institutional involvement. For some organisations, inclusion is a core area of work, while in local self-government it is linked to social protection, education, infrastructure, and public services. Participants noted positive developments in service provision and cooperation with civil society, but also that institutional responsibility alone does not ensure direct participation in decision-making.

1.2. Cooperation as Partners and Decision-Makers

Three forms of cooperation emerged from the consultations: ongoing partnerships and involvement in bodies and working groups; occasional consultations on specific initiatives; and communication mainly in the context of service provision. Participants emphasised that persons with disabilities should be treated as partners and decision-makers, not only as service users.

In communication with the City of Skopje, regular cooperation with persons with disabilities and their associations was reported, alongside the absence of a dedicated document formalising that practice. This illustrates the distinction between active communication and permanently established institutional mechanisms.

1.3. Participation Procedures and Mechanisms

Existing mechanisms mentioned included working groups, public consultations, feedback collection, statutory provisions, and direct communication. Participants cited examples of involvement in organisational governing bodies, consultations during policy and local programme development, and student representation. In some settings, the mechanisms are not sufficiently formalised.

Providing an opportunity to express an opinion is not enough; a transparent mechanism is needed to show how a proposal was considered and whether it influenced the final decision.

1.4. Most Significant Barriers

- Physical, digital, and communication inaccessibility of institutions, information, and procedures.
- Prejudice, stereotypes, and lack of confidence in the leadership abilities of persons with disabilities.
- Lack of permanent advisory structures, clear procedures, and rules for participation.
- Financial and staffing constraints, including insufficient resources for assistive technology and accommodations.
- Insufficient direct representation of persons with disabilities themselves, with participation instead taking place through intermediaries.

These barriers were identified through a thematic summary of views shared during the consultations; their order does not constitute a statistical ranking.

1.5. Regulatory and Budgetary Constraints

Financial constraints recur across various institutional settings, from maintaining services to providing accessible premises, necessary personnel, and technical adaptations. One specific example cited was a functional assessment service in Ohrid located on the third floor of a building without a lift or adapted toilets. Issues relating to the division of responsibilities and administrative procedures were also raised.

1.6. Women, Young People, and Persons with Intellectual or Psychosocial Disabilities

The views exchanged highlighted the need for an approach that recognises the different barriers faced by women, young people, and persons with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities. Gender stereotypes, economic dependence, limited leadership development opportunities, communication barriers, and a need for adapted support were identified. Formal equality is not sufficient without genuine opportunities for participation.

1.7. Positive Practices Identified

- PORAKA NOVA: the “Self-Advocate Influencers” initiative (since 2021) supporting self-advocacy and representation.
- Association of Special Educators and Rehabilitators: involvement of persons with disabilities in the organisation’s governing bodies.
- Ministry of Social Policy, Demography and Youth: participation of association representatives in working groups on legislation and strategies.
- Municipality of Kavadarci: meetings and consultations with associations when planning local measures.

These examples reflect experiences and information obtained during the consultations. Before presenting them as verified good practices, their results, continuity, and actual impact need to be assessed further.

1.8. External Support Needed

Needs identified include financial assistance, training, exchange of experience, technical expertise, improved interinstitutional coordination, and support for smaller organisations. European experience should be combined with local knowledge and the lived experience of persons with disabilities.

2. Recommendations for the Inclusive Representation Handbook

Participants expressed a need for a practical, understandable, and applicable Handbook with concrete examples and tools, rather than a document limited to theoretical principles.

Proposed tool	Purpose
Accessibility checklists	Assessing physical, digital, and communication accessibility
Consultation templates	Planning and documenting participation
Self-assessment	Assessing institutional inclusiveness
Participation models	Working groups, committees, and advisory bodies
Communication guidelines	Accessible information, meetings, and events
Examples from practice	Applicable solutions from North Macedonia and partner countries
Impact indicators	Monitoring actual influence on decisions

2.1. Responsibility for Implementation

It is proposed that a responsible person or organisational unit be designated, with a clear implementation plan and participation of persons with disabilities in evaluation. Implementation should not depend solely on personal initiative.

2.2. Proposed Indicators for One Year

- Number of institutions that have established formal procedures for inclusive consultations.
- Number of persons with disabilities directly involved in committees, working groups, and advisory bodies.
- Percentage of proposals receiving a reasoned institutional response.
- Number of physical, digital, and communication accessibility improvements implemented.
- Number of staff members trained and assessment of satisfaction with influence on decisions.

These indicators are analytical proposals, not already agreed project targets.

3. Additional Guidance from the Consultations

During the discussions, proposals included systematic training for public administration, active involvement of public social protection institutions, improved accessibility of municipal websites and public consultations, and support for career development and leadership. The possibility of a broader political commitment to advancing the rights and political participation of persons with disabilities was also mentioned.

The need to complement these institutional perspectives with direct testimonies from persons with disabilities was emphasised: whether they feel heard, whether they can express disagreement freely, and whether their views influence final decisions.

4. Conclusions

- Inclusion often remains associated with services and support rather than leadership and direct decision-making.
- Contacts and consultations are not always supported by permanent, written procedures and mechanisms.
- Accessibility should be treated as a physical, informational, communication, and procedural issue.
- Better coordination, human resources, and financial sustainability are needed.
- Practical tools and measurable results can turn principles into institutional practice.

5. Implications for INCLUDE's Next Activities

The institutional views summarised should be compared with first-hand experiences from focus groups with persons with disabilities to identify similarities and differences between institutional and personal perspectives.

- Development of concrete procedures, templates, and tools for participation and documenting influence.
- Practical training for employees in public administration, municipalities, and other institutions.
- Piloting the Handbook in several institutional settings, with persons with disabilities participating in its evaluation.

6. Final Assessment

The institutional consultations show that moving from formal inclusion to meaningful participation requires changes in institutional procedures, responsibilities, and decision-making processes. The principle "Nothing About Us Without Us" should become a verifiable practice in which persons with disabilities have genuine influence, rather than merely an opportunity to be consulted.

Note: This report is a thematic summary of consultation contributions and views collected. It is not a representative assessment of all institutions in the country. Examples of practices have not been independently verified; personal contact details are not published.