



Ambitions. Rights. Belonging.

Briefing – The EU accession and inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities

Situation, reports of the EU, and how to improve the situation

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Why did we write this briefing?

Joining the European Union is an important moment for EU candidate countries, and it is an opportunity to review the country's laws and practices.

As 10 countries are in the process of joining the European Union, it is important this takes into account also the situation of people with intellectual disabilities and their families.

It is also important to understand how the EU accession process can positively influence the rights and inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities.

Who is this briefing for?

- Organisations representing people with intellectual disabilities: to speak to their government and the EU to advance rights and inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in the accession process.
- Policymakers from the EU and accessing countries: to know the needs and priorities in the EU accession process.

What is the EU Accession?

EU accession is the process of a country joining the EU.

These are the countries currently in the process of joining the EU:

- Albania,
- Bosnia and Herzegovina,
- Georgia,
- Kosovo,
- Moldova,
- Montenegro,

- North Macedonia,
- Serbia,
- Türkiye,
- Ukraine.

The process of joining the EU (accession) consists of 3 stages¹:

1. Official candidate for membership.

This means the country has fulfilled some conditions for starting negotiations to access the EU.

2. Formal membership negotiations with the EU.

This process involves preparing the country to apply EU law. In this phase, the EU issues reports and recommendations about necessary reforms to meet the conditions for joining the EU.

3. Approving of the country's EU membership.

When the negotiations have been completed, and the EU and the country are both satisfied, the country can join the EU if approved by current EU member states.

¹ See [the factsheet on the EU accession](#) for more details

Why is the EU Accession important for people with intellectual disabilities and their families?

During the EU Accession, the **European Union reviews if EU candidate countries align with fundamental rights and policy standards of the EU**. All the EU laws and policies are sometimes called “EU acquis”.

More precisely, the EU reviews applications of countries for different categories (also called clusters) and sub-categories (also called chapters).

Below are the most relevant clusters for people with intellectual disabilities:

- Cluster 1 is “Fundamentals of the EU Accession”. The EU oversees if fundamental rights are respected in the candidate countries, including rights of people with disabilities guaranteed in the [EU Charter of Fundamental Rights](#) and [the UN Convention on the Rights of persons with disabilities](#).

The EU also looks at if the country is ready to comply with EU laws which promote the rights of people with disabilities in specific areas such as [the Employment Equality Directive](#) or [EU Accessibility Act](#).

- Cluster 3 is on “Competitiveness and inclusive growth”. The EU has a look at the situation regarding social inclusion and employment (Chapter 19). The EU expects candidate countries to ensure people with disabilities have access to work and that acceding country ensures social inclusion.

The EU also has a look at “Education and culture” in the candidate country. The EU assesses if the country does enough to prevent discrimination and ensure quality education for children, including children with disabilities.

[In the EU enlargement Package](#), released every year, the EU shares its observations and recommendations.

It is the opportunity for the EU to see if the rights and inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities are a priority for the acceding country.

Moreover, during the process, EU Funds from [the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance](#) are made available to work on the policies and reforms that are required. This money needs to be used in line with the rights of people with disabilities.

How did we gather the data to write this briefing?

Some of the data provided are from the [Inclusion Indicators](#). The Inclusion Indicators is a yearly report made by Inclusion Europe². It scores 7 crucial indicators showing inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities and their families in Europe.

National representative organisations participating in the Inclusion Indicators 2025 and in this briefing are:

- [The Help The Life Association](#) (Albania)
- [The VGO Coalition](#) (Ukraine)

Scores given in the Inclusion Indicators report 2025³ are used in this briefing.

Some of the data provided are **from organisations representing or supporting people with intellectual disabilities and their families**. Organisations participating in this briefing are:

- [Georgian Down syndrome Association](#) (Georgia)
- [PORAKA](#) (North Macedonia).
- [Keystone](#) (Moldova)

This briefing follows the methodology used in the Inclusion Indicators report but does not include scores for indicators.

² The Inclusion Indicators 2025 is to be published in December 2025 on Inclusion Europe website

³ The Inclusion Indicators report 2025 will be publish on Inclusion Europe's website in December 2025

Situation in some acceding countries

Albania

1. Right to decide and right to vote

Legal capacity status can be fully removed. This can restrict the right to vote and the right to stand for election. Voting is not accessible.

Albania scores 1.5 out of 10 on the right to decide and right to vote.

The average EU score is 5.0 out of 10.

2. Right to live independently and to be included in the community

Most people with intellectual disabilities live in smaller institutions.

Albania scores 4.7 out of 10 on the right to live independently and to be included in the community.

The average EU score is 4.2 out of 10.

3. Housing and support

Almost all people with intellectual disabilities live with their family. Very few live in their own place. Families do not receive enough support from the government. Disability benefits go to both the person with an intellectual disability and to the caregiver.

Albania scores 2.5 out of 10 on housing and support.

The average EU score is 4.3 out of 10.

4. Education

Some children with intellectual disabilities go to mainstream schools, very few go to special schools. Many receive no education at all.

Albania scores 4.2 out of 10 on education.

The average EU score is 5.6 out of 10.

5. Employment

Very few people with intellectual disabilities have a job on the open labour market, and most stay at home. People do not risk losing disability benefits when they have a paid job. There are measures in place to make jobs more accessible, but they do not work in practice.

Albania scores 3.7 out of 10 on employment.

The average EU score is 4.2 out of 10.

6. Healthcare

Many people with intellectual disabilities have access to general healthcare. Some have access to the dentist and women's health. There is no easy-to-read information about healthcare. Little freedom of choice in reproductive health. People with intellectual disabilities cannot be forcibly sterilised.

Albania scores 4.9 out of 10 on healthcare.

The average EU score is 5.6 out of 10.

7. Representation

People with intellectual disabilities are represented within the national cross-disability organisation, but there is no person with an intellectual disability part of the board/council. Help the Life Association does not receive government funding for advocacy work.

Albania scores 3.8 out of 10 on representation.

The average EU score is 6.3 out of 10.

The average score of Albania is 3.4 out of 10

The EU average score is 5 out of 10

Reported number of people with intellectual disabilities in	
Larger institutions	243
Smaller institutions	50
Small care homes	No data available
Psychiatric hospitals	No data available
Mainstream schools	4,500
Special education	200
No education	10,000

Disclaimer: these are the reported or estimated numbers of the country. In most cases, in reality, the numbers will be higher as the data is underreported or missing entirely.

What the EU says in the [Enlargement Package 2025 report about Albania](#):

“Limited action was taken to tackle discrimination against persons with disabilities, improve accessibility in line with the EU acquis, including as regards the European Accessibility Act and boost opportunities in employment, education and participation in political and public life.”

“There has been limited progress on deinstitutionalisation, which needs to be dealt with urgently to move towards independent living and inclusion of persons with disabilities.”

The Help the Life Association says:

“Although Albania has ratified the UNCRPD, still some laws, especially on decision making, are not in line with the convention.”

“Even though independent living and living in the community is mentioned as a priority by our government in main strategies and action plans, still nothing has been done.”

“Reproductive health is a ‘taboo’ for people with intellectual disability in our country. It is rare to talk about it.”

North Macedonia

1. Right to decide and right to vote

Legal capacity can be fully or partially removed. This can restrict the right to vote and stand for election. There are some measures to make voting accessible.

2. Right to live independently and be included in the community

Few people with intellectual disabilities are living in large institutions. Few live in smaller scale institutions. Very few live in small care homes. There is a deinstitutionalisation plan, but with limited impact.

3. Housing and support

Most of the adult persons with intellectual disability live with their families. Only few live in their own place. Disability benefits sometimes go to the person, sometimes to families. Families do not receive enough support from the government.

4. Education

Some children with intellectual disabilities go to mainstream schools. Some go to special schools. Most of the children with complex support needs are not in education at all. There is a strategy towards inclusive education.

5. Employment

Most people with intellectual disabilities are in “protected employment”. Very few work in the open labour market. Many are unemployed. There are a few measures to make jobs accessible, but they are not used enough.

6. Healthcare

People with intellectual disabilities have limited access to healthcare. There is a lack of access to reproductive health, dentists, and women’s health.

7. Representation

People with intellectual disability and their families are represented in their national association. PORAKA gets public funding for advocacy work.

In its [EU Enlargement report 2025 about North Macedonia](#), the EU says:

“Persons with disabilities are still unable to fully enjoy their rights. This is because legislation and government policies are not aligned with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).”

“Persons with intellectual and physical disabilities are gradually being transferred to residential units operated by community services for organised supported living.”

“Overall, persons with disabilities continue to encounter significant forms of discrimination, including insufficient access to information and services, discriminatory attitudes and social marginalisation.”

PORAKA says:

“The existing guardianship system results in restrictions on decision-making and the right to choose for persons with intellectual disability.”

" All children with intellectual disability, residents in Special Institute – Demir Kapija⁴, have been taken out and placed in community-based services (foster care, small group homes). However, the DI process faced many obstacles and most of the resettled people with intellectual disabilities were transferred to small group homes, where the institutional characteristics could be observed and the quality of services is questionable.”

⁴ The only large residential institution for people with intellectual disabilities in North Macedonia.

Georgia

1. Right to decide and right to vote

By law, people with intellectual disabilities should keep their legal capacity and have support to make decisions. They have the right to vote and stand for elections, regardless of legal capacity status. There are a few measures available to make voting accessible.

2. Right to live independently and be included in the community

Some adults with intellectual disabilities live in large institutions. Some live in small care homes and some in psychiatric hospitals. There is a plan to close institutions, but it is slow and has limited results.

3. Housing and support

Most of the adults with intellectual disabilities live with their family. Almost none live in their own place. When families can no longer provide support, the person is likely to go to an institution. Disability benefits go to the individual. There is no mechanism to assess quality of services.

4. Education

Almost all children with intellectual disabilities go to mainstream schools. Almost none go to special schools. Not enough support is available for inclusive education.

5. Employment

Very few people with intellectual disabilities have a job on the open labour market. People do not risk losing their disability benefits when they have a paid job. There are some measures to make jobs accessible, but they are not effective.

6. Healthcare

Few people with intellectual disabilities have access to healthcare. There is no easy-to-read information. Sex education is poor. By law, people with intellectual disabilities cannot be forcibly sterilised.

7. Representation

People with intellectual disabilities are not represented in the national cross-disability organisation. The Georgian Down Syndrome Association does not receive government funding for their advocacy work.

In [its EU Enlargement report 2025 about Georgia](#), the EU says:

“Georgia has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and its Optional Protocol, but persons with disabilities continue to face systemic barriers to the enjoyment of their rights.”

“The closure of a large institution in Martkopi at the end of 2024 marks progress in deinstitutionalisation, but further efforts are needed to ensure the full and effective implementation.”

“The 2024 report by the PDO highlighted gaps in the provision of inclusive education for children with disabilities.”

The Georgian Down Syndrome Association says:

“The main issue is that Georgia lacks a systemic network of services that enable independent living. There are no functioning personal assistance programs, supported housing models, or local community centres designed to provide daily life support and inclusion.”

“While the government has acknowledged the need for deinstitutionalization, progress remains limited to children’s services, such as foster care and small group homes. Adults with disabilities continue to be excluded from reforms. A coordinated national strategy, supported by transparent governance and open civic participation, is urgently needed.”

“The government has abolished the Inclusive Education Department, which has significantly weakened institutional support and coordination in this field. Public schools,

teachers, and assistants now receive limited guidance and resources to ensure meaningful inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities.”

Moldova

1. Right to decide and right to vote

By law, people with intellectual disabilities should have support to make decisions and keep their legal capacity. They have the right to vote and stand for elections, regardless of legal capacity status. But voting is not made accessible.

2. Right to live independently and be included in the community

Most of the adults with intellectual disabilities live in large institutions. Some live in small care homes and some in psychiatric hospitals. There is a deinstitutionalisation plan, but it has been put on standby.

3. Housing and support

Most of the adults with intellectual disabilities live with their family. Some live in their own place. When families can no longer provide support, the person is likely to go to an institution. Disability benefits go to the individual. There is a mechanism to assess quality of services.

4. Education

Almost all children with intellectual disabilities go to mainstream schools. Some go to special schools. There is a national strategy towards inclusive education.

5. Employment

Most people with intellectual disabilities are sitting at home. Some are employed on the open labour market. Measures are in place to make jobs accessible, but they lack implementation.

6. Healthcare

Almost all people with intellectual disabilities have access to healthcare. There is the need for easy-to-read information. Sex education is poor. There is limited information on choice in reproductive health. People with intellectual disabilities cannot be forcibly sterilised.

7. Representation

People with intellectual disabilities are represented in the national cross-disability organisation but there is no person with an intellectual disability on the board/council.

Reported number of people with intellectual disabilities in	
Larger institutions	2000
Smaller institutions	No data available
Small care homes	67
Psychiatric hospitals	250
Mainstream schools	3800
Special education	500
No education	No data available

Disclaimer: these are the reported or estimated numbers of the country. In most cases, in reality, the numbers will be higher as the data is underreported or missing entirely.

In its [EU Enlargement report 2025 about Moldova](#), the EU says:

“While de-institutionalisation continued to progress slowly, reports by civil society and investigative media highlight serious ongoing human rights violations in institutions. Apart from urgently tackling these violations, further efforts are needed to move towards independent living and inclusion of persons with disabilities.”

“Support services are insufficient; mobile teams help but need wider coverage.”

“Children with disabilities remain exposed to higher protection risks, including violence and family separation. The placement of children with intellectual disabilities in psychiatric institutions continues to be a systemic issue and a human rights violation.”

Keystone Moldova says:

“During the last 4 years, due to Covid-pandemic, refugees and energetic crises, the deinstitutionalization was put on standby, as well as the development of new community based social care services.”

“There is a need for more support on how to vote in easy to read, as well as education and training for persons with intellectual disabilities based on their needs.”

“The number of employed persons with intellectual disabilities is still small because of the unpreparedness of employees, limited money in the budget for assisted employment, unpreparedness of persons with disabilities and their families to get a job etc.”

Ukraine

1. Right to decide and right to vote

Legal capacity can be fully removed, and this can limit the right to vote and the right to stand for elections. Voting is not accessible for people with intellectual disabilities.

Ukraine scores 2.1 out of 10 on the right to decide and right to vote.

The average EU score is 5.0 out of 10.

2. Right to live independently and to be included in the community

Some adults with intellectual disabilities live in larger institutions, few live in psychiatric hospitals. There is a plan to close institutions, but it is not being followed.

Ukraine scores 2.3 out of 10 on the right to live independently and to be included in the community.

The average EU score is 4.2 out of 10.

3. Housing and support

Most adults with intellectual disabilities live with their families. Very few live in their own place. Disability benefits go to the individual, a legal representative or a guardian. Housing and disability support are not accessible. The mechanism for quality of services does not reflect the reality.

Ukraine scores 2.5 out of 10 on housing and support.

The EU average score is 4.3 out of 10.

4. Education

Many children with intellectual disabilities go to special schools and some go to mainstream schools. There is a law that addresses inclusive education, but there is little progress.

Ukraine scores 4.2 out of 10 on education.

The EU average score is 5.6 out of 10.

5. Employment

Very few people with intellectual disabilities have a job on the open labour market. Some work in 'protected employment', some attend daycare and some stay at home. People do not risk losing their disability benefits when they have a paid job, but jobs are not very accessible. 'Protected employment' does not pay minimum wage.

Ukraine scores 2.6 out of 10 on employment.

The EU average score is 4.2 out of 10.

6. Healthcare

Many people with intellectual disabilities have access to healthcare. Some have access to the dentist and women's health. There is little freedom of choice in reproductive health. People with intellectual disabilities cannot be forcibly sterilised.

Ukraine scores 3.5 out of 10 on healthcare.

The EU average score is 5.6 out of 10.

7. Representation

People with intellectual disabilities are represented in the national cross-disability organisation. VGO Coalition does not receive government funding for advocacy work.

Ukraine scores 3.5 out of 10 on representation.

The EU average is 6.3 out of 10.

The average score of Ukraine is 3 out of 10

The EU average score is 5 out of 10.

Reported number of people with intellectual disabilities in	
Larger institutions	20 000*
Smaller institutions	100*
Small care homes	0*
Psychiatric hospitals	1000*
Mainstream schools	2000
Special education	10 000
No education	1000

* Disclaimer: these are the reported or estimated numbers of the country. In most cases, in reality, the numbers will be higher as the data is underreported or missing entirely.

In [the Enlargement report 2025 about Ukraine](#), the EU says:

“Regarding the deinstitutionalisation of adults, Ukraine adopted the Strategy of reform of psycho-neurological and other institutions and deinstitutionalisation of care for adults with disabilities and elderly until 2034 and adopted an operational plan for its implementation for 2025-2027. The implementation of this strategy and plan needs to be ensured.”

“Ukraine has committed to ensuring access to housing for people in need, in particular internally displaced persons. Challenges remain in ensuring evacuation and accessible facilities and housing for displaced elderly and persons with disabilities.”

The VGO Coalition says:

“The recent resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers clearly declares the intention of the government to make a shift in care from large institutions (100 and more users) to smaller institutions and group homes. Still, it is said that it is the responsibility of the local communities who say they have no money for supported living in the group homes. So, the government has to determine at least minimal financial guarantees from the national level public budget.”

“Special measures have to be planned focused on persons with intellectual disabilities. We are advocating for the supported employment in the open labour market and shelter employment. The government has promised to support shelter employment financially and is currently developing appropriate sublaws.”

More about people with intellectual disabilities in the [Ukraine Support Project](#) and in the [report of Richard Backer](#), member of the British Parliament.

How this briefing can be used

This briefing is an overview of the situation of people with intellectual disabilities and their families in some acceding countries the EU.

It aims to complement the Enlargement Package reports released by the European Commission.

Countries acceding to the EU can take this information to work on their reforms to meet the EU standards on:

- **Right to decide and right to vote:** Repealing laws that deprive people with intellectual disabilities of their legal capacity and progressing towards supported decision-making.
- **Right to live independently and be included in the community:** Supporting deinstitutionalisation, independent living and the transformation of services towards community-based support.
Using EU funds in pre-accession instruments serving this objective.
- **Housing and support:** Building accessible homes with support for independent living as well as adequate social protection and quality support.
- **Education:** Supporting the education of all children with intellectual disabilities and the development of inclusive education.
- **Employment:** Supporting work in the open labour market and reforms of “protected employment” towards real jobs, good pay and working conditions, and pathways to the open labour market.
- **Healthcare:** Supporting access to healthcare for people with intellectual disabilities, including accessible information. Guaranteeing freedom of choice in reproductive healthcare, especially for women with intellectual disabilities.
- **Representation:** Supporting participation of self-advocacy groups and representative organisations in the civil dialogue, especially in discussions regarding EU accession.

The European Commission can use this briefing for:

- Having better information about people with intellectual disabilities and their families in acceding countries.
- Better supporting acceding countries to identify priorities for the rights and inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in the EU accession process.
- Engaging with organisations representing people with intellectual disabilities and their families, in particular those participating in this briefing.

Organisations representing people with intellectual disabilities and their families can:

- Raise awareness about the EU accession and its importance for rights and inclusion
- Share the briefing with their government
- Use it in their advocacy work for rights and inclusion in the dialogue about the EU accession