

Mutual Learning Event 'Living independently in cities – local approaches for persons with disabilities'

Vienna, 16-17 October 2025

Promoting independent living for persons with disabilities and those facing mental health challenges can range from the provision of barrier-free and supported housing solutions, peer support activities, promoting recovery-oriented approaches and transition from institutional care to community-based services (“deinstitutionalisation”), fostering labour market inclusion opportunities, individualised support, and social participation. On 16-17 October 2025, Eurocities organised a mutual learning on how cities promote independent living for persons with disabilities, hosted by the city of Vienna, bringing together city officers representing the social and mobility dimensions.

Background

Eurocities is committed to promoting inclusive cities where all citizens can participate fully in social, cultural, and economic life (annex 1). This mutual learning event focused on the inclusion of persons with disabilities, aimed to foster knowledge exchange, highlight good practices, and discuss innovative strategies that can support local governments in achieving greater inclusion of this vulnerable group. It is extensively documented how persons with disabilities face significant barriers to inclusion, including social stigma and inequalities, and accessibility barriers. Cities play a crucial role in addressing these challenges by designing inclusive policies, ensuring accessible infrastructure and services, and engaging with diverse stakeholders for the promotion of independent living.

In November 2024, the Commission adopted [guidance](#)¹ to promote the right of persons with disabilities to live independently and be included in the community. The guidance offers recommendations to EU member states on utilising EU funding to expedite the transition from institutional care to community-based services and independent living for individuals with disabilities. The practice demonstrates that cities are at the forefront of providing community support services to empower individuals with disabilities and promote equal access to services.

¹ A ‘flagship’ initiative of the [Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030](#)



The mutual learning event created a platform for Eurocities members to identify, share, and co-learn local strategies and measures (policies, projects, and approaches) focused on addressing the complex challenges faced by persons with disabilities in promoting independent living. We managed to gather participants from 14 different European cities who engaged in insightful discussions around good practices and challenges². The city of Vienna, hosting the event, organised site visits on the promotion of labour market inclusion for persons with disabilities, community-based services to promote independent living, grounded on a person-centred approach and affordable and accessible housing solutions.

Cities across Europe are developing a variety of services to support persons with disabilities, ranging from mobility solutions to cultural and independent-living initiatives. As a snapshot, **Vienna** offers workshops aimed at preventing institutional violence, while **Warsaw** provides door-to-door transport. **Ghent** ensures accessibility at cultural events by offering concerts with sign-language interpreters, and Berlin operates shuttle services to leisure activities. **Milan** recently opened three Independent Living Centres that provide peer-to-peer guidance, housing consultations, and personal assistance. In the Netherlands, **Amsterdam** participates in collaborative research projects focused on improving accessibility. Additional services mentioned include respite care as well as **Lisbon's** system for transporting persons with disabilities to medical facilities and prioritising them in social-housing projects. **Barcelona** organises leisure activities designed to support families of persons with disabilities, and **Helsinki** is developing digital tools to promote independent living, including renewed training programs for individuals moving into their first homes.

Vienna Social Fund

Funded by the City of Vienna in 2001, the [Vienna Social Fund](#) (Fonds Soziales Wien, FSW) is the city's central organisation for planning, financing, and delivering social services, supporting over 145,000 people annually. Vienna's disability services are shaped by the Equal Opportunities Act Vienna, Austria's national framework and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). The FSW focuses on a comprehensive system of community-based services, counselling, employment-related support, early intervention, mobility assistance, and personal assistance.

"Nothing about us, without us" is the motto to participation of service users, self-advocates, and partner organisations that collaborate in shaping services and policies, including the city-wide strategy [Inclusion Vienna 2030](#). This approach reflects Vienna's broader commitment to inclusion, accessibility, and independent living for all citizens. While the system is well developed, ongoing challenges include budget constraints, staffing shortages, and the need for strong cooperation across social, health, and housing sectors.

Deinstitutionalisation of persons with disabilities: housing support and personal assistance

According to the guidance on independent living, endorsing it for persons with disabilities also requires measures that stop institutionalisation from happening in the first place, which involves acknowledging the wide array of disabilities and the overlapping forms of discrimination that certain groups may experience, such as children, older people, women and girls with disabilities, adults with mental health conditions or psychosocial disabilities, and adults with intellectual disabilities or complex support needs.

² Namely from the cities of Vienna, Helsinki, Milan, Katowice, Ghent and Barcelona.

Independent living and deinstitutionalisation rely on access to suitable, affordable, non-segregated and accessible housing, either for individuals or families, that reflects each person's needs and goals. Investing in adaptable and accessible community-based social housing plays an essential role. The right to live independently is not compatible with replacing large institutions with smaller versions that still fail to meet the conditions required for true community inclusion, nor with situations where persons with disabilities remain in their homes but lack the support systems needed to participate fully in community life. Individual plans and case-management approaches help identify each person's support requirements and ensure that services are organised and delivered in a way that centres on the user and guarantees continuity of assistance.

The deinstitutionalisation process is directed by personalised plans that evaluate each person's specific needs and support individuals with disabilities throughout their move toward independent living, guaranteeing consistent and continuous assistance. Shifting from institutional care to community-based services may sometimes call for short-term measures and targeted investments in social and healthcare facilities to implement "the most urgent actions required to protect residents' physical safety," while fully upholding the highest human rights and fundamental freedoms as set out in the UNCRPD (United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) and other relevant human rights standards³.

Since the 1980s, Vienna has pursued a consistent process of deinstitutionalisation, shifting from institutional care to supported living arrangements integrated into regular neighbourhoods. Supported housing is offered through fully assisted living: 24/7 assistance in shared apartments integrated in regular neighbourhoods, and partly assisted living: mobile support in individuals' own homes, including the innovative *Garconnierenverbund* model⁴. More than 5400 people in Vienna currently live in these settings. Ongoing challenges include securing accessible housing, improving transitions between support levels, and expanding services for persons with high support needs and young care leavers.

In the site visits organised by Vienna, participants had the chance to get a more in-depth impression of how the deinstitutionalisation process has been addressed at the local level in different locations of the Austrian capital, while they also heard about how other cities ensure independent living for persons with disabilities. Below are some good practices on housing support and community-based care from cities participating in the mutual learning event:

Helsinki

Helsinki provides a wide range of services to support the independence, inclusion, and everyday well-being of persons with disabilities. Following new Finnish disability legislation, services now include supported decision-making and coaching during key life transitions such as moving, studying, and employment. The city offers diverse housing support, including 24/7 residential care, community-based living, and supported housing for clients of all ages. Short-term care is also available to assist family caregivers. Although the new law has limited access to employment workshops for persons with disabilities without learning disabilities and challenged existing job coaching models, Helsinki continues to offer personal assistance, transport, job coaching, and both in-person and virtual activity

³ Moreover, certain interim arrangements aligned with these high human-rights standards may be necessary: (i) to address the impacts of prolonged institutionalisation on persons with disabilities as they leave such settings, and/or (ii) to support persons with disabilities, including young adults, in building independence and the skills needed for self-reliance.

⁴ Individual flats that combine independent living with a support network. At its core, the *Garconnierenverbund* Seestadt represents a shift from traditional care models toward self-determination, inclusion, and participatory support. Rather than separating individuals from community life, the initiative places them at the centre of a diverse and accessible urban district, ensuring that independence is supported, not isolated.

workshops, which promote digital inclusion. Helsinki's flexible, person-centred approach ensures that persons with disabilities can lead ordinary lives, working, enjoying hobbies, and spending meaningful time with others. The city remains committed to building an accessible urban environment and tailoring all municipal services to meet the diverse needs of persons with disabilities.

Katowice

Katowice has implemented several EU-funded projects to enhance social inclusion and independence for persons with disabilities and those at risk of exclusion. These initiatives, running between 2020 and 2022, have supported over 275 residents through tailored social services, capacity-building, and community integration. The **'Arm in Arm' project** supported 135 individuals, primarily families facing care and educational challenges, and persons with disabilities. Services included supported accommodation for persons with intellectual disabilities, assisted living, family assistance, therapy, pedagogy, and specialist counselling. The **'Katowice, an Open City – Community Organisation' project** focused on building an inclusive local community for 80 participants. Key actions included setting up a Counselling and Information Point, supporting grassroots disability initiatives, running an Integration Club for persons with disabilities, and providing work coaching, training, and group support. The **'Open City – Social Services Development' project** supported 60 persons with disabilities and 20 caregivers with personal assistant and caregiver services, as well as access to counselling and support groups.

Milan

Milan supports the autonomy, inclusion, and quality of life of persons with disabilities through personalised life projects, developed under Italy's Law 112/2016. These projects are co-designed with individuals and caregivers and based on a holistic assessment of each person's abilities, needs, and aspirations. The approach goes beyond healthcare to promote meaningful participation in all areas of daily life, in line with the UNRPD. Services are delivered by coordinated multidisciplinary teams, with a dedicated Case Manager ensuring continuity, communication, and tailored support. Individuals and their families receive psychosocial support, caregiver training, and access to family vouchers. Projects are integrated with Milan's broader welfare and social service system. The city offers flexible housing solutions, including apartments provided by families, associations, and the municipality, some of which are funded under the National Recovery and Resilience Plan. A complementary support scheme assists individuals with severe disabilities already in long-term housing, enabling home-like living environments enhanced by assistive technologies. Milan is also piloting individual project budgets to help persons with disabilities remain in mainstream housing, including micro-cohousing. These personalised budgets may cover housing costs, education, personal assistance, and social inclusion activities. This person-centred model currently supports dozens of adults across the city and has shown positive outcomes in fostering independence, inclusion, and sustainable alternatives to institutional care.

Leben ohne Krankenhaus (LOK), Vienna

[Leben ohne Krankenhaus \(LOK\)](#) is a Vienna-based organisation dedicated to providing community-oriented support for individuals with disabilities and facing mental health issues. The services are designed to promote independent living, social inclusion, and personal empowerment with tailored support and community engagement. LOK is supported by both professional assistance and peer

networks, and fosters an environment where individuals can thrive. LOK is a social project/NGO which depends on different funding sources and supports 460 people with housing and employment solutions⁵.

In Vienna's 10th district, LOK operates the *Garconnierenverbund*, providing support for independent living under a housing model that offers small, self-contained apartments for individuals with psychosocial support needs. Residents live independently while receiving tailored, on-site psychosocial assistance. This approach fosters autonomy and stability, allowing individuals to manage their daily lives with professional support when necessary. It is relevant to highlight that LOK's primary concern is psychiatric disorders⁶, and that the care service approach is not connected to treatment, as it lies in not forcing *clients* to take their medicine.

Grätzlkreis, Vienna

The *Grätzlkreis* complements the promotion of independent living by offering group activities and opportunities for social participation in the neighbourhood. It consists of a neighbourhood-based initiative that facilitates group activities and social participation. The *Grätzlkreis* is professionally accompanied by employees of the LOK association and was developed with the Dutch partner organisation [Pameijer](#) serving as a role model. The focus lies on empowering individuals to enjoy a self-determined life within their community, to reduce isolation and strengthen and expand social networks. Peer support is a cornerstone of the *Grätzlkreis*, empowering individuals to share experiences and support one another in their journey towards self-determination. By default, *Grätzlkreis* meets once a week in the group to discuss interesting topics, spend time together and help each other with private aspects. *Grätzlkreis* is a platform that allows people in need of support to share their own talents and skills with others.

Wiener Sozialdienste, Vienna

[Wiener Sozialdienste](#) is a professional service organisation in Vienna, providing a wide range of services for different target groups⁷, one of which is persons with mental health issues. It focuses on independent living, social inclusion, and recovery-oriented care, via the provision of community-based support from a multiprofessional team working closely with local specialised psychiatric services and hospitals. To enable clients to lead autonomous and stable lives, Garconnierenverbund Seestadt offers assisted living in individual apartments, tailored to the needs of each resident⁸, allowing autonomy while providing on-site psychosocial support, focusing on recovery-oriented approaches. There is a public-private agreement for the rent resulting from a collaboration between municipal authorities (the VSF) and privately owned housing facilities (which are publicly co-funded, as getting funds from the City of Vienna to provide social housing and affordable housing)⁹.

The facilities support independent living by providing individual apartments that promote autonomy while ensuring assistance is available. In terms of services and community engagement, there is a variety of services provided across the system, including psychosocial support, therapy, and social

⁵ Clients pay for their rent, and the city of Vienna provides care support activities to whoever needs it.

⁶ LOK's clients may have substance use-related problems, and there is an ongoing dialogue on all issues, including this one.

⁷ Overall, the umbrella of Wiener Sozialdienste reaches around 300 people.

⁸ Currently, the number of residents in Garconnierenverbund Seestadt is 15 people, and the age range is from 18 to 84 years, which represents a very wide spectrum of needs and life stages. As per the challenges faced, the other existing residents in the building do not fully welcome the other residents (e.g. stereotypes and insecurity due to the profile of mental issues, etc), and the team working with them.

⁹ The residents are renters of their apartments, paying the rent themselves, and they get social assistance whenever needed (with whatever income they have). The facility is partially funded by VSF, which funds the costs of the support.

activities. Common rooms allow for shared activities, and staff rooms are available 24/7 for support and private conversations. Social activities, including birthday celebrations, are voluntary but encouraged. Clients can participate in sheltered workshops for skills development and social engagement, with the freedom to choose whether to attend and which partner organisation's workshop to join. There is a diverse professional team¹⁰, including social workers, mental health specialists, and others¹¹.

HABIT Garconnierenverbund Seestadt, Vienna

The site visit to [HABIT](#) Garconnierenverbund Seestadt operated by the social service provider HABIT, enabled the events' participants to get to know an innovative residential initiative¹². It is designed to support adults with intellectual disabilities and complex or high support needs in pursuing a self-determined and self-directed life within an inclusive urban environment. The provision of individualised, person-centred assistance that adapts to each resident's abilities, daily routines, and long-term development goals is pivotal to this model.

The Garconnierenverbund offers barrier-free, self-contained apartments that allow residents to maintain the privacy, autonomy, and personal living space typically associated with independent housing. Simultaneously, on-site staff provide continuous or intermittent support as needed. This combination ensures that individuals with extensive support requirements can access the benefits of independent living without compromising their safety, stability, or quality of life.

Support within the Garconnierenverbund focuses on three interconnected domains that collectively promote independent living. First, residents receive tailored assistance in developing daily living skills, including support with household organisation, personal care, meal preparation, and managing financial routines. Second, the initiative incentivises social participation and community inclusion, as residents are encouraged and supported to engage with the wider Seestadt community, take part in neighbourhood activities, and build meaningful social networks. Third, the Garconnierenverbund is committed to fostering autonomy and personal empowerment, via the action from the integration team working collaboratively with residents to set individual goals, support informed decision-making, and develop strategies that promote long-term independence.

Through its combination of personalised assistance and autonomous living spaces, HABIT Garconnierenverbund Seestadt constitutes a crucial contribution to modern independent living for persons with intellectual disabilities and complex needs.

Personal assistance

Person-centred approaches to independent living have become a central priority as cities work to strengthen the services and supports available to persons with disabilities. These approaches place the individual at the heart of service design and delivery, safeguarding their autonomy, choice, and control over who provides their support.

¹⁰ The staff enrolls in training for crisis intervention, inclusion, racism, and other professional development.

¹¹ There is a strong collaboration with the community services, including hospitals and other local services, to coordinate the care services.

¹² Operated by the Haus der Barmherzigkeit Integrationsteam.

By tailoring assistance to each person's needs and improving coordination across services, person-centred practices support greater inclusion and more effective pathways to independent living. Their successful implementation relies on the availability and affordability of high-quality, community-based services, particularly personal assistance and professional home care provided in a person's place of residence.

Personal assistance is a cornerstone of independent living, offering individualised support across all areas of daily life, whether at home, at work, or in social and leisure activities. When designed to be needs-based and flexible, personal assistance models can enable full self-determination and, where required, supported decision-making. Professional home care further complements these models by enabling persons with disabilities to continue living in their usual environment through a wide range of health and social services. These may include medical care as well as non-medical assistance with daily activities such as cooking, cleaning, and other household tasks. Support for family carers also forms an essential part of comprehensive home-care provision, ensuring that the broader support network around the individual is sustained.

Challenge to promote personal assistance programmes, Barcelona

Barcelona is committed to the inclusion and rights of people with disabilities. The Municipal Institute for People with Disabilities (IMPD) is a pioneering, participatory body where people with disabilities themselves are part of its governing body and participate in the design and monitoring of public policies. One of the key services to **guarantee the right to independent living is the Personal Assistance Service (BCN-PAS)**, which enables people with disabilities to hire a personal assistant to accompany them in daily, social, educational or work activities, according to their life project.

The BCN-PAS is based on a flexible, self-directed and person-centred support model. Each applicant proposes an individual assessment that determines the monthly hours of assistance they wish to receive. The service is funded by the Barcelona City Council and the regional government (Generalitat de Catalunya) and can be managed directly by the beneficiary and/or through accredited entities. Each person decides how to manage their service, with support from accredited organisations. The BCN-PAS responds to a wide range of situations: people with physical, intellectual disabilities, mental health disorders or multiple disabilities.

The main challenge that Barcelona is currently facing is to guarantee **universal, equitable and sustained access to personal assistance** for all people who need it, especially those with high support needs or in situations of social vulnerability. The number of beneficiaries has increased to an average of 55 people/year, but the unmet demand is high. This challenge, despite having local specificities, is shared with other municipalities in the region of Catalonia and at the national level. Main causes could include the absence of a clear legal framework at the state level, difficulty in finding trained professionals with decent working conditions or low awareness about the right to personal assistance.

This context negatively impacts the livelihoods and wellbeing of individuals by increasing their dependence on family or informal environments, having a clear impact on women as principal carers, as well as a high risk of social isolation and institutionalisation. The question to solve in the dedicated workshop was: **How can we ensure that the PAS model does not undermine the beneficiaries' autonomy? How can we make them strategic partners in the design of care services?**

The group examined the challenge faced by the City of Barcelona in increasing the uptake of personal assistance services among persons with disabilities. Although approximately 160,000 persons with disabilities reside in the city, only a limited number currently apply to these services. Participants considered several factors contributing to this low uptake, including limited public awareness, cultural perceptions surrounding care, and the need for a broader shift in mindset among both potential service users and caregiving professionals. The proposed solutions focused on strengthening data-driven awareness, embedding rights-based education, expanding outreach to isolated individuals, and highlighting the societal and personal benefits of personal assistance. Together, these actions aim to support a shift in public, cultural, and professional attitudes and to enhance access to personal assistance services for persons with disabilities in Barcelona. (see annex 2).

A central issue identified was the necessity of promoting self-determination and advancing the paradigm shift embodied in the UNCRPD. The group noted that many professionals continue to operate within traditional, dependency-oriented care models, which can restrict autonomy. To address this, participants proposed integrating knowledge of the Convention, as well as principles of empowerment and independent living, into education and training across all relevant professional sectors. Participants emphasised that such knowledge should be embedded not only in specialist training, but also across diverse educational pathways, enabling a strong rights-based foundation for future practitioners.

The discussion highlighted the need for broader public awareness-raising strategies. Participants recommended incorporating human rights and disability rights content into secondary school curricula, particularly for students aged 15 to 17, to normalise self-determination and foster societal understanding from an early age. They further suggested inviting persons with disabilities who use personal assistance to share their experiences in schools, illustrating the impact of these services on autonomy, daily life, and social participation.

Another priority identified was the need to reach individuals who are isolated or not connected to disability organisations. The group advocated for proactive outreach strategies, including mobile counselling in everyday public spaces (e.g., shopping centres, markets, and cultural venues) to disseminate information more widely. This approach aims to ensure that those who may face cultural, emotional, or informational barriers are made aware of available services.

Participants also underlined the importance of demonstrating the social return on investment associated with personal assistance. They noted that investment in these services can reduce costs in other sectors, shift care responsibilities from unpaid to paid labour, and improve overall wellbeing. Reference was made to research from other countries indicating that family members who act as full-time caregivers often experience significantly lower life expectancy compared to those supported by personal assistance services. Such information could be valuable for policymakers as well as families, particularly in contexts where cultural norms or a sense of stigma may discourage the use of external support. The group emphasised that personal assistance should not be viewed as diminishing the family's role; rather, it can strengthen family relationships by allowing interactions to be based on choice rather than obligation.

Accessible housing solutions

Places of residence for persons with disabilities encompass a wide range of arrangements, from individual dwellings to shared living situations and various tenancy forms such as ownership or rental. A residence supports independent living when it is embedded in the community and accompanied by access to in-home and community-based services, as well as to mainstream services available to the general population, including accessible transport and infrastructure, inclusive education, employment opportunities, and accessible digital services.

Community-based services may be delivered directly in the person's home or provided within the community, requiring the individual to travel to the service. These services include so-called "residential" options such as social housing, self-managed co-housing, or free matching services, all aimed at ensuring equality and non-discrimination in the realisation of the right to adequate housing for persons with disabilities. Across these varied living arrangements and community-based supports, certain shared characteristics are essential to enabling independent living: they respect the freedom of persons with disabilities to choose where and with whom to live and from whom to receive assistance; they facilitate inclusion and full participation in community life; and they uphold self-determination in daily decisions and activities. In practice, such settings allow for routines and lifestyles tailored to individual preferences and make it possible for persons with disabilities to maintain close connections with family, friends, and their local communities.

Challenge to promote accessible housing solutions, Ghent

Ghent, as many European cities, faces a growing demand for accessible, barrier-free housing as the number of residents with limited mobility rises. Despite this need, there is a shortage of suitable homes available across both private and social housing sectors. Even when accessible homes do exist, they often remain off the market or are priced higher than average, making them unaffordable for many people with disabilities. In many cases, residents are forced to adapt their own homes, while discriminatory practices by private landlords further restrict access to rental options for wheelchair users.

In response, the city has collaborated with various municipal services to draft recommendations and share them with advisory councils and aldermen. However, progress is slow because broader Flemish and national policies still pay limited attention to accessible, independent living. The current framework focuses more on providing care within inaccessible homes rather than creating housing that supports independence. Additionally, restrictive building regulations and differing opinions among architects on what is feasible in accessible design continue to hinder development.

Ghent's challenge lies in promoting the idea that accessible housing is not an individual issue, but a collective and policy-driven responsibility. The absence of regional legislation on housing accessibility, despite existing standards for public spaces, leaves the city with little regulatory support. This challenge is compounded by the ongoing housing crisis, characterised by an ageing, inaccessible housing stock and long waiting lists for social housing. Affordability pressures further marginalise those who need accessible homes, and the lack of reliable data on supply and demand prevents effective policymaking.

Nevertheless, Ghent is taking important steps forward. Partnerships with sogent (the city's urban development agency) and THUIS.gent (a social housing company) are fostering the creation of new accessible homes following the GOLLD – Ghent Long Live Design – principles. These efforts illustrate the complexity of accessibility, which involves not just housing design but also the accessibility of the surrounding environment. The city's main task now is to engage and convince all stakeholders – public bodies, private developers, and technical experts – that accessible housing must become a shared priority. By defining its responsibilities clearly and promoting collaboration across sectors, Ghent aims to make inclusive, accessible living a standard rather than an exception.

The question to solve in the workshop was: What approaches would you recommend for the city of Ghent to convince the main policymakers that accessible housing must become a priority for promoting independent living in Ghent?

The group discussed the challenge of increasing accessible housing in Ghent, noting that there are no strong rules or regulations requiring it, and that private homeowners often avoid making accessibility changes due to cost. They identified a major problem: the lack of data on demand, such as how many people need accessible housing, where they are located, and how such housing would be used.

Their proposed solution focused on data collection, public awareness, and empathy-driven advocacy to make accessible housing a larger part of the market in Ghent (annex 3). Collecting and analysing data to better understand demand and inform policy and planning. The data collection should be aimed at better understanding the demand (who is looking for accessible housing solutions). It is also important to connect the data on the elderly population with persons with disabilities to convince politicians of the relevance of promoting accessibility to those two target groups. This would involve service designers and data analysts creating a clear plan based on the findings. It is highly important to have the right people from various services collecting data.

They also emphasised the importance of defining target groups (e.g., politicians, the general public) and using marketing strategies and education to raise awareness and build public pressure for new regulations supporting accessibility. Focus on who the target group is, and in the following questions: *Why do we want to change the mind of politicians? Do we want to change the mind of the public?* Participants also explore the possibility of using tax reduction as a benefit for accessible housing solutions.

While acknowledging that private homeowners cannot be forced to make major changes, the group suggested fostering empathy among politicians, paired with concrete next steps, as a key part of creating change.

Labour market and training opportunities for persons with disabilities

Creating and expanding labour market opportunities for persons with disabilities is crucial for independent living, enabling individuals to earn their own income and achieve financial independence. Developing inclusive opportunities in the open labour market requires investment in areas such as work trainers, reasonable accommodations, accessible workspace arrangements, and training for co-workers, as emphasised in the Disability Employment Package. Additionally, social protection systems should support a smooth transition into employment, ensuring that individuals do not lose income support when entering the workforce.

Jugend am Werk, Vienna

The social service organisation [Jugend am Werk](#), meaning “Youth at work”, is an initiative that provides practical career guidance and integration services for persons with disabilities in Vienna from the age of 15 years. In multiple locations, they offer volunteer placements, excursions, workshops and buddy services. Through career orientation processes, the initiative has also been able to bring added value to companies participating in this opportunity. Participants are motivated and committed, fostering inclusion in practice, raising awareness among other employers with no costs incurred and little to no organisational efforts for companies.

The Jugend Am Werk Sozial provides so-called *day structures or sheltered workshops* for around 1260 people, which include qualification offers, working groups, creative work, support for people with higher or complex care needs, services for older people, and cooperation with Supported Employment. The participants of the mutual learning event visited a day structure centre premises, where multiple creative activities for persons with disabilities, with a strong focus on participation, personal development, and inclusion, take place.

Jugend am Werk Sozial also places strong emphasis on job integration and employment-oriented support, one form of Supported Employment. Participants are encouraged to explore different types of work, try new tasks, and discover their own strengths. Throughout this process, they receive tailored support that enables them to develop competencies and gain practical experience in real working environments. This approach not only enhances employability but also reinforces confidence, autonomy, and a sense of purpose.

One notable strength of the organisation is its commitment to enabling individuals to engage with art on a more professional level as part of the sheltered workshop. Participants receive guidance, materials, and structured support that allow them to develop artistic skills, present their work, and experience creative expression as a valued and recognised activity. This professionalised artistic environment offers both personal fulfilment and opportunities for skills development.

Another significant positive aspect is the organisation’s inclusive approach to ageing and long-term wellbeing that prevents social isolation, as participants can keep enrolled in these activities after the age of 65.

Annexes

Annex 1: Eurocities' reports covering persons with disabilities

- [Eurocities report A new decade of making cities disability inclusive](#), Eurocities, 2020.
- [Lessons learnt by cities in implementing the Youth Guarantee 2014-2020 – technical report](#), Eurocities, 2020.
- [The EU Child Guarantee - Eurocities contribution to the EU targeted consultation](#), Eurocities, 2020.
- [City employment & Covid-19: from crisis to recovery - How do cities ensure resilience of workers on labour markets?](#), Eurocities, 2021.
- [Cities social trends paper: Green Skills for Vulnerable People](#), Eurocities, 2023.

Annex 2: Action plan for Barcelona

Selected solution

- advertising conscious community

Steps for implementation

- include peers
- different places (market, football)
- alternative sources of funding (EU, private sector, CRS)
- school curriculum implementation
- treating them like customers

Stakeholder involvement

- educators
- relevant social workers
- doctors
- politicians
- peer-to-peer guidance
- private companies

Resources required

- economic agenda
- social return on investments
- more clear data
- long-term perspective
- corporate social responsibility
- collaboration with private (communication campaigns)

Annex 3: Action plan for Ghent

Selected solutions

- data on demand on accessible housing
- raising awareness (storytelling): awareness campaign to policy-makers and the general public
- tax reduction for accessible buildings

Steps for implementation

- define the target group before collecting data
- connect with other group ages, regional needs
- user experiences
- understand what is accessibility
- combine data from different sources
- data: social services, realtor, immoweb search engines ("google search"), parking permits for wheelchair users, questionnaires

Stakeholder involvement

- data analyst
- service designer
- cooperate with different levels (local, regional) stakeholders
- universities
- architects
- civil engineers
- urbanists
- social workers

Resources required

- accessible housing market search data
- data on custom made adjustments
- social workers adjustment
- advice data
- financial support to adapt houses for persons with disabilities
- awareness campaigns on tv, internet, schools, news articles

Risks and mitigation measures/strategies

- data differs at local, regional, and national levels
- data privacy regulation