ASSIST NEWSLETTER — ISSUE 7 — SEPTEMBER 2026

From Evidence to Practice: ASSIST Moves Towards Lasting Change

Turning Research into Practical Change

Welcome to the seventh edition of the ASSIST Project newsletter.

As ASSIST enters the final months of its three-year journey, the project is moving from research and development towards practical application, knowledge sharing and long-term impact.

The findings of the ASSIST Transnational Report have revealed persistent barriers encountered by mothers with disabilities across Belgium, Greece, Ireland, Italy and Croatia. These include inaccessible environments and information, inadequate communication support, discriminatory attitudes, limited reproductive autonomy, and fragmented mental-health and postpartum care.

The project is now responding to these findings through its multilingual Digital Ecosystem, training resources for healthcare professionals and medical students, and opportunities for dialogue among women with disabilities, educators, healthcare professionals, advocates and decision-makers.

Recent initiatives highlighted by ASSIST have also demonstrated how closely different areas of inequality are connected. Patient safety depends on accessible communication. Reproductive choice depends on receiving information directly and in an understandable format. Mental-health support cannot be effective when services are inaccessible or lived experiences are overlooked. Economic inequality may further restrict the independence and choices available to mothers with disabilities.

These are not separate concerns. Together, they show why maternal healthcare must respond to the whole person and recognise how gender, disability, communication, economic circumstances and other factors can interact.

In this edition, we introduce the ASSIST Digital Ecosystem, revisit the evidence guiding its development and look ahead to the project's final conference, which will take place at the European Parliament in Brussels on 18 November 2026.

About the Project

The ASSIST Project is a three-year project co-funded by the European Union under the Erasmus+ Programme. It aims to reduce discrimination and attitudinal barriers among healthcare professionals when providing care to women with disabilities during pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood.

ASSIST brings together three higher education institutions and seven organisations working in the fields of maternal rights, disability rights, education, social inclusion and digital innovation.

The project combines research, professional training, digital learning and advocacy. Its Digital Ecosystem includes a Virtual Learning Environment, multilingual courses and interactive 3D clinical scenarios designed to help current and future healthcare professionals

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them. Grant agreement number: 101134558 — ASSIST — ERASMUS-2023-PCOOP-ENGO

provide more accessible, respectful and inclusive maternal care.

🔗 **Learn more about the project on our website!** 🔗

From Evidence to Inclusive Practice

What the ASSIST Research Revealed

The ASSIST Transnational Report brings together policy analysis, qualitative testimonies and quantitative findings from five European countries: Belgium, Greece, Ireland, Italy and Croatia.

Although each country has its own healthcare system, legislation and institutional structure, the research identified strikingly similar experiences.

Mothers with disabilities reported encountering inaccessible healthcare facilities, examination rooms and information. Communication support and assistive technologies were often unavailable, particularly for women with sensory disabilities. Some participants described being spoken over or ignored while healthcare professionals directed questions to relatives, companions or support persons.

The research also identified concerns relating to reproductive autonomy and informed consent. Women were not always provided with accessible information about prenatal testing, birth planning, contraception or postnatal care. Some reported that their decisions were questioned or that assumptions were made about their ability to become or remain parents.

Mental health emerged as one of the most neglected dimensions of maternal care. Participants described fear, isolation and emotional exhaustion, while appropriate screening and referral pathways were frequently absent or insufficiently adapted. Postpartum guidance and longer-term support were also limited, leaving many women to navigate fragmented systems after childbirth.

These findings show that exclusion is rarely caused by one barrier alone. Gender and disability discrimination may interact with communication barriers, economic inequality, geographical disparities and assumptions about reproductive or parenting capacity.

An intersectional approach is therefore essential. It enables healthcare professionals and institutions to understand the full context of a woman's experience rather than responding to each barrier in isolation.

The ASSIST Digital Ecosystem

The ASSIST Digital Ecosystem translates the project's research into practical learning for medical students and healthcare professionals.

Its free e-learning courses are available in English, French, Greek, Italian and Spanish, helping the project's knowledge and resources reach learners across different countries and healthcare contexts.

The training addresses disability awareness, accessible communication, professional attitudes, informed consent, reproductive autonomy, mental health and respectful maternal care. Through interactive learning and 3D clinical scenarios, participants can consider how barriers emerge in practice and how their professional responses can either reinforce exclusion or support meaningful participation.

The aim is not simply to teach professionals about disability. It is to help them recognise women with disabilities as rights-holders, decision-makers and active partners in their own care.

The development and promotion of the Digital Ecosystem also reflect the complementary expertise within the ASSIST consortium. ReadLab Brussels contributes knowledge in digital learning and

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them. Grant agreement number: 101134558 — ASSIST — ERASMUS-2023-PCOOP-ENGO

innovation, while the World Federation of the Deafblind helps keep accessibility, inclusive communication and the lived experiences of persons with deafblindness visible within the project's work.

Together with the other ASSIST partners, these contributions connect technical development with the project's wider commitment to inclusion and human rights.

🔗 Explore the free ASSIST training: https://elearning.assistproject.eu/

Connected Rights, Connected Experiences

During September, ASSIST used several international observances to explore how different rights and barriers intersect in the lives of women with disabilities.

World Patient Safety Day on 17 September highlighted that healthcare cannot be considered fully safe when a patient cannot access information, communicate symptoms or participate in decisions.

International Equal Pay Day on 18 September drew attention to the economic effects of overlapping gender and disability discrimination. As ReadLab Brussels previously explored for ASSIST, financial insecurity can affect independence, access to support and the choices available to mothers with disabilities.

The International Day of Sign Languages on 23 September reinforced the importance of communication access. For Deaf and deafblind mothers, qualified interpreters and appropriate communication support are essential to privacy, informed consent and safe care.

World Contraception Day on 26 September places reproductive choice at the centre of the conversation. Women with disabilities must receive accessible and non-judgemental information directly, rather than having decisions discussed primarily with companions, relatives or carers.

Looking ahead, World Mental Health Day on 10 October will be observed under the theme "Lived Experiences Heard: Real Voices, Real Change." This message closely reflects the ASSIST approach: the experiences of women with disabilities must not only be collected but must also influence professional education, healthcare practice and service design.

Together, these initiatives support one of the central conclusions of the Transnational Report: healthcare systems must respond to women as whole people because barriers do not occur separately in real life.

Latest Updates

ASSIST Final Conference at the European Parliament

The ASSIST Project will hold its final conference, **Amplifying the Voices of Mothers with Disabilities**, on 18 November 2026 at the European Parliament in Brussels.

Hosted by Member of the European Parliament Rosa Estaràs, the event will bring together women with disabilities, healthcare professionals, educators, advocates, project partners and other stakeholders to reflect on the project's findings, resources and recommendations.

The conference will provide an opportunity to consider how the lessons developed through ASSIST can contribute to more accessible, respectful and inclusive maternal healthcare across Europe.

Participation will be possible both in person and through a web stream.

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them. Grant agreement number: 101134558 — ASSIST — ERASMUS-2023-PCOOP-ENGO

Date: 18 November 2026
Time: 14:30–16:30 CET
Venue: European Parliament, Brussels
Format: In person and via web stream

Further information about the programme and participation will be shared through the ASSIST website and social media channels.

ASSIST So Far

The project has brought together:

- 10 partner organisations working across research, education, maternal rights, disability rights and digital innovation;
- evidence and lived experiences from five European countries;
- multilingual e-learning in five languages;
- a Digital Ecosystem combining online learning with interactive 3D clinical scenarios;
- research, training, awareness-raising and advocacy focused on disability-inclusive maternal healthcare;
- women with disabilities, professionals, educators and representative organisations contributing to the conversation about change.

These results represent more than the completion of project activities. They provide resources that can continue supporting professional education and inclusive healthcare practice beyond the formal end of ASSIST..

Stay Connected with the ASSIST Project

Facebook:
https://www.facebook.com/assisteuproject

Twitter / X: https://x.com/AssistProjectEU

LinkedIn:
https://www.linkedin.com/company/assist-project-eu/posts/?feedView=all

Website: https://assistproject.eu

Digital Ecosystem:
https://elearning.assistproject.eu/

3D Scenarios:
https://assistproject.eu/3d-scenarios/

Email: info@assistproject.eu

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them. Grant agreement number: 101134558 — ASSIST — ERASMUS-2023-PCOOP-ENGO