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# Transnational Inclusive Horizon Handbook

Developed within the Erasmus+ project:

**YOUTH IMPACT – Youth Integration and Motivation for Positive  
Achievement and Capacity Transformation**

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## About the Youth IMPACT Project

The Youth IMPACT project – Youth Integration and Motivation for Positive Achievement and Capacity Transformation – was developed in response to a clearly identified need to provide young people with visual impairments with stronger and more comprehensive support in accessing information, educational opportunities, mobility programs, and active participation in social life. In the contemporary era, where most key information, services, and opportunities are delivered through digital platforms, young people with visual impairments often face significant barriers that limit their access to timely, accurate, and accessible information. The reasons for this are multiple: insufficiently developed accessibility standards, a lack of understanding and knowledge within educational institutions, a lack of technical support, as well as numerous barriers within society. Youth IMPACT brings together organizations from five European countries that share a common goal: improving the position of young people with visual impairments through cooperation, knowledge exchange, and the development of inclusive policies and programs. The project partners are the Croatian Blind Union (project coordinator), the Union of the Blind and Partially Sighted of Slovenia, the Union of the Blind of Herzeg-Bosnia, the Union of Blind of Montenegro, and the Emphasys Centre – Education, ICT Training, Research and Development Centre from Cyprus.

Each of the organizations contributes its knowledge, experience, and understanding of the specific challenges within its own environment. Together, these partners form a coordinated network that encompasses different European contexts, while at the same time sharing a common vision of an inclusive, accessible, and supportive society for all young people.

This project also recognizes the necessity for young people with visual impairments to have the same opportunities as their peers in the areas of education, employment, mobility, participation in youth programs, and decision-making processes. Therefore, the project includes activities designed to strengthen their competencies, increase their self-confidence, and provide concrete tools for easier involvement in local, regional, and international programs. It is particularly important to emphasize the significance of activities that involve direct work with young people, among which two mobility programs stand out, as well as research and educational activities. However, a central place is occupied by the development of the transnational handbook that is before you, the Inclusive Horizon Handbook.

This handbook was created as the result of a combined process of learning, consultation, and exchange, which began with the organization of two transnational online panel discussions with young people with visual impairments from partner countries. Through these panels, young people had the opportunity to speak openly about their experiences in accessing information, about the barriers that limit their participation, about missing services, and about concrete changes that would improve the quality of their lives. The conclusions from the panels represent an important foundation for the content of the handbook, as they enable the voices of young people to be directly embedded in the document.

Cooperation among the partners is based on mutual trust, respect, and commitment to a shared mission. Each organization contributes a piece of the mosaic – national regulations, existing services, examples of good practice, as well as challenges in accessibility, education, mobility, and employment. Improving the position of young people with visual impairments requires a comprehensive approach, and Youth IMPACT seeks, through its activities, to offer solutions that are applicable in different contexts. In this way, the project not only analyzes the existing situation, but also provides a starting point for the development of inclusive policies and practical steps that can contribute to change at the level of the local community and society, as well as institutions and legislation.

The Inclusive Horizon Handbook represents one of the most significant results of the project, as it connects research, practice, the experiences of young people, and European standards. Its aim is to provide a clear and comprehensive overview of the situation in the partner countries, to point out key barriers, and to present models of support that can serve as inspiration for further work. The handbook is intended for young people, organizations working with youth, institutions, public services, professionals, and policy makers. It provides a tool for understanding challenges, as well as a map of possible solutions, based on the experiences of those who live with these challenges daily.

Through this project and through the development of the handbook, Youth IMPACT seeks to raise awareness of the needs of young people with visual impairments, to strengthen their voice, and to contribute to the building of an inclusive society in which everyone has an equal opportunity to learn, to move, to contribute, and to succeed.

## Introduction to the Inclusive Horizon Handbook

The Inclusive Horizon Handbook represents a key result of strengthening the capacities of young people with visual impairments and is one of the most important intellectual outputs of the Youth IMPACT project. This handbook was created in response to the need to provide a unified, comprehensive, and accessible document that maps the situation, needs, challenges, and opportunities of young people with visual impairments in the partner countries, while also presenting models and practices from the European Union that can contribute to the creation of more inclusive policies and programs.

The purpose of the handbook is twofold. First, it systematizes the information collected during the project – from insights provided by young people through transnational panel discussions to analyses prepared by partner organizations. Second, it serves as a practical tool that can be used by a wide range of stakeholders: young people with visual impairments, their families, youth organizations, educational institutions, public authorities, decision-makers, civil society organizations, and European institutions dealing with youth policies and inclusion.

The handbook is not conceived merely as a collection of information, but as a document that encourages change. Through the examination of the barriers faced by young people, the analysis of existing support services, and the presentation of concrete recommendations, the handbook creates a foundation for improving practices in all aspects of the lives of young people with visual impairments – from the education system, through employment and mobility, to access to information and active participation in society.

In the process of its development, special attention was paid to ensuring that the voices of young people are heard, understood, and respected. Their experiences, needs, and expectations, collected through two transnational online panel discussions, form the basis of the handbook. The panels enabled young people from Montenegro, Croatia, Slovenia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina to directly share the challenges they face in accessing information, the barriers they encounter, shortcomings in support, and recommendations they consider crucial for improving their opportunities and quality of life. In addition, partner organizations prepared national analyses that provide a comprehensive overview of the legal framework, institutional practices, available services, and initiatives in their respective countries. These analyses provide context that enables a better understanding of the position of young people with visual impairments, as well as the conditions in which they live, learn, work, and participate in social activities. Each country has specific challenges and opportunities, and the handbook brings all this information together into a single, clear, and coherent document.

In addition to national insights, the handbook also includes a European perspective. This section addresses examples of good practice from European Union member states, strategic documents, and policies related to inclusion, youth mobility, digital transformation, accessibility, and equality. The overview of European practices serves as inspiration and a roadmap that can assist in planning and implementing systemic solutions in the partner countries. In this way, the

handbook enables the comparison of different approaches and the identification of models that can be adopted, adapted, and applied in local contexts.

The handbook is structured to allow clear and simple navigation through various topics and chapters. Each chapter represents a distinct thematic unit, while together they form a unified whole that provides a comprehensive overview of the position of young people with visual impairments. Through the presentation of barriers, needs, opportunities, and recommendations, the handbook also addresses decision-makers, offering them concrete guidelines for improving policies and practices. In line with the project's commitment to promoting accessibility, the handbook will be available in multiple formats: a digital version, an audio version, and in Braille, in the languages of the partner countries as well as in English. This ensures that the document is fully accessible and available to all interested parties, including young people with visual impairments who often encounter barriers in accessing information.

The Inclusive Horizon Handbook is designed as a tool of long-term significance and therefore represents not only a project result, but also a foundation for future initiatives, research, and programs. Through a combination of national information, a European perspective, and recommendations based on the experiences of young people, the handbook has the potential to be used as a reference document in the creation of policies, strategic plans, projects, and programs that contribute to improving the position of young people with visual impairments.

Finally, the handbook represents a call for cooperation, action, and the further development of an inclusive society. Its value lies not only in the information it offers, but also in the process through which it was created – a process of learning, exchange, and joint action among partners from multiple countries, in which young people with visual impairments are recognized as active participants and agents of change.

## Methodology for the Development of the Inclusive Horizon Handbook

The process of developing the Inclusive Horizon Handbook is based on a carefully structured methodology that combines qualitative insights, thematic analysis, expert contributions from partners, and a review of European standards. The methodology is designed to ensure a comprehensive, representative, and credible presentation of the position of young people with visual impairments in partner countries, while aligning all findings with European Union strategic documents and international practices.

The development of the handbook took place through the following key phases:

The first step in the process was the organization of two online transnational panel discussions, which brought together young people with visual impairments from Montenegro, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Slovenia. The panels clearly defined thematic areas, including: access to information and sources of information; the most common barriers and limitations in accessing information; barriers affecting mobility, education, employment, and participation in the community; key needs of young people; missing services and expected changes; and recommendations for improving inclusion and quality of life. Participants spoke about their personal experiences, which enabled direct insight into the real challenges faced by young people. The panels were moderated by SSCG, prepared according to a predefined structure of questions, and documented through written records. These findings represent one of the fundamental sources of information for the handbook.

The second phase of preparing the handbook involved an overview of the situation regarding the position of young people with visual impairments in the partner countries. This segment forms the backbone of the handbook, as it includes a general overview of the position of young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities, the legal framework, policies and institutional mechanisms, available services and support programs, opportunities for education, mobility, and employment, identified barriers and challenges, examples of good practice at the national level, and recommendations for improving the support system. These national-level analyses enable the comparison of contexts, the identification of similarities and differences among countries, and the formulation of joint recommendations based on real needs.

A separate chapter of the handbook is dedicated to the European context. This section includes: European Union policies and strategic documents on young people and persons with disabilities; digital accessibility standards (e.g. EN 301 549, the Web Accessibility Directive); available European mobility and inclusion programs (Erasmus+, ESC, Eurodesk, Youth Goals); examples of successful models and services from European countries; and recognized national innovations and examples of good practice within the EU.

The European perspective serves as a reference framework and complements the national insights, enabling the handbook to be both locally relevant and internationally aligned.

After collecting all necessary data, including panel findings, national-level overviews, and opportunities for the participation of young people with visual impairments at the European Union level, the final phase of developing the handbook followed. This phase included: synthesis and editing of content, thematic grouping of information by chapters, identification of common patterns and differences among partner countries, processing of recommendations, challenges, and examples of good practice, and harmonization of terminology.

As stated above, with the primary aim of accessibility for young people with visual impairments, and also to ensure visibility, high-quality application, and distribution, the handbook has been adapted into electronic format, audio format, and Braille.

In addition, the handbook has been translated into the languages of the partners (Croatian, Bosnian, Slovenian, Montenegrin, Greek, and Turkish), as well as into English.

# The Position of Young People with Visual Impairments in the Partner Countries

## Introduction and Comparative Overview

In all partner countries of the project — Montenegro, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Cyprus — the position of young people with visual impairments is shaped by much more than laws and institutional policies. It is built through the everyday experiences of young people: in classrooms and at universities, in the digital space, on the streets they move through, in offices where they seek employment, as well as in informal encounters where they try to find their place within the community. Although each country has its own social and cultural context, what connects them is the fact that young people with visual impairments continue to face similar barriers, ranging from technology that is not always accessible to environments that often lack sufficient knowledge to provide the support they need.

In some areas, such as the development of support services, the legal framework, and the availability of information technologies, certain countries have gone a step further, while others are still struggling with basic challenges. Yet regardless of these differences, the common thread uniting all partners is the desire of young people to move freely, to learn on an equal basis, to work, and to contribute to society in the same way as their peers.

For this reason, this chapter does not compare countries through statistics, but rather seeks to present, through a narrative approach, the reality of young people with visual impairments in different social environments. It represents a combination of institutional context and lived experiences — because the position of young people is not measured solely through regulations, but also through their experience of accessibility, opportunities, and everyday obstacles.

## Montenegro

In recent years, Montenegro has improved its legislative framework in the field of the rights of persons with disabilities, but the actual position of young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities remains marked by numerous limitations. Although laws and strategic documents formally recognize the rights and needs of people with disabilities, their implementation in practice is slow, uneven, and often carried out without clear intersectoral coordination. Institutions invest certain efforts in improving the support system, but due to limited capacities, a lack of specialized services, and weak interconnection between sectors, a large part of concrete support still relies on civil society organizations.

According to available population census data and administrative records, more than 33,000 people in Montenegro have a formally recognized status of persons with disabilities, while estimates indicate that around 8.5% of the total population has certain impairments or obstacles

in everyday functioning. These data include various forms of disability, including sensory, motor, and psychosocial difficulties, and undoubtedly include a significant number of young people. However, Montenegro does not have a unified register of persons with disabilities with age and disability-based disaggregation, which makes it impossible to precisely determine the exact number of young persons with disabilities, or specifically young people with visual impairments. This lack of data further complicates the planning of policies and services aimed at young people.

Young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities in Montenegro increasingly show a desire to be active, included, and visible in society, but at the same time face numerous barriers in accessing information, education, employment, and mobility. Although they are more vocal today than before and more frequently participate in the activities of organizations that bring them together, their participation in institutional decision-making processes remains limited. Many young people do not know where to find reliable information, how to exercise their right to adequate support, or what opportunities exist for education, professional development, or mobility outside Montenegro.

Within the education system, accessibility and support largely depend on the goodwill and sensitivity of individual teachers, professors, or administrative staff. There are positive examples of adjustments to teaching and examinations, but accessible textbooks, digital materials, and assistive technologies are still not standardized or systematically provided. Many young people rely on their families or organizations of people with disabilities to obtain scripts, textbooks, or digital resources in accessible formats.

Although digital transformation in Montenegro is accelerating, many websites of state institutions, educational institutions, student services, cultural centers, and public enterprises are still not accessible to persons who use screen readers. Young people often state that they feel excluded at the very beginning, because basic information about scholarships, calls, programs, or public invitations is not available in accessible formats.

In the field of social and child protection in Montenegro, certain advances have been observed in recent years that are relevant to the position of young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities, although the system is still not fully adapted to their real needs. The development of the legislative framework, as well as the adoption of various strategies and other documents in the field of social policy and disability, have contributed to greater visibility of disability-related issues, but practice remains characterized by fragmentation, uneven availability, and a strong dependence on project-based solutions. The social and child protection system formally recognizes the rights of persons with disabilities through various forms of financial benefits, social services, and support measures, but the availability and quality of these services vary significantly depending on the municipality and the capacities of local centers for social work. Young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities often encounter administrative barriers, lengthy procedures, and uneven implementation of regulations, which make timely access to adequate and continuous support more difficult.

Services that support independent living in the community are of particular importance, and in practice these are most often implemented by civil society organizations, primarily the Blind Union of Montenegro and the Association of Youth with Disabilities of Montenegro. These organizations have provided concrete services for years that enable young people to gain greater independence, mobility, and active participation in society. Among the most significant services are the sighted guide, personal assistance, psychosocial support, counseling, information on rights, support in education and employment, as well as empowerment and peer support programs. The sighted guide service is implemented by the Blind Union of Montenegro and is of particular importance for young people with visual impairments, as it enables movement, the performance of daily activities, access to educational, cultural, and social content, as well as participation in public life. Although this service exists, its availability is still not systemically resolved but largely depends on projects and the capacities of the organizations that provide it, which limits long-term security and planning of independent living for young people.

In addition, the Association of Youth with Disabilities of Montenegro, through various programs, contributes to the development of independent living models, advocacy for deinstitutionalization, improvement of accessibility, and strengthening the participation of young people with disabilities in decision-making processes. These activities play an important role in filling gaps within the social and child protection system, particularly in the area related to the transition of young people from education to employment and independent living. Although strategies and other documents increasingly emphasize the need to develop community-based services and reduce institutional dependence, in practice there is still no comprehensive, stable, and sustainable system that would enable young people long-term planning of education, employment, and life in the community. As a result, social and child protection still largely relies on a combination of institutional solutions, family support, and the engagement of the non-governmental sector, clearly indicating the need for further improvement and systemic strengthening of community-based support services.

Independent living for young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities in Montenegro remains limited by a range of structural and practical barriers. Although young people increasingly express a desire for independence, autonomous mobility, education, employment, and an active social life, systemic support for the development of independence is still insufficiently developed. A particularly important role in fostering independence among young people with visual impairments is played by the Blind Union of Montenegro, which provides orientation and mobility training using the white cane. This training is predominantly attended by young people with visual impairments and represents a basic prerequisite for independent movement, education, employment, and participation in the community. Despite its importance, the training is not continuously available to all those who need it but depends on project funding and limited capacities. Independent living also podrazumijeva the ability to make decisions, plan one's own future, and take control over everyday life. In this sense, young people with disabilities and young people with visual impairments often remain reliant on family and informal support, as the system does not provide sufficient mechanisms to enable long-term independence, particularly in the areas of housing, employment, and mobility.

The participation of young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities in public and political life in Montenegro remains limited, although certain improvements have been recorded in recent years. Young people are formally recognized through various strategies and other public policy documents, but their actual inclusion in decision-making processes remains sporadic and largely depends on the initiative of civil society organizations, rather than on systemic and institutionalized mechanisms. Young people with disabilities and young people with visual impairments are rarely represented in advisory bodies, working groups, and other formal decision-making structures. Even when they are included, their participation is often limited in scope, without significant influence on the creation and implementation of policies that directly affect their everyday lives.

An additional challenge is the lack of timely and accessible information about public debates, consultations, calls, and other forms of participation in decision-making, as well as the inaccessibility of digital platforms through which these processes most often take place. In this context, the Blind Union of Montenegro plays a significant role in improving digital accessibility, in cooperation with the Ministry of Public Administration, through participation in the development of Guidelines for creating accessible electronic documents and accessible websites, in accordance with WCAG standards. The Guidelines are intended for state authorities, institutions, and local governments, with the aim of ensuring the availability of information to people with visual impairments and persons with disabilities, particularly in the areas of education, employment, social and child protection, and the exercise of rights through electronic services. In addition, the Blind Union of Montenegro participated in the process of creating and improving the state digital platform Gov.me, with the aim of increasing its functionality and accessibility for persons with visual impairments. This platform represents a central channel of communication between citizens and institutions and a key source of information on public services, calls, and administrative procedures.

In the area of political participation, the Association of Youth with Disabilities of Montenegro (UMHCG) and the Blind Union of Montenegro cooperate with the State Election Commission and other relevant institutions in order to improve the accessibility of the electoral process. This cooperation includes consultations, advocacy activities, and initiatives aimed at improving the availability of electoral information and procedures for people with disabilities. Nevertheless, the participation of young people with visual impairments in political life remains low, particularly when it comes to formal political structures and party engagement. Positive examples of youth participation are most often linked to public debates, consultative processes, and projects implemented with the support of international organizations and through youth and inclusive programs, but they are still limited in scope and duration.

Mobility, both at the local and international level, is further constrained by the physical inaccessibility of space, insufficiently developed support services, and the lack of stable assistance solutions. However, experience shows that when young people are given the opportunity to participate in youth, educational, or international programs, they demonstrate a high level of motivation, responsibility, and engagement. In this sense, the barriers do not lie in

the potential of young people, but in the lack of systemic mechanisms that would enable them equal access.

In the labor market, young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities face a combination of prejudice, insufficient awareness among employers, and limited institutional support. Although subsidies and certain employment measures exist, they are not sufficient to significantly motivate employers, which leads many young people to give up before even attempting to find employment. Those who do manage to find work most often do so in supportive environments, within the non-governmental sector, or in certain institutions that recognize the value of inclusion.

The most positive examples of practice in Montenegro come precisely from youth organizations and organizations of persons with disabilities. Mentorship programs, peer support, inclusive workshops, and international exchanges clearly demonstrate how much young people can achieve when adequate conditions are provided. These experiences confirm that the potential of young people is not in question, but that the key challenge lies in creating an accessible, coordinated, and sustainable system of support.

## Slovenia

### Young blind and partially sighted people

In Slovenia, young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities constitute a relatively small but diverse segment of the youth population. Their position is shaped by the national commitment to inclusion, the development of the education and social protection system and the significant role of specialized services and civil society organizations. These principles are reflected in the Action Programme for Persons with Disabilities 2022–2030 [Akcijski program za invalide 2022 - 2030](#), which provides the strategic framework for improving participation, accessibility, and equal opportunities.

According to estimates based on international interpolation studies, between 8,000 and 10,000 people who are fully or partially visually impaired live in Slovenia. These figures represent an approximate population-level estimate and should be interpreted as indicative, given that comprehensive national data on visual impairment have only recently become available and still do not allow for reliable longitudinal analyses.

In Slovenia, visual impairment is defined at the national level in alignment with the World Health Organization (WHO) classification system. The degree of visual impairment is determined by an ophthalmologist and classified into categories I to V, which serve as the basis for the recognition of visual impairment and access to rights and support measures.

According to the most recent European reports prepared in the context of monitoring the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), there are approximately 384 children and young people with visual impairments in Slovenia under the age of 18. This represents around 0.1% of the population in this age group

and provides a more specific insight into the prevalence of visual impairment among children and young people, the broader estimated population.

In parallel, national administrative data collected by the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Education (Zavod Republike Slovenije za šolstvo, further on ZRSS) are based on placement procedures under the Placement of Children with Special Needs Act (Zakon o usmerjanju otrok s posebnimi potrebami, further on ZUOPP-1). This data includes children formally recognized as blind or partially sighted, or as having an impairment of function who have received official placement decisions. As they reflect administrative eligibility for support rather than the actual prevalence of visual impairment in the population, these data are not directly comparable with European data or general population-level estimates.

According to membership records of the Union of the Blind and Partially Sighted of Slovenia (UBPSS), the most recent available data indicate that 193 persons with full or partial visual impairments aged between 18 and 30 are registered members of the Union. This number refers exclusively to registered membership and should not be interpreted as the total number of young adults with visual impairments in this age group in Slovenia.

Due to the small Slovenia's small population, the education of blind and partially sighted children is supported by a single specialized institution, which also provides support to children and students with visual impairments in mainstream primary and secondary schools. At the same time, as most children with visual impairments are educated in mainstream schools, this institution increasingly enrolls children with other developmental needs, including children on the autism spectrum. This shift reflects broader inclusion trends but also presents challenges for the future, particularly in terms of maintaining specialized expertise and ensuring adequate support for students with visual impairments

In practice, this means that most blind and partially sighted children remain in mainstream primary and secondary schools, while specialized educational services are delivered through outreach support, travelling teachers, and professional guidance provided to schools across the country.

Medical assessment and certain segments of functional vision rehabilitation are carried out within the health care system, especially as a service of comprehensive rehabilitation for blind and partially sighted covered by the National health insurance system at the National Center for Comprehensive Rehabilitation for Blind and Partially Sighted (NC CRSS) at the University Eye Clinic in Ljubljana, while longer-term educational and functional support is mainly provided through Center IRIS, regional associations of the blind and partially sighted (Medobčinska društva slepih in slabovidnih, further on MDSS), and other specialized service providers.

Although inclusive education is formally well established, young people with visual impairments continue to face challenges, including delays in the availability of accessible learning materials, uneven digital accessibility of educational platforms, and barriers related to mobility and public transport, particularly outside larger urban areas. Differences in the availability of specialized services between urban and rural areas persist, as do varying levels of awareness and

sensitivity among teaching staff and peers. Despite these challenges, young people with visual impairments in Slovenia largely benefit from a supportive framework characterized by strong involvement of non-governmental organizations, particularly UB PSS and MDSS.

### Young people with disabilities

Young people with disabilities in Slovenia constitute a diverse group encompassing individuals with sensory, physical, intellectual, neurodevelopmental, and other forms of disability. Most of them are educated in mainstream educational institutions with various forms of support, while a smaller number attend specialized programs and schools, all in accordance with national legislation that promotes inclusive education and equal opportunities.

Despite a relatively well-developed system of social protection and rehabilitation support, young people with disabilities continue to face structural barriers such as physical inaccessibility, challenges related to transport, digital exclusion, and uneven access to assistive services, particularly outside major urban centers. At the same time, national youth policies increasingly emphasize inclusive youth work, participation, and the improvement of transitions to employment, through targeted initiatives aimed at strengthening the professional and employment pathways of young people with disabilities.

For students aged 18 and over, personal assistance represents an important support mechanism in higher education, enabling independent participation in academic activities and daily student life. At the same time, national youth policies increasingly emphasize inclusive youth work, participation, and improved transitions to employment, supported by targeted initiatives aimed at strengthening the educational and employment pathways of young people with disabilities.

### Common context and trends

Young people in Slovenia are increasingly involved in community life, supported by strong networks of non-governmental organizations, including organizations representing young people with visual impairments and other young people with disabilities, as well as youth organizations that promote active participation. At the same time, Slovenia reflects a broader European trend of reduced youth engagement in traditional, organized forms of participation, such as membership in NGO's or structured youth groups.

These trends are associated with greater inclusion of young people in mainstream social environments, more diverse and individualized opportunities for participation, as well as changes in the interests and preferences of young people. They reflect the principles of participation and inclusion promoted by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, while also pointing to the need for organizations to adapt their approaches to encourage meaningful and genuine participation of young people, including their involvement in decision-making processes.

Overall, Slovenia provides a supportive environment and a relatively well-developed network of services for young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities. At the

same time, persistent barriers remain, indicating the need for further improvements in accessibility, inclusive education, independent mobility, and the empowerment of young people with disabilities.

## Croatia

A general overview of the situation and the position of young people with visual impairments and young persons with disabilities in Croatia in recent years shows visible improvements through the development of the legislative framework, the strengthening of the social services system, the growing presence of inclusive policies, and more stable financing of the sector. Organizations of persons with disabilities are recognized as organizations of special interest for the Republic of Croatia and, for the first time in history, can secure basic, systemic funding for their work through three-year institutional project support.

Despite these advances, barriers remain significant, both in mobility and accessibility, and in upbringing and education, employment, and everyday participation in community life. Croatia is still in the process of transitioning from a medical model of institutional care to a model of independent living, which is the basis of contemporary European standards, especially after 2025 and the beginning of the implementation of the 18 pillars of independent living in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The demographic and social context indicates that more than 575,000 persons with disabilities live in Croatia, a significant proportion of whom are young people up to the age of 30. Young people with visual impairments represent one of the most vulnerable groups, because alongside disability they often also bear the consequences of social isolation, limited mobility opportunities, and insufficient access to modern assistive technologies. Although formal equality exists, real opportunities for full inclusion remain far from the desired level and largely depend on the availability of local services, financial support, and the degree of social awareness.

Mobility remains one of the greatest challenges. Although legal standards are clearly defined, the accessibility of infrastructure, information, and the environment is not implemented evenly in all settings. Larger cities to some extent develop tactile paths, audible traffic lights, and adapted public transport, while smaller communities still depend on sporadic initiatives by individuals, organizations, and local self-government. Personal assistance services in the form of a sighted guide, although increasingly widespread, are not equally available in all locations, and the financial framework and the conditions for their provision are not aligned with the quality standards that would be necessary. As a result, young people with visual impairments often face limited independence, which directly affects their education, employment, and social life.

Inclusive education is making progress, but challenges remain. Croatia has legally introduced inclusive education at all levels; however, its effectiveness and purposefulness vary. Full inclusive education cannot be discussed until the Croatian Braille standard developed by the Croatian Blind Union is adopted, which has been accepted and applied by the National Centre

for External Evaluation within the state matura, and until Braille textbooks are provided exclusively through project financing.

The greatest challenges in this area include:

- an insufficient number of typhlopedagogues and support specialists,
- insufficient preparedness and training of teaching staff in the mainstream education system,
- limited digital accessibility of educational platforms and the availability of assistive technologies and typhlotechnical aids,
- uneven quality of support between urban and rural areas.

Nevertheless, it is encouraging that the number of students with visual impairments included in the mainstream education system is growing, while higher education institutions are gradually introducing adjustments to examinations and digital materials and providing personal assistance.

Despite legal incentives, young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities continue to face low employability, prejudice, and insufficient adaptation of workplaces, as well as a lack of competencies, knowledge, experience, and educational profiles demanded on the open labor market. Vocational rehabilitation, employment quotas for people with disabilities, and subsidies for employers exist, but they are not equally effective in all sectors. Key barriers remain the lack of work experience, employers' fear, insufficient flexibility of the work environment, complex administrative procedures, misunderstanding of the system of assessment, vocational rehabilitation, and employment of persons with disabilities, as well as limited opportunities for career advancement. Nevertheless, a positive trend is recognized through a growing number of examples of good practice, particularly in the IT sector, public institutions such as the Ministry of the Interior and the City of Zagreb, as well as in social enterprises.

The system of social and psychosocial services is undergoing significant transformation. From 2023/2024, personal assistance for the first time became a systemic legal right, rather than a project-based service. This includes personal assistants, sighted guides, communication intermediaries, and other forms of support. In addition, the implementation of the Act on Inclusive Allowance has ensured significantly higher benefits to compensate for increased living costs caused by disability, thereby improving the standard of living and dignity of persons with visual impairments and all persons with disabilities.

The greatest advances are recognized in the following areas:

- stable financing of independent living services,
- development of mobile teams in local communities,
- improvement of living standards through the inclusive allowance,

- strengthening psychosocial support for young people,
- the increasingly significant role of organizations of people with disabilities as key service providers.

At the same time, the main challenges remain a lack of a long-term trained and sustainable workforce, administrative burdens in implementing projects and providing services, the slowness of the system in resolving requests for the exercise of new rights, and uneven availability of services across regions.

When it comes to participation in social and political life, young people with visual impairments remain largely invisible in decision-making processes. Although advisory bodies and inclusive mechanisms exist, their involvement remains insufficient. Accessibility of cultural, sports, and social content is gradually increasing, mainly thanks to the work of civil society organizations. Digital accessibility is still not a standard, although it is of key importance for young people's participation in online education, employment, and access to information.

From 2025, Croatia enters a new phase of alignment with European standards through the implementation of the 18 pillars of independent living, which include self-determination, choice and control over one's own life, accessible housing, personal assistance as a right, individualized social services, mobility and access to transport, access to information and communications, accessible technology and assistive devices, inclusive education, access to employment, participation in the community, protection from institutionalization, deinstitutionalization and supported housing, social and health security, participation in decision-making, protection from discrimination, financial affordability of support, and cultural, political, and sports inclusion. These pillars will form the basis for further shaping public policies in Croatia in the long term.

Assistive technologies and typhlotechnical and optical aids are key to independence, but they are still insufficiently available. Technological progress, including smartphones with accessible interfaces, navigation devices, Braille displays, and screen-reading software, has opened significant space for independence. However, the problem of slow inclusion of new aids on the List of Aids of the Croatian Health Insurance Fund remains. Civil society organizations, including the Office of the Ombudsperson for Persons with Disabilities and organizations of persons with visual impairments, are intensively advocating for regular updating of the list of aids, inclusion of modern assistive technologies and typhlotechnical aids, removal of bureaucratic obstacles, and enabling the replacement of outdated aids before the expiry of long-time limits.

Although Croatia has achieved significant progress, the position of persons with visual impairments, especially young people, is still burdened by structural, social, and technological barriers. The trends are nevertheless positive: personal assistance as a systemic right, the register of people with disabilities, a single assessment body, the expansion of rights and benefits, the inclusive allowance, improved accessibility, development of educational support, increased use of assistive technologies, and an increasingly strong voice of people with disabilities in shaping public policies.

The key for the next decade will be consistent implementation of the legislative framework, accelerated introduction of assistive technologies and typhlotechnical aids on the List of Aids, the development of accessible transport and infrastructure, strengthening inclusive education, greater inclusion in the open labor market, and full implementation of the 18 pillars of independent living. This is the path toward a society in which young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities are not only service users, but equal, visible, and active citizens.

## Bosnia and Herzegovina

The organization of persons with visual impairments and efforts aimed at providing systemic care for this population in Bosnia and Herzegovina have been present for decades. In almost every larger city, local unions of blind and partially sighted people operate, and in accordance with the country's administrative structure, these unions are organized into unions. The complex administrative structure of Bosnia and Herzegovina has also resulted in a complex organizational structure of unions and unions of blind and partially sighted persons.

Associations and their unions, such as the Union of the Blind of Herzeg-Bosnia and the Union of the Blind of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, operate with the aim of improving the position of persons with visual impairments in various areas of life, including education, employment, health care, social security, access to information, culture, and other segments of social life.

All unions and associations in Bosnia and Herzegovina bring together around 5,000 persons with visual impairments, while the total number of persons with visual impairments is significantly higher. All people with visual impairments, regardless of whether they are members of associations or not, have equal rights to use the services and participate in the activities organized by these associations, under the same conditions as their members.

## Cyprus

Thanks to improved early diagnosis, initiatives for inclusive education, and the strengthening of the rights of persons with disabilities, young people with disabilities, including young people with visual impairments, constitute a relatively small but growing community in Cyprus. Nevertheless, socioeconomic marginalization and disability remain strongly interconnected, despite ongoing efforts to mitigate this relationship. Compared to their peers without disabilities, young people with disabilities are more likely to face long-term unemployment, social exclusion, and reduced participation in community life.

- The education system offers certain opportunities for the inclusion of young people, but these vary significantly depending on the school they attend. Students with visual impairments have access to special education teachers and assistive technologies; however, regardless of this, the level of support largely depends on local resources, the number of specialized staff, and the capacity of schools to adapt curricula.

- In Cyprus, young people with visual impairments express a strong desire for independence, employment, and active participation in various youth activities. However, equal participation is hindered by challenges such as limited accessibility, insufficient skills development, digital exclusion, and inadequate preparation for the labor market. Additionally, it is important to note that, since disability data are aggregated into a single category, there is no separate national overview that focuses exclusively on the needs of young people with visual impairments.
- Due to cultural norms and the lack of adequate support services, young people with disabilities are often unable to live independently, which leaves the family as the primary, and often the only, source of long-term support. As a result, young people with disabilities continue to depend on their families well into adulthood.

## International European Framework

The inclusion of young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities cannot be viewed exclusively through a national lens. Although the everyday experiences of young people are most often linked to the education system, access to information, and the support of local institutions, a large part of the rights, standards, and opportunities that shape their lives are formed at the European and international level. Policies, programs, and normative frameworks developed within the European Union and the broader international system have a direct impact on education, employment, mobility, digital accessibility, and social participation of young people with disabilities.

For many years, the European Union has systematically developed frameworks aimed at ensuring equal opportunities for young people with disabilities, regardless of the country in which they live. These frameworks cover areas such as accessibility, digital services, education, mobility, employment, and the active participation of young people in society. Although European documents and policies are often perceived as abstract or distant, many concrete opportunities available to young people—such as the Erasmus+ program, youth exchanges, traineeships, and other initiatives—derive directly from these decisions and strategic commitments.

European standards largely reflect young people's expectations of how a modern society should function: accessible information, digital tools compatible with assistive technologies, and the possibility to move, learn, and develop professionally under equal conditions. Understanding the European framework therefore does not only imply familiarity with policies and regulations, but also insight into where opportunities are created, as well as a basis for demanding change at the national level.

This chapter provides an overview of international and European documents and mechanisms that shape policies on inclusion, accessibility, and the rights of people with disabilities. Special emphasis is placed on standards and instruments relevant to young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities, as well as on ways in which they can be part of the wider European community through education, mobility, and active participation. Although national contexts differ, the European framework provides a shared foundation for the exchange of experiences, learning, and policy improvement.

At the core of the international framework is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which represents the foundation of the contemporary human-rights-based understanding of disability. The Convention clearly emphasizes the right of people with disabilities to a dignified life, education, employment, access to information, participation in the community, and decision-making about their own lives. Emphasis is placed on accessibility—not only physical, but also digital and communicational—as a prerequisite for equal participation in society. For young people with visual impairments, this means that access to educational

materials, assistive technologies, public services, and information is not a matter of goodwill, but a recognized and guaranteed right.

Building upon this international framework is the European normative and strategic system. In recent years, the European Union has developed a range of legislative and policy mechanisms that directly relate to people with disabilities, and particularly to young people. One of the key instruments is the Directive on the accessibility of websites and mobile applications of public sector bodies, which establishes the obligation for digital content of public institutions to be accessible to all users, including persons who use screen readers and other assistive technologies. This directive significantly affects everyday access to information, from educational services and public calls to cultural and administrative content.

An additional step forward is represented by the European Accessibility Act, which extends accessibility obligations to products and services in the private sector. In this way, accessibility is established as a standard rather than an exception, thereby strengthening the rights of young people with disabilities in the fields of digital technologies, communications, and services. The technical aspects of these obligations are further defined through standard EN 301 549, which serves as a reference framework for the development of accessible information and communication technologies, including educational platforms and software solutions used by institutions.

The European legislative framework is linked to a strategic vision defined through the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030. This strategy recognizes the need to improve equal opportunities for people with disabilities in the areas of education, employment, mobility, and social participation. Although young people are not always explicitly singled out, the strategy clearly affirms the principle that inclusion means active participation in all social processes, not merely formal protection of rights. Within this vision, initiatives such as the European Disability Card have also been developed, aiming to ensure that certain rights and benefits are recognized beyond one's country of origin, particularly during travel, studies, and participation in international programs.

European mobility and skills development programs available for young people with disabilities

Within the European context, young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities have access to various programs that enable mobility, skills development, and the acquisition of international experience. Among the most significant are the Erasmus+ program and the European Solidarity Corps, which offer young people opportunities to participate in youth exchanges, study stays, training courses, volunteering activities, and non-formal learning in an international environment.

These programs recognize young people with disabilities as a group requiring additional support measures and allow for individual adjustments in line with participants' specific needs. This includes funding for assistance, coverage of additional travel costs, adapted accommodation, flexibility in the implementation of activities, as well as support during preparation, the stay itself,

and the return from mobility. In this way, young people with visual impairments can participate in international programs on an equal footing with their peers.

Beyond mobility itself, European programs place particular emphasis on the development of key life and professional skills. Participation in these programs contributes to the development of independence, communication and digital skills, teamwork, intercultural understanding, and active citizenship. For many young people with disabilities, these programs represent the first space in which their potential is recognized and developed within a supportive and inclusive environment.

Experiences gained through European mobility often have a long-term impact on the personal and professional development of young people, as they contribute to increased self-confidence, broader perspectives, and easier integration into educational and social pathways upon returning to their communities. In this sense, European mobility programs represent an important resource for empowering young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities and for strengthening their active participation in society.

### Examples of successful inclusive models and practices from European countries

- In various European countries, models and practices have been developed that demonstrate how the inclusion of young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities can function in practice when approached systematically and with the active involvement of young people themselves. Although contexts differ, the common denominator of these practices is a focus on accessibility, independence, and equal participation in all areas of life.
- In the field of education, many European Union countries have developed strong support systems for inclusive education. National resource centers and specialized services, such as those existing in Slovenia, Germany, and the Nordic countries, ensure the timely production of textbooks and learning materials in accessible formats, support for teachers, and continuous training of professional staff. In these systems, educational accessibility does not depend on the goodwill of individuals but is clearly regulated through institutional mechanisms and stable funding.
- In the area of mobility and independent living, practices from Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands are particularly notable, where orientation and mobility are recognized as the foundation of independence for young people with visual impairments. Systematic training in mobility using the white cane, the availability of tactile guiding paths, audible signaling, and digital navigation tools enable young people to move independently and plan their daily lives. These models demonstrate that mobility is not a separate service, but an integral part of a broader independent living policy.
- Positive examples also exist in the field of employment. In countries such as Germany, Austria, and France, supported employment models have been developed that combine vocational rehabilitation, individual counseling, workplace adaptation, and continuous support for employees with disabilities. Cooperation with employers is of particular importance, as they

are not viewed merely as end beneficiaries of incentives, but as active partners in the inclusion process.

- At the level of youth work and community participation, many European countries have developed inclusive youth centers and programs that include young people with disabilities from the outset in the design and implementation of activities. In these practices, young people participate not only as users, but as content creators, peer trainers, and members of advisory bodies. This strengthens their sense of belonging, self-confidence, and visibility in the public sphere.
- European networks of organizations of people with disabilities, such as the European Blind Union, also play a significant role in the development and promotion of these practices by connecting national organizations, exchanging experiences, and influencing the shaping of European policies. Through these networks, good practices are transferred from one country to another, adapted to local contexts, and become a basis for improving national support systems.
- These examples show that the inclusion of young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities is not a matter of resources, but of priorities, coordination, and consistent implementation of the principles of accessibility and equal opportunities. European experiences confirm that it is possible to build systems in which young people receive real support to learn, work, move, and participate in the community on an equal basis with others.

Recommendations of European networks and organizations in the areas of access to information, inclusive education, and active youth participation

European networks and organizations working on the rights of people with disabilities have, in recent years, developed a range of recommendations and guidelines related to the position of young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities. These recommendations are based on experiences from different countries, monitoring the implementation of international and European standards, as well as direct consultations with young people.

In the area of access to information, European organizations consistently emphasize that information is the foundation for exercising all other rights. Focus is placed on digital accessibility, as young people primarily rely on online channels to access information on education, employment, mobility, and social participation. Recommendations call for consistent application of accessibility standards, such as the WCAG guidelines, as well as clear, understandable, and timely communication. European networks stress that accessibility does not only imply technical compliance of websites, but also the availability of content in formats adapted to different types of disabilities, including visual impairment.

Regarding inclusive education, recommendations of European organizations are aimed at a systemic approach in which support for pupils and students with disabilities does not depend on individual solutions or project-based activities. Emphasis is placed on the timely availability of textbooks and learning materials in accessible formats, continuous training of teaching staff, and the role of resource centers and professional services that support mainstream schools and

universities. Importance is given to transitions between different levels of education, in order to ensure continuity of support throughout schooling and studies.

European networks, including the European Blind Union, also point to the need for young people with visual impairments to be actively involved in the planning of educational policies and system adaptations, as their experiences provide the most accurate insight into real barriers and needs.

In the area of active youth participation, recommendations focus on creating conditions in which young people with disabilities can participate equally in youth policies, advisory bodies, and decision-making processes. European organizations emphasize the importance of ensuring accessible participation mechanisms, including accessible information about consultations, adapted meeting formats, and digital platforms that enable equal inclusion. Special attention is paid to the role of youth and disability organizations as spaces in which young people develop self-confidence, advocacy skills, and a sense of belonging to the community.

The recommendations also highlight the importance of networking young people at the European level, through formal and informal platforms, so that the exchange of experiences contributes to strengthening their voice and visibility. In this context, European networks recognize young people not only as beneficiaries of policies, but as active actors who can contribute to their improvement.

Overall, the recommendations of European networks and organizations reflect a shared understanding that the inclusion of young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities requires consistent implementation of existing standards, as well as ongoing dialogue with young people. They represent an important reference framework for understanding European trends and practices, as well as a basis for comparing national policies and experiences.

In conclusion, the European framework relating to young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities represents a combination of international obligations, legislative standards, strategic documents, and practical programs that together shape the contemporary understanding of inclusion. From the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, through European directives and accessibility acts, to mobility programs and recommendations of European networks, a common orientation toward removing barriers and creating equal opportunities for young people's participation in all areas of life is clear. This framework does not operate in isolation, but is reflected through education systems, digital services, employment programs, and youth policies across Europe. For young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities, the European context represents an important reference space that connects national policies with broader values of accessibility, equality, and active participation, and provides a basis for understanding how rights, standards, and opportunities are developed and applied in contemporary European society.

## National Legislation in Partner Countries

When examining the position of young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities through the lens of legislation in the countries participating in the Youth IMPACT project, it becomes clear that legal frameworks differ, yet they all share the same fundamental aspiration: to provide young people with equal opportunities to learn, work, and actively participate in the community. However, reality often shows that laws on paper and everyday life are not always in perfect alignment.

In Montenegro, for example, laws on the rights of persons with disabilities have existed for some time, but in recent years they have undergone significant improvements. These laws clearly define the right to education, employment, and access to information, yet in practice their implementation often relies on the initiative of civil society organizations. Young people with visual impairments increasingly seek their place in the community, but they encounter difficulties when trying to use the legal benefits available to them, as institutional support and coordination are still not fully developed.

Croatia, on the other hand, has developed more detailed mechanisms regulating the rights of young people with disabilities. The legislation provides for the obligation to include persons with disabilities in education and employment, and the existence of employment quotas and specific services demonstrates a clear intention by the state to provide support. Nevertheless, practice often shows that access to these rights depends on the local community, available resources, and the willingness of individual institutions. Young people in larger cities have more opportunities, while those in smaller communities must seek out ways to obtain the support they need on their own.

Slovenia represents an example of a country where legislation and policy go hand in hand with practice. Young people with visual impairments have clearly defined channels of support, from education to professional integration, and cooperation between institutions and civil society organizations often facilitates access to these rights. Even so, there is still a perceived need for greater emphasis on digital accessibility and increased visibility of young people in decision-making processes.

Bosnia and Herzegovina illustrates how a complex administrative structure can affect the implementation of rights. Legislation exists, but its application depends on entities, cantons, and local units, resulting in unequal access for young people across the country. Young people often feel that they must navigate bureaucratic obstacles on their own, relying on the support of organizations of people with disabilities to exercise their rights.

Cyprus, as a member state of the European Union, follows European standards in legislative terms, particularly in the areas of digital accessibility and inclusive education. Young people there have relatively good institutional support, but barriers still arise in access to employment and everyday inclusion in social life. Although legal regulations exist and align with international

frameworks, practice is still shaped by the readiness of institutions and local communities to implement these laws in concrete ways.

Across all partner countries, legislation, no matter how well designed, is not merely a set of rules, it is a living framework that gains meaning through practice, everyday institutional decisions, community willingness, and the engagement of young people. The rights of young people with visual impairments are not abstract concepts, but a lived reality shaped through the struggle for access to education, employment opportunities, mobility, and active participation in society. National laws provide the structure, but true inclusion emerges when these structures come to life in everyday practice and when young people can genuinely exercise the rights that belong to them.

## Legislative Framework in Montenegro

The legal position of young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities in Montenegro is based on a combination of international obligations, constitutional guarantees, national legislation, and strategic documents governing the areas of social and child protection, education, employment, health care, accessibility, mobility, culture, sport, and protection from discrimination. Over the past decade, Montenegro has seen a gradual shift toward a human-rights-based approach, with a formal move away from an exclusively medical model of disability and an increasingly clear recognition of the need to include persons with disabilities in all segments of social life.

Although the legislative framework today covers a wide range of areas that are important for young people with disabilities and young people with visual impairments, the gap between normative solutions and their implementation in practice remains pronounced. Laws and policies often establish general rights and obligations, while their concrete realization faces challenges related to service availability, intersectoral coordination, institutional capacities, and consistent implementation across the entire territory of the state. For this reason, understanding the legislative framework is an important prerequisite for assessing the actual position of young people with disabilities and young people with visual impairments in Montenegro.

## International framework – the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Montenegro ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2009, thereby committing to respect, protect, and advance the rights of persons with disabilities in all areas of life. The Convention is the foundation of the contemporary human-rights-based approach to disability and is rooted in the principles of dignity, equality, autonomy, and full participation in society. The obligations arising from the Convention also apply to young people with disabilities and young people with visual impairments, particularly in the areas of education,

employment, accessibility, information, mobility, and participation in public and political life. The Convention emphasizes that access to education, information, technologies, and public services must not depend on the goodwill of institutions but must be ensured systemically. It also provides a basis for aligning national legislation and public policies with international standards and serves as a reference framework for monitoring the realization of the rights of persons with disabilities in Montenegro.

## The Constitution of Montenegro

The Constitution of Montenegro guarantees the prohibition of discrimination on any grounds and obliges the state to provide special protection to persons with disabilities. These constitutional provisions form the foundation for the development of specific laws, policies, and measures governing the position of people with disabilities, including young people with disabilities and young people with visual impairments.

## Key national laws

The legislative framework of Montenegro includes several systemic regulations governing the position of persons with disabilities across different areas of life. One of the most significant steps forward is the Law on a Unified Disability Assessment, adopted in 2025, which introduces a unified, centralized, and transparent system for assessing disability. This law establishes an integrated assessment of functionality, needs, and the degree of disability, thereby creating the conditions for exercising rights in the areas of social and child protection, education, employment, rehabilitation, and health care through a single procedure, without multiple and parallel assessments.

Protection from discrimination for persons with disabilities is regulated by the Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination and the Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities. The Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination is the general legal framework governing protection from discrimination on all grounds in Montenegro, including disability. This law prescribes the prohibition of direct and indirect discrimination in all areas of social life, as well as the obligation of the state and other actors to ensure equality in the exercise of rights and freedoms. The law establishes basic principles of equal treatment, legal protection, and mechanisms for preventing discrimination, thereby creating a foundation for protecting the rights of people with disabilities across all systems and sectors. The Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities is a specific regulation that more closely governs the protection of persons with disabilities from discrimination. This law defines the obligation to provide reasonable accommodation, remove barriers, and create equal conditions in the areas of education, employment, access to information, public services, culture, and social life. The law clearly positions disability as a ground requiring active measures by the state and other actors to achieve full equality.

The system of social and child protection is regulated by the Law on Social and Child Protection, which defines rights to financial benefits, social services, and forms of support for living in the community. This law lays the foundations for the development of services that provide support to people with disabilities in everyday functioning, including community-based

services, counseling, and other forms of support, in line with the principles of deinstitutionalization and social inclusion.

Rights in the field of health care are regulated by the Law on Health Care and the Law on Health Insurance. The Law on Health Care regulates the organization of the health system, types of health services, and the rights of health care users in Montenegro. This law prescribes the obligation to ensure accessible, continuous, and high-quality health care, including preventive, diagnostic, therapeutic, and rehabilitation services. The normative framework also includes specific obligations toward people with disabilities, through the right to health care adapted to their needs. The Law on Health Insurance regulates rights under compulsory health insurance, the scope of health services, and the way they are financed. This law defines insured people's rights to health services, medical and other aids, as well as the procedures for exercising those rights. The law forms the basis for exercising the right to health care and aid for people with disabilities within the compulsory health insurance system.

The area of labor and employment is regulated by the Law on Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities, which prescribes vocational rehabilitation measures, employment incentives, employers' obligations, and protective mechanisms in the labor market. The aim of this law is to improve the employability of people with disabilities and create conditions for their equal inclusion in the world of work.

### Laws relating to young people, education, mobility, culture, and sport

The legal framework regulating the position of young people in Montenegro, including young people with disabilities and young people with visual impairments, is based on several sectoral laws that define rights, obligations, and institutional competences in the areas of education, youth policy, mobility, culture, and sport. These laws form the basis for ensuring equal opportunities and access to public services, along with the obligation to adapt systems to the diverse needs of young people.

Education is regulated by the Law on Primary Education, the Law on Secondary Education, the Law on Higher Education, and the Law on the Upbringing and Education of Children with Special Educational Needs. The Law on Primary Education regulates the right to primary education, the principles of inclusion, and the obligation to ensure equal access to education for all children. The law provides for adaptation of the educational process, individualized support, and cooperation with professional services to exercise the right of children with disabilities to education. The Law on Secondary Education regulates the conditions and manner of exercising the right to secondary education, including the obligation to ensure equal opportunities for students with disabilities. The normative framework provides for adaptation of the educational process and support for students with special educational needs during secondary schooling. The Law on Higher Education regulates the higher education system and students' rights, including the right to equal access to education without discrimination. The law provides a basis for ensuring accessibility, adapting study programs, and supporting students with disabilities in higher education institutions. The Law on the Upbringing and Education of Children with Special Educational Needs regulates specific measures and forms of support for children and young

people who require additional educational support. This law establishes a system of individualized approach and professional support in the education process.

The position of young people as a distinct social group is regulated by the Law on Youth, which defines the rights of young people, forms of institutional support, mechanisms for participation in decision-making, and the development of youth policies. Although the law does not single out young people with disabilities as a separate category, its principles of equality, service accessibility, and inclusion create a normative framework in which young people with disabilities have the right to equal participation in youth programs, activities, and decision-making processes.

Issues of youth mobility are regulated through the Law on Road Traffic Safety, the Law on Transport, and the Law on Spatial Planning and Construction of Structures. The Law on Road Traffic Safety regulates rules and measures ensuring safe participation of all road users. Within this law, the need to adapt to the traffic environment to people with disabilities is recognized through safe and accessible traffic conditions. The Law on Transport regulates the organization and functioning of transport, including public passenger transport. The normative framework provides a basis for developing an accessible and adapted transport system for people with disabilities. The Law on Spatial Planning and Construction of Structures prescribes the obligation to plan and construct buildings and public spaces in line with accessibility principles. This law establishes a normative basis for removing architectural barriers and creating an accessible physical environment.

The right to participate in cultural life is regulated by the Law on Culture, which guarantees the availability of cultural content, cultural institutions, and cultural creativity to all citizens. The law affirms the principle of equal access to culture and the obligation of public institutions to create conditions for the participation of different social groups, including persons with disabilities, thereby establishing a legal basis for the inclusion of young people with disabilities and young people with visual impairments in the cultural life of the community.

Sport is regulated by the Law on Sport, which recognizes the right of all citizens to engage in sports and recreational activities. The law includes provisions related to the development of sport for persons with disabilities, the availability of sports programs, and participation in sports activities in accordance with individual abilities. This creates a normative framework for the equal inclusion of young people with disabilities in sports and recreational activities.

### **Strategies relevant to the position of persons with disabilities in Montenegro**

In addition to the legal framework, the position of persons with disabilities in Montenegro, including young persons with disabilities and young people with visual impairments, is significantly shaped by strategic documents, action plans, and by-laws. These documents represent the operational level of public policies, as they define goals, priorities, measures, and responsible actors through which legally guaranteed rights are translated into concrete programs and services.

The Strategy for Protection from Discrimination and Promotion of Equality 2022–2027 is the overarching strategic document in the field of human rights and equality. It recognizes persons with disabilities as a group exposed to multiple discrimination, with a focus on improving equal access to education, employment, public services, information, and legal protection. Although the strategy does not single out young people as a separate category in all segments, it creates a horizontal framework for improving the position of young people with disabilities through equality measures and the prohibition of discrimination.

The Strategy for the Development of the Social and Child Protection System for the period 2023–2027 is aimed at improving the quality of social services, deinstitutionalization, and the development of support services for living in the community. This document emphasizes the need to move from a model of long-term institutional or family dependence toward individualized forms of support, which is of particular importance for persons with disabilities. The strategy provides a basis for developing services that are crucial for independent living, including community support, with a clearly defined role for the state and local self-government.

The Youth Strategy 2023–2027 defines directions for the development of youth policy in the areas of education, employment, mobility, young people's participation in decision-making, and mental health. The document affirms principles of inclusion and equal opportunities, but young people with disabilities are not systematically elaborated through specific measures across all areas. Their inclusion is most often achieved through general measures intended for young people or through projects implemented in cooperation with civil society organizations.

## Legislative Framework in Slovenia

Young people in Slovenia are increasingly involved in community life, supported by strong networks of non-governmental organizations, including organizations that bring together young people with visual impairments and young persons with disabilities, as well as youth organizations that promote active participation of young people. At the same time, Slovenia reflects a broader European trend of declining engagement in traditional, formally organized forms of participation, such as membership in associations or participation in structured youth groups.

These trends are linked to greater inclusion of young people in mainstream social environments, more diverse and individualized opportunities for participation, as well as changes in young people's interests and preferences. They reflect the principles of participation and inclusion promoted by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, while at the same time pointing to the need for organizations to adapt their approaches to encourage meaningful and active participation of young people, including their involvement in decision-making processes.

Overall, Slovenia provides a supportive environment and a relatively well-developed network of services for young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities. At the same time, persistent barriers remain, indicating the need for continuous improvement of

accessibility, inclusive education, independent mobility, and the empowerment of young people with disabilities.

### Relevant rights, legislative and strategic framework

Disability policy in Slovenia is based on the principles of inclusion, accessibility, and equal opportunities, in line with the human-rights-based approach promoted by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. These principles are embedded in national legislation and strategic documents aimed at ensuring inclusive education, participation in community life, protection from discrimination, and access to appropriate support services for children, young people, and adults with disabilities.

The key national strategic document in this field is the Action Programme for Persons with Disabilities 2022–2030, which defines priorities in the areas of accessibility, inclusive education, rehabilitation, and participation in social life. Within the education system, the Act on the Placement of Children with Special Needs (ZUOPP-1) provides a framework for assessment procedures, individualized adaptations, and access to professional support, thereby supporting inclusive educational pathways.

The Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities Act (ZIMI) establishes the legal basis for accessibility and the removal of physical, informational, and communication barriers, thus shaping participation in public and social life. Early support is provided through the Early Intervention Act, while certain individuals, depending on whether they meet the prescribed criteria, are entitled to support under the Personal Assistance Act. However, the eligibility criteria under the Personal Assistance Act are based on an assessment framework that may not fully capture the specific functional needs of people with sensory disabilities, including blind and partially sighted. Protection from discrimination is ensured through the Protection against Discrimination Act.

Despite formal legal provisions, access to adapted learning materials for pupils and students with visual impairments is not ensured through a comprehensive or systematic national framework. The preparation of such materials remains fragmented and dependent on ad-hoc arrangements or on limited capacity, which results in uneven and often delayed access for children.

Overall, the legislative and strategic framework in Slovenia provides a foundation for the inclusion of young people with visual impairments and other persons with disabilities. Although fundamental rights are clearly defined, their effective implementation depends on the continuous improvement of accessibility, the timely availability of accessible learning materials, and coordinated support across different sectors, in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and national strategic documents.

## Legislative Framework in Croatia

The legal position and protection of persons with disabilities in Croatia are based on a combination of international obligations, national legislation, and development policies that cover various areas of life—from accessibility and mobility, through education, employment, and social services, to participation in social and political life. In recent years, the system has been significantly improved, while additional progress is expected through the full implementation of European standards of independent living from 2025 onwards.

### International framework – Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)

Croatia was among the first countries to ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), thereby committing to ensure full respect for the human rights of persons with disabilities, including the right to independent living, accessibility, education, work, health care, and participation in public life. From 2025, policies in Croatia are increasingly aligned with the 18 pillars of independent living, a European interpretative framework of the CRPD that defines key areas of support.

### Constitution of the Republic of Croatia

The Constitution of the Republic of Croatia guarantees equality of all citizens, the prohibition of discrimination, and special care and protection for persons with disabilities. This constitutional provision represents the foundation for the development of all specific laws and public policies governing inclusion.

### Fundamental national laws for persons with disabilities

The Personal Assistance Act (2023) for the first time introduces personal assistance as a permanent, systemic legal right, including personal assistants, sighted guides, communication intermediaries, and other specific forms of support. This law represents one of the greatest advances in the field of independent living and is considered one of the most significant social services in the Republic of Croatia.

The Inclusive Allowance Act (2024) regulates financial support for persons with disabilities in order to cover disability-related costs and increased living expenses, with clearly defined categories of levels of impairment or functional abilities. It is particularly significant for young people with visual impairments, as it provides a more stable and uniform form of support.

The Social Welfare Act regulates the system of social services, procedures for needs assessment, types of services, rights to accommodation, community-based support, and the competences of local and state authorities.

The Anti-Discrimination Act prohibits discrimination on the grounds of disability in all areas of life, including employment, education, access to services, health care, and public policies.

The Act on Equal Accessibility of Products and Services, whose application begins in 2025, is aligned with the European Accessibility Act and prescribes mandatory accessibility of digital and

electronic services, information systems, banking products, e-commerce, transport systems, and communication devices.

The Act on the Croatian Register of Persons with Disabilities enables the collection of statistical data and the development of data-based policies and is particularly important for monitoring the position of young persons with disabilities.

### Laws significant for mobility and accessibility

The Construction and Spatial Planning Act introduces the obligation of universal design and accessibility of public spaces, buildings, and public areas.

The Road Transport Act and local regulations on public transport prescribe minimum accessibility requirements for public transport, including tactile guiding paths, audible signaling, and adapted vehicles.

The Electronic Communications Act and the Digital Accessibility Act regulate the accessibility of public sector websites and mobile applications, which is a key prerequisite for young people's participation in the digital environment.

### Laws and policies in the field of education

The Act on Education in Primary and Secondary Schools regulates inclusive education, additional professional support, adaptation of curricula and programs, and the rights of pupils with developmental difficulties.

The Act on Higher Education and Scientific Activity prescribes the obligations of higher education institutions to ensure accessibility, assistive technologies, adapted examinations, and individualized support for students with disabilities.

The National Education System Development Plan envisages improvements in digital accessibility, employment of specialized professionals such as typhlopedagogues, psychologists, and educational rehabilitators, as well as strengthening early developmental support.

### Legislative framework in the field of employment

The Act on Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities regulates the quota employment system, incentives for employers, vocational rehabilitation measures, protective and integrative workshops, and the rights of employed persons with disabilities.

The Labour Act contains provisions on reasonable workplace accommodation and protection against discrimination.

Active programs of the Croatian Employment Service and youth employment policies encourage the labor market integration of young persons with disabilities through subsidies, traineeships, mentorships, training, and digitalized work models.

## Rights in the field of health care and assistive technologies

The Health Care Act regulates the organization and provision of health care, levels of health services, the network of service providers, patients' rights, and special preventive programs.

The Compulsory Health Insurance Act regulates the circle of insured persons, rights arising from compulsory insurance, the scope of health services, sick leave, travel costs, and other rights.

The Voluntary Health Insurance Act regulates supplementary, additional, and private health insurance.

The Patients' Rights Protection Act defines patients' rights to information, consent, confidentiality, and access to medical documentation.

The Act on the Unified Assessment Body plays a key role in the assessment of disability, work capacity, and the exercise of rights based on health impairment.

### Key by-laws

The Regulation on Assessment Methodologies prescribes criteria and procedures for assessing disability and functional abilities.

The Rulebook on Medical Assessment in Compulsory Health Insurance regulates procedures for exercising rights to sick leave, aids, and work incapacity.

The Rulebook on Orthopedic and Other Aids defines in detail the types of aids, conditions, and periods of use, and is particularly significant for optical aids, typhlotechnical aids, and assistive technologies.

The List of Aids of the Croatian Health Insurance Fund, although not a law, in practice represents a key document for exercising the right to aids.

The Rulebook on Contributions for Compulsory Insurance is important due to special calculations and exemptions in certain cases.

The Rulebook on the Exercise of the Right to Travel Costs in the Health System regulates the right to transport for medical examinations, rehabilitation, and treatment.

The Rulebook on Quality Standards of Health Care and Accreditation relates to the availability and accessibility of health services.

## National policies and strategic documents

The National Plan for Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities 2021–2027 is a key strategic document defining priorities in the areas of accessibility, rehabilitation, employment, education, and participation in the community.

The National Youth Strategy recognizes young persons with disabilities as a priority group, with a focus on mental health, mobility, employment, and social participation.

## The role of local policies

Cities and counties increasingly adopt local action plans for equalization of opportunities and introduce services such as transport for persons with disabilities, community-based social services, accessible cultural and recreational programs, employment and volunteering programs, and activities aimed at raising public awareness.

These policies often represent the crucial difference between genuine inclusion and marginalization.

In conclusion, Croatia has a broad and modern legal framework for the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities. However, the success of its implementation depends on the availability of services, accessibility of infrastructure, consistent application of European standards, and cooperation between state institutions and organizations of persons with disabilities. The introduction of personal assistance as a legal right, the inclusive allowance, the development of inclusive education, and improvements in accessibility represent important advances, but long-term challenges remain in the areas of digital accessibility, employment, mobility, technological support, and the removal of social barriers.

## Legislative Framework in Bosnia and Herzegovina

As a specific category of persons with disabilities, persons with visual impairments are recognized through laws on the protection of war invalids, the protection of children and families, and the protection of persons with disabilities in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as through laws relating to employment, vocational rehabilitation, and training. Unfortunately, many other laws that have a direct impact on the everyday lives of people with visual impairments are not fully aligned with this legal framework.

One of the key problems is the lack of harmonization of legislation at different levels of government. The complex administrative and governance structure of the state further complicates the practical implementation of regulations. Many laws are imprecise, general in nature, and have a low level of practical applicability.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has signed and ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and submits reports to the United Nations on its implementation every two years. Nevertheless, domestic legislation is only partially aligned with the obligations arising from the Convention. One illustrative example concerns the funding of associations, which Bosnia and Herzegovina accepted as an obligation through the ratification of the Convention, while the competent authorities limited this obligation in legislation by stating that associations “may” be funded, instead of clearly prescribing that they “must” be funded.

## Legislative Framework in Cyprus

Cyprus has aligned its national legislation with international and European standards in the field of the rights of persons with disabilities, with the aim of promoting equality, inclusion, and the full participation of persons with disabilities in society. The legislative framework in this area is shaped through a set of key laws and national policies that regulate the prohibition of discrimination, accessibility, education, employment, and social inclusion. These regulations and strategic documents form the basis for improving the rights and position of persons with disabilities, including young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities.

### Key laws

#### Law on Persons with Disabilities (127(I)/2000)

The key Cypriot law regulating the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities is the Law on Persons with Disabilities (127(I)/2000), adopted in 2000. This law defines clear and fundamental guidelines for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in Cypriot society, equality, and the prohibition of discrimination. It establishes a legal framework that promotes equal opportunities and reduces the barriers faced by persons with disabilities in everyday life, and it is largely aligned with the values of the United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities.

#### Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Related Matters (8(I)/2011)

Cyprus ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) and its Optional Protocol through the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Related Matters (8(I)/2011). The implementation of this law began on 27 July 2011, after it was adopted by the Cypriot Parliament in the same year. This law is also known as the “Ratification Law,” due to the strong integration of the principles of the UN CRPD into the domestic legal system of Cyprus, thereby further strengthening the human-rights-based approach to disability.

#### Special Education Law (113(I)/1999 and subsequent amendments)

In the field of education, the main law regulating the identification, assessment, support, and inclusion of children and young people with disabilities in the Cypriot education system is the Special Education Law (113(I)/1999), also known as the Law on the Education and Instruction of Children with Special Needs. Together with later amendments (69(I)/2001, 87(I)/2014, and 166(I)/2020), this law is fully oriented toward protecting the rights of pupils with special educational needs and ensuring equal and inclusive education with appropriate support measures.

### Accessibility and digital inclusion

Cyprus’s efforts to improve the accessibility framework in the field of information and communication technologies and public services are of particular importance. These regulations ensure that persons with disabilities, including persons with visual impairments, can use digital

services on an equal basis and access public information. Within these measures, the standards of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) are respected, thereby strengthening digital inclusion and access to online public services.

## National strategic frameworks

### National Disability Strategy and National Disability Action Plan

The cornerstone of the Government of Cyprus's policy framework for the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities, their inclusion, and full participation in society consists of the National Disability Strategy and the accompanying National Disability Action Plan. These strategic documents define measures to improve equality, participation, and the availability of services, and further confirm Cyprus's commitment to implementing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities across all relevant sectors.

### Employment quota scheme

The employment quota scheme represents one of the key national initiatives aimed at increasing employment opportunities for persons with disabilities, including support for the transition from education to the labor market. This scheme reflects the principles of the UN CRPD as well as relevant European Union legislation in the field of employment and is based on equal access to opportunities, the prohibition of discrimination, and the application of positive measures.

In conclusion, the national legislative and strategic frameworks in Cyprus create a strong legal basis for the protection and advancement of the rights of persons with disabilities, including young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities. Nevertheless, there remains a need for additional efforts to ensure their consistent and equal implementation across all sectors and at all levels of society, so that formally guaranteed rights are translated into real, everyday inclusion.

## Available services, support mechanisms, and support programs – institutional and non-governmental

The availability of high-quality services and support programs represents one of the key prerequisites for the full inclusion of young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities in education, employment, and social and public life. In addition to the legislative and strategic framework, the actual quality of young people's lives largely depends on whether functional support services exist in practice, how accessible and stable they are, and to what extent they are adapted to individual needs.

In the countries covered by this handbook, support systems are developed through a combination of institutional mechanisms and the activities of civil society organizations. State institutions play a key role in ensuring basic rights and services, while non-governmental organizations often take a leading role in developing specialized services, innovative programs, and direct support for young people.

This chapter provides an overview of the available services, support mechanisms, and support programs for young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities, with particular attention to institutional and non-governmental actors, their roles, scope of activities, and the challenges they face. The aim of the chapter is to present existing models of support, while also highlighting the importance of their further development, stability, and cooperation.

### Montenegro

#### Institutional services and support

State institutions in Montenegro play a significant role in creating conditions for the inclusion of young people with disabilities, including young people with visual impairments. Although most policies and measures formally address persons with disabilities as a whole, their implementation across different sectors—social and child protection, education, health care, employment, culture, and sport—directly affects the everyday lives of young people and their opportunities for independent and active living.

The institutional system provides the basic framework for the exercise of rights and access to public services, while the level of actual support varies depending on the sector, institutional capacities, and local conditions. In this sense, institutional services represent the foundation of the support system, but their effectiveness depends on intersectoral coordination and practical availability.

#### Social and child protection and community-based support services

The system of social and child protection in Montenegro provides various forms of material and non-material support to persons with disabilities, including young people with disabilities and young people with visual impairments. Through centers for social work, young people and their

families have access to information on rights, counseling support, needs assessment, and referrals to other relevant institutions and services. Of particular importance are community-based support services, which represent a key element in the process of independent living and the prevention of social exclusion. Within the system, services such as personal assistance, home help, day care centers, and other forms of support are being developed, enabling young people to achieve greater autonomy in everyday life, education, and employment. Although the normative framework has been established, the availability of these services is still not uniform across the country. System capacities differ among municipalities, and the scope of support often depends on local resources and organizational possibilities. Despite these limitations, the system of social and child protection remains one of the most important institutional pillars of support for young people with disabilities, with clear potential for further improvement.

### Educational institutions and inclusive support

In the field of education in Montenegro, an inclusive approach has been formally established, encompassing children and young people with disabilities, including young people with visual impairments. Educational institutions are required to apply an individualized approach, adapt the teaching process, and provide additional professional support in accordance with the needs of pupils and students.

In practice, institutional support is most often realized through the development of individualized education plans, adaptation of teaching methods, use of teaching materials in accessible formats, and, in certain cases, the engagement of teaching assistants. The availability of digital content and technical adaptations depends on the level of equipment of institutions and their technical capacities.

Higher education institutions strive to apply accessibility principles by allowing extended time for examinations, the use of digital materials, and counseling support for students with disabilities. Nevertheless, challenges remain in practice related to the availability of assistive technologies, digital accessibility, and the systematic training of teaching and academic staff to work with students with disabilities.

### Health care services

The health care system in Montenegro provides basic and specialist health services to persons with disabilities, including young people with visual impairments. In addition to ophthalmological care, the system includes other forms of medical and rehabilitation support that are important for preserving the health and functionality of young people.

Early diagnosis, specialist examinations, and counseling services are of particular importance, especially for young people facing vision loss or progressive visual impairment. Within the health care system, there is also an increasing need for psychological support, which is provided through health institutions or via referrals to specialized services.

Although the health care system represents an important part of institutional support, continuity and coverage of services—particularly in the field of rehabilitation and modern assistive technologies—remain challenges that require further development and improvement.

## Employment programs and vocational rehabilitation

The institutional framework for the employment of young people with disabilities in Montenegro includes active labor market measures, vocational rehabilitation, and employment mediation. These programs enable young people with disabilities, including young people with visual impairments, to participate in training, skills development programs, subsidized employment, and other forms of support when entering the labor market.

Institutional services play an important role in connecting young people with potential employers, as well as in providing information on rights and opportunities envisaged by the legislative framework. Despite this, the employment of young people with disabilities continues to be burdened by prejudice, insufficient awareness among employers, and a limited number of adapted workplaces.

As a result, institutional employment programs represent an important but still underutilized mechanism for the long-term economic inclusion of young people with disabilities.

## Non-governmental organizations and the support community

In addition to the institutional system, civil society organizations play a key role in the development and provision of support to young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities in Montenegro. Their role is particularly important because they often identify the needs of young people more quickly and directly than formal institutions and offer flexible, tailored, and continuous support programs that complement state services.

Non-governmental organizations act as a vital support for young people at different stages of education, independent living, employment, and social engagement. Through direct work with beneficiaries, advocacy, and cooperation with institutions, they contribute to strengthening young people's self-confidence, access to information, and active participation in the community.

A particularly significant role in supporting young people with visual impairments is played by the Blind Union of Montenegro, together with its local organizations and Youth Committee. The Union represents a central actor in advocating for rights, education, and empowerment of young people with visual impairments, offering a wide range of programs that include counseling and information services, education on rights and available services, and continuous support throughout education, employment, and social inclusion.

A special segment of the Union's work relates to fostering independence among its members through orientation and mobility training using the white cane, which is predominantly attended by young people with visual impairments. This training represents one of the key prerequisites for independent living, as it enables young people to move more safely and independently, increases mobility, and supports more active participation in educational, social, and professional activities. Through this form of support, young people develop practical skills that directly affect the quality of their everyday lives. The Blind Union of Montenegro also provides training in digital accessibility and the use of assistive technologies, including screen readers, accessible software, and mobile applications. These activities are of particular importance for

young people, as they enable equal access to information, educational content, and digital services. In addition, the Union provides psychosocial support, empowerment and motivation programs, and family counseling, contributing to the creation of a stable support network around young people with visual impairments. The Blind Union of Montenegro plays a significant role in improving the position of young people with visual impairments both through direct support services and through cooperation with institutions and participation in the development of systemic solutions.

Through advocacy activities and cooperation with state authorities, the Union contributes to improving the accessibility of information, digital services, and public policies related to persons with visual impairments. Of particular importance is the work of the Youth Committee of the Blind Union of Montenegro, which provides young people with space for networking, exchanging experiences, and actively participating in the design of programs and initiatives that respond to their real needs.

A complementary and equally important role in the support system is played by the Association of Youth with Disabilities of Montenegro, which primarily focuses on improving the position of young people with disabilities through a comprehensive approach that includes education, employment, mobility, independent living, and active participation in public and political life. The work of this organization is based on the principles of human rights, equality, and independence of young people with disabilities. The Association continuously develops programs that enable young people with disabilities to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for active participation in society. Special emphasis is placed on support during studies, career guidance, development of employability, and preparation for entry into the labor market. Through training, mentoring, and individualized support, young people are empowered to recognize and use the opportunities available to them, as well as to actively advocate for their right.

An important segment of the Association's work also relates to strengthening the capacities of young people to participate in decision-making processes, monitor public policies, and cooperate with institutions. In this way, young people with disabilities are not viewed merely as beneficiaries of support, but as active agents of social change. The Association of Youth with Disabilities of Montenegro represents one of the key organizations that systematically addresses the position of young people with disabilities in Montenegro, with a focus on education, employment, independent living, human rights, and social participation. Through long-standing work, the Association develops programs that combine education, counseling, mentoring, and public advocacy, providing young people with disabilities with support at various stages of their personal and professional development.

A particular contribution of the Association is reflected in empowering young people for active participation in public and political life, as well as in monitoring and analyzing public policies that affect their position. Through projects, training, and consultative processes, the Association strengthens the capacities of young people with disabilities to recognize, articulate, and advocate for their rights, thereby creating a foundation for greater visibility and equal participation in society.

In addition to the two organizations mentioned, other non-governmental organizations, youth centers, and informal initiatives in Montenegro develop programs aimed at young people with disabilities and young people with visual impairments. These programs are often focused on developing key competencies important for independence, employability, and social inclusion, including digital literacy, communication and leadership skills, and peer support.

Mentorship programs, peer-to-peer learning, and international exchanges enable young people to share experiences, become familiar with inclusive practices from other countries, and build self-confidence through participation in diverse social and cultural environments. During these activities, young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities have the opportunity to learn about accessible models and practices, which often has a strong motivational effect and encourages their personal and professional development.

In contemporary society, where access to information is strongly linked to digital technologies, civil society organizations play a crucial role in reducing the digital divide. Through training in the use of assistive technologies, advising institutions, and supporting the procurement of specialized equipment, these organizations contribute to greater independence of young people in education, employment, and everyday communication.

Special attention is also given to the emotional empowerment of young people. Through group workshops, individual support, work with mental health professionals, and shared activities, young people are provided with space to develop self-confidence, a sense of belonging, and mutual support. Such programs are of exceptional importance for young people who face feelings of isolation and a lack of social contacts.

Together, institutional and non-governmental services form the foundation of the support system for young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities in Montenegro. While institutions provide the normative and service framework, civil society organizations contribute flexibility, accessibility, and adaptation to the real needs of young people. This synergy represents a key prerequisite for further improvement of quality of life, independence, and social inclusion of young people.

## Slovenia

Slovenia provides a range of services and support programs for young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities, delivered through public institutions, the health care and education systems, as well as through a strong network of non-governmental organizations. The organization of these services largely reflects national priorities defined by the Action Programme for Persons with Disabilities 2022–2030, combining institutional support with community-based initiatives and programs implemented by civil society organizations.

### Institutional services

Slovenia provides institutional services for young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities primarily through the public health care and education systems. Within

the health care system, early support and rehabilitation services are available, complemented by a national early intervention framework for children from birth to six years of age.

For children and adolescents with visual impairments, specialized health services provide ophthalmological care, functional vision assessment, and counseling on the use of optical and other visual aids. Broader educational and functional support, including orientation and mobility training, daily living skills, and typhlopedagogical support, is provided through national professional institutions and specialized services that support pupils with special educational needs.

Within the education system, schools are provided with professional support, adapted teaching materials, and assistance in the use of assistive technologies and the application of inclusive teaching practices. These services contribute to the development of more accessible educational environments and support the inclusion of pupils with visual impairments and pupils with disabilities in mainstream education.

### Incentives for the employment of people with disabilities

In Slovenia, employers are legally required to comply with the quota employment system, which obliges them to employ a certain proportion of persons with disabilities in relation to the total number of employees. The quota ranges from 2% to 6% and applies to employers with at least 20 employees.

Employers who do not meet the quota are required to pay a contribution to the disability fund. Employers who exceed the quota, or who are not subject to the quota but nevertheless employ a person with a disability, may be eligible for various incentives, such as exemptions from social security contributions and rewards for exceeding the quota. These incentives are also available to self-employed people with disabilities.

In the case of supported employment, additional financial and service-related incentives may be granted to support the employment of people with disabilities. Quota employment measures and related incentives are administered by the Public Scholarship, Development, Disability and Maintenance Fund of the Republic of Slovenia.

### Social support programs

Centers for Social Work (CSW) coordinate access to financial benefits and social services for young people with disabilities and their families. Technical aid for people who are totally or partially visually impaired is provided through the health insurance system and relevant national support schemes for people with disabilities, in accordance with the Health Care and Health Insurance Act and the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities Act.

After reaching adulthood, some individuals may apply for the right to personal assistance. However, the eligibility criteria for this right are primarily based on physical dependency, which may limit access to personal assistance for people who are blind or partially sighted, as well as for people with psychosocial or intellectual disabilities.

For young people with visual impairments, social support most often includes orientation and mobility training, training in the use of assistive technologies, and access to accessible study materials. These services are mainly provided by specialized institutions and organizations of blind and partially sighted people. Medical care and functional vision assessment are ensured through specialized health services, complementing the educational and functional support available in the community.

### Programs of organizations representing blind and partially sighted

In addition to institutional support, organizations of blind and partially sighted, including local associations and Union of the Blind and Partially Sighted of Slovenia implement programs that promote independent living, social inclusion, and peer support. As a national umbrella organization, UBPSS coordinates the work of nine regional associations and plays a significant role in connecting persons with visual impairments, service providers, educational institutions, and public authorities. In this way, it contributes to continuity of support, particularly during transitions between education, employment, and independent living.

### NGO initiatives and community-based programs

NGO's play an important role in providing support to young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities in Slovenia. UBPSS and its regional associations implement special social programmes regulated under the Act on Disability Organizations, comprising ten national and six local programmes, which include structured activities for young people with visual impairments, peer support, cultural and social activities, mobility workshops, digital skills training, and awareness-raising activities adapted to the needs of young people with visual impairments. In addition to that, a separate program at the national level is also dedicated exclusively to children and young people, providing targeted support and opportunities for participation, and organizing camps.

UBPSS and other organizations also contribute to the development of inclusive youth work and participation in community life. The Association of Students with Disabilities of Slovenia provides support to students with disabilities in higher education, while organizations such as Zavod ODTIZ and Zavod Mladi Zmaji (both are youth centers) develop inclusive non-formal learning programs and community-based initiatives. Organizations of people with disabilities representing people with physical, intellectual, and sensory disabilities also implement camps, counseling activities, advocacy, and leisure activities for children and young people. Local youth centers and the Youth Council of Slovenia increasingly cooperate with these organizations to improve accessibility, volunteering opportunities, and the participation of young people in youth and community programs.

### Youth sector and mobility programs

In the youth sector in Slovenia, both specialized and general youth organizations increasingly strive to include young people with disabilities in their activities, in line with the principles of inclusion defined by the National Youth Programme 2023–2030. European programs such as Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps provide opportunities for international mobility,

volunteering, and non-formal learning, with additional support measures for participants with fewer opportunities, including young people with visual impairments.

Despite the existence of these frameworks, the participation of young people with disabilities in international mobility programs remains limited in practice. Nevertheless, inclusive youth exchanges, adapted training courses, and more accessible volunteering opportunities are gradually becoming more widespread, contributing to increased participation of young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities at both local and international levels.

## Croatia

In Croatia, the system of support for persons with visual impairments has been developed through the complementary interaction of state services, local programs, and a broad network of civil society organizations. Public institutions, in cooperation with organizations of persons with disabilities, provide basic forms of support such as personal assistance, sighted guide services, professional rehabilitation, early developmental support, educational adaptations, and various measures aimed at integrating young people with disabilities into the labor market. In many cities and counties, additional local programs are being developed, including accessible transport, adapted cultural activities, sports workshops, training programs, and subsidies that facilitate mobility, participation in the community, and independent functioning for people with visual impairments.

A key role in the actual availability of support is played by civil society organizations, particularly the Croatian Blind Union as the national umbrella organization of persons with visual impairments in the Republic of Croatia and its member organizations. Their activities cover the most important areas of everyday life: rehabilitation programs and training for independent living, orientation and mobility training, development of daily living skills, strengthening communication and social skills, information provision, counseling and psychosocial support, continuous education on the use of assistive technologies and digital accessibility, as well as activities tailored to different groups within the population of persons with visual impairments, including young people, children, parents, women, older persons, and persons with diabetes. A special segment of their work consists of advocacy activities and influence on public policies, promotional and visibility-raising activities, as well as support to member organizations and individual members.

These programs enable young people to acquire knowledge and competencies that are not systematically available to them through formal institutions. Particular emphasis is placed on non-institutional support during transitional life phases, such as entry into the education system, transition to higher levels of education, first employment, and the development of an independent life.

In this context, special mention should be made of the support provided by the Croatian Foundation for the Education of the Blind "Marko Brkić," established by the Croatian Blind Union

with the aim of providing financial support for the higher education of young persons with visual impairments.

Organizations throughout Croatia further develop a range of services that complement state systems, including organized transport, assistance with navigating the local community, cultural and recreational programs, volunteer support, and activities that promote inclusion, mutual connection, and active citizenship. A particularly valuable segment consists of peer and mentoring programs, through which young people receive emotional support and practical advice from more experienced persons with visual impairments, contributing to increased self-confidence, independence, and social inclusion.

This combination of institutional services and civil society programs creates a broad, multi-layered support network that goes beyond basic assistance and enables young persons with visual impairments to participate as equally as possible in education, employment, culture, and everyday life. In this way, not only is a higher degree of independence ensured, but also genuine social inclusion, the development of competencies, and an improved quality of life within the local community.

## Bosnia and Herzegovina

There are laws relating to the employment of persons with disabilities that provide for programs supporting the employment of young persons with disabilities. However, most initiatives originating from the non-governmental sector are project-based and limited in duration.

Local non-governmental organizations occasionally organize visits and exchanges with organizations from neighboring countries, providing young people with opportunities to gain experience and establish connections at the regional level.

## Cyprus

### State Institutions

#### Department for the Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (DSIDP)

The Department for the Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities is the main state institution in Cyprus responsible for the design, organization, and implementation of programs and policies whose primary objective is the protection of rights, inclusion, and equal participation of persons with disabilities, including young people with visual impairments.

DSIDP operates under the supervision of the Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare and plays a key role in fulfilling Cyprus's obligations arising from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD).

This department also serves as the primary point of contact for the exercise of rights in the field of disability, including access to financial benefits, assistive programs, and assistive technologies.

### Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth is the main state institution responsible for education, youth policies, cultural initiatives, and sport in Cyprus. The Ministry's objective is to ensure that education and extracurricular activities and opportunities are inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities, including young people with visual impairments.

The Ministry works closely with other local authorities, non-governmental organizations, and other ministries to develop and implement policies based on the principles of inclusion and equal opportunities.

### NGOs and the Community Sector

#### Pancyprian Organization of the Blind (POB)

The Pancyprian Organization of the Blind (POB) is the main national non-governmental organization in Cyprus that represents and promotes the rights, interests, and needs of persons with visual impairments. Founded in 1980, it has a dual role—acting both as a service provider and as a representative body for persons with visual impairments. POB plays a key role in policy-making in the field of disability, improving accessibility, and developing social inclusion programs for blind and partially sighted persons.

#### Cyprus Confederation of Organizations of the Disabled (KYSOA)

The Cyprus Confederation of Organizations of the Disabled acts as the national umbrella organization of persons with disabilities, within which the Pancyprian Organization of the Blind is also a member. The activities and programs of KYSOA include support for persons with hearing impairments, physical disabilities, psychosocial disabilities, as well as persons with other chronic conditions. The organization was founded in 1981 and cooperates closely with the United Nations, European organizations, municipalities, and ministries, with the aim of ensuring the greatest possible effectiveness of its programs and activities.

#### Local Non-Governmental Organizations and Municipal Centers

Local non-governmental organizations throughout Cyprus often fill gaps left by the work of national services and institutions. Their activities include community inclusion, the organization of accessible activities, and the provision of support to families and other forms of social assistance.

Local NGOs and municipal centers provide a wide range of community-level activities aimed at promoting inclusion, including:

- social support

- recreational and educational activities
- rehabilitation programs and life skills development
- activities aimed at improving accessibility
- awareness-raising campaigns
- advocacy for the rights of persons with disabilities

These activities not only encourage greater participation of young people but also contribute to the development of independent living and enable persons with disabilities to achieve better integration into the local community.

## Opportunities for Mobility, Education, Employment, and Youth Participation

Opportunities for mobility, education, employment, and active participation in society represent key prerequisites for the full inclusion of young people, particularly young people with disabilities and young people with visual impairments. These areas are strongly interconnected and directly affect the level of independence, social inclusion, and quality of life of young people at different stages of their development. Access to education influences employability and the economic position of young people, while mobility and environmental accessibility determine the ability to use educational, cultural, and social opportunities. At the same time, participation of young people in social, cultural, and public life contributes to strengthening self-confidence, a sense of belonging, and active citizenship.

For young people with disabilities, these opportunities often depend on the availability of adapted services, system support, and the removal of physical, digital, and social barriers. This chapter examines opportunities and challenges in the areas of mobility, education, employment, and social participation of young people, with a particular focus on the position of young people with disabilities and young people with visual impairments. The analysis includes institutional frameworks, existing programs and support mechanisms, as well as barriers that continue to affect equal access to these key areas of life.

### Montenegro

In Montenegro, opportunities for mobility, education, employment, and social participation of young people with disabilities and young people with visual impairments are developed through a combination of the legislative framework, institutional mechanisms, and civil society activities. Although there are formal conditions that recognize the right of young people to equal participation in all areas of life, the actual availability of these opportunities often depends on the level of accessibility of the environment, the level of information available to young people, and the provision of individualized support. The position of young people in Montenegro is marked by significant differences between normative solutions and their practical implementation. Young people with disabilities and young people with visual impairments often face barriers that affect their mobility, educational pathways, employability, and participation in social processes; at the same time, there are examples of positive practices, initiatives, and programs that contribute to their empowerment and a higher level of inclusion. The following sections analyze the key areas that shape the life chances of young people with disabilities and young people with visual impairments in Montenegro, with the aim of identifying existing opportunities, challenges, and areas for further development of inclusive policies and practices.

## Mobility

In Montenegro, mobility represents one of the key prerequisites for independent living, education, employment, and active participation of young people with disabilities and young people with visual impairments in society. The ability to move safely and independently directly affects access to educational institutions, workplaces, cultural content, social activities, and support services. Although certain improvements in accessibility can be observed in recent years, mobility for young people with disabilities remains marked by significant challenges that vary depending on the type of disability and place of residence.

For young people with visual impairments, mobility includes orientation in space, use of public transport, independent movement within the local community, travel to other cities, as well as participation in national and international mobility programs. At the same time, young people with physical, sensory, intellectual, and multiple disabilities face additional barriers arising from inaccessible infrastructure, architectural obstacles, lack of assistive support, and limited availability of public transport.

In larger cities in Montenegro, certain improvements in physical accessibility are visible, such as the installation of tactile surfaces, adapted intersections and signaling, as well as increased awareness of the needs of persons with disabilities. However, these changes remain fragmented and unevenly distributed. In smaller communities and rural areas, young people with disabilities often rely on the support of family members, friends, or informal support networks, as local infrastructure and public spaces are not adapted to their needs.

A particularly important form of support consists of training for independent movement and orientation. For young people with visual impairments, this most often includes training in movement using a white cane, mastering everyday routes, and developing skills for safe movement in urban environments. Such programs, predominantly implemented by civil society organizations, play a crucial role in strengthening self-confidence, a sense of independence, and readiness to actively engage in education, employment, and social life. Nevertheless, the availability of these trainings remains limited and does not cover all young people who need them.

The use of public transport remains one of the most complex aspects of mobility for young people with disabilities. Although the legislative framework recognizes the obligation to ensure accessibility, in practice support often depends on the individual willingness of staff to provide assistance. The lack of audio announcements, inaccessible stations, inconsistent procedures, and limited technical equipment of vehicles make public transport a source of insecurity and stress, particularly for young people with visual impairments and young people with physical disabilities.

At the same time, the growing participation of young people with disabilities in international mobility programs, youth exchanges, trainings, and conferences opens new opportunities for personal development and empowerment. Through these programs, young people have the opportunity to become familiar with more inclusive models of support, develop skills for

navigating unfamiliar environments, and gain experiences that positively affect their self-confidence and independence.

Mobility within European programs represents a significant development opportunity for young people with disabilities and young people with visual impairments from Montenegro. Participation in international projects enables them to develop communication and adaptive skills, expand their networks of contacts, and acquire knowledge that they later transfer to their local communities. However, young people often point to the lack of timely information about available programs, as well as the need for additional logistical and organizational support in preparing for travel.

Despite numerous challenges, the experiences of young people with disabilities show that mobility, when supported by adequate services and information, represents a powerful tool for empowerment and inclusion. Further development of accessible infrastructure, systematic support for independent mobility training, and improvement of public transport remain key prerequisites for full social participation of young people in Montenegro.

## Education

Education represents one of the most important factors influencing life opportunities, professional development, and social inclusion of young people with disabilities and young people with visual impairments. Through the education system, knowledge, skills, self-confidence, and expectations of young people are shaped, as well as their readiness to enter the labor market and participate actively in social life. In Montenegro, an inclusive education model has been formally established, which implies the inclusion of children and young people with disabilities in the mainstream education system, with appropriate adaptations and support.

Children and young people with disabilities, including young people with visual impairments, attend mainstream primary and secondary schools, with the possibility of developing Individual Education Plans and receiving additional professional support. This approach aims to ensure equal educational opportunities, but its practical implementation largely depends on available resources, the expertise of teaching staff, and the technical equipment of educational institutions.

For young people with visual impairments, the accessibility of teaching materials is one of the key issues in the educational process. The availability of textbooks and teaching content in alternative formats, the use of assistive technologies and digital tools, and the adaptation of teaching methods have a decisive impact on the quality of education. In practice, however, young people often point to insufficiently digitally adapted materials, limited use of accessibility technologies, and reliance on individual teacher engagement or family support.

Young people with other types of disabilities face additional challenges related to the physical accessibility of school facilities, the availability of classroom assistance, adaptation of the teaching process, and understanding of their specific needs. In many cases, the quality of support depends on the sensitivity and willingness of teaching staff to adapt their approach, leading to uneven educational experiences across different schools and communities.

Despite these challenges, young people also highlight positive examples of inclusion in education. Teachers who demonstrate additional commitment, schools that invest efforts in acquiring equipment, and peer support represent important factors contributing to the success of young people with disabilities in the educational process. Such examples show that inclusive education has significant potential when appropriate institutional and human support is in place.

Higher education in Montenegro is becoming increasingly accessible to young people with disabilities and young people with visual impairments, with the presence of certain flexibility and support mechanisms. Universities allow the use of digital teaching materials, extended exam time, alternative forms of knowledge assessment, and counseling support for students with disabilities. Nevertheless, challenges remain, particularly regarding the accessibility of online platforms, availability of literature in accessible formats, and the systematic preparedness of academic staff for inclusive work.

Due to these obstacles, young people with disabilities often invest additional effort in order to participate equally in educational processes. However, the experiences of those who successfully complete higher education show that it has a strong empowering effect, contributes to increased self-confidence, and opens greater opportunities for professional development and employment.

Education, although formally available, still requires continuous improvement in terms of accessibility, professional support, and systematic application of inclusive principles. Investment in teacher training, development of digital accessibility, and strengthening of intersectoral cooperation remain key prerequisites for creating an education system that fully meets the needs of young people with disabilities and young people with visual impairments in Montenegro.

## Employment

Employment represents one of the most sensitive and challenging areas for young people with disabilities and young people with visual impairments in Montenegro. The transition from the education system to the labor market is often accompanied by a range of barriers related to lack of support, system misalignment, and employer prejudice. Although the formal framework recognizes the right of persons with disabilities to work and employment under equal conditions, the real opportunities for young people to achieve stable and sustainable employment remain limited.

The institutional employment system includes measures of professional rehabilitation, active labor market policies, and employment mediation. Young people with disabilities have the opportunity to participate in trainings, vocational education programs, work placements, and support programs aimed at strengthening employability and preparing them for real labor market demands. These programs represent an important first step toward integrating young people into the world of work, especially for those without prior work experience.

However, in practice it often appears that these programs are insufficiently adapted to the specific needs of different groups of persons with disabilities. Young people with visual

impairments point to a lack of jobs adapted for the use of assistive technologies, as well as limited opportunities for employment in fields requiring higher levels of digital and professional competencies. Young people with other forms of disabilities additionally face physical inaccessibility of workplaces and a lack of flexible work arrangements.

Prejudices and insufficient awareness among employers represent one of the greatest barriers to employment of young people with disabilities. Despite the existence of subsidy and incentive systems, employers often lack sufficient knowledge about workplace adaptation options, rights and obligations related to employing persons with disabilities, and the potential that young people with disabilities can bring to the work environment. As a result, young people often face rejection or doubts about their abilities, even when they possess appropriate qualifications.

Non-governmental organizations play a significant role in supporting young people in the employment process. Through counseling, mentoring, assistance in preparing CVs and motivation letters, as well as training for the development of professional and “soft” skills, young people receive additional support that helps them navigate the labor market. This type of individualized support is often crucial for strengthening self-confidence and realistically assessing professional opportunities.

An increasing number of young people with disabilities also recognize entrepreneurship as an alternative path to professional fulfillment. Digital technologies, remote work, and online services open new employment opportunities for young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities, particularly in areas such as digital marketing, IT services, creative industries, and educational content. However, this form of employment requires additional training, mentoring, and access to financial and technical support.

Employment of young people with disabilities in Montenegro remains an area where systemic improvements are needed, including better alignment between education and the labor market, greater employer awareness, and continuous support for young people throughout the entire employment process. Despite numerous challenges, the motivation of young people, examples of successful employment, and the growing potential of the digital labor market indicate that there are real opportunities to improve the position of young people with disabilities and young people with visual impairments in the field of work and employment.

### Participation of Young People with Disabilities in Society

Participation of young people with disabilities and young people with visual impairments in social, cultural, and public life represents one of the key indicators of genuine inclusion. Active participation enables young people to express their potential, influence the communities in which they live, and take part in processes that shape their everyday living conditions. In Montenegro, opportunities for youth participation exist, but they are still marked by uneven availability, varying levels of support, and dependence on individual initiative and engagement.

Young people with disabilities and young people with visual impairments are increasingly involved in youth organizations, youth councils, civil society projects, and various forms of informal activism. These spaces often represent the first opportunity for young people to

develop a sense of belonging, gain experience in public engagement, and learn how to articulate their needs and interests. When accessible conditions are ensured—such as available materials, adapted spaces, digital accessibility, and support during activities—young people with disabilities become active and equal participants.

Participation in youth and civic initiatives brings multiple benefits to young people. Through activism and social engagement, communication and leadership skills are developed, self-confidence is strengthened, and a sense that their voice matters is created. Young people involved in such processes often emphasize that through these activities they gained new knowledge, expanded their networks of contacts, and developed greater trust in their own abilities.

Access to culture and the arts represents an important segment of social participation. In recent years, topics of inclusive culture have increasingly been opened in Montenegro, including audio description, adapted theater and film content, creative workshops, and artistic projects intended for persons with disabilities. Young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities show great interest in such content, as it enables expression, socialization, and active participation in the cultural life of the community. Nevertheless, the offer of such programs remains limited and often depends on project-based initiatives.

Sports and recreational activities also represent an important channel of social inclusion. Participation in sports contributes to physical and mental health, as well as strengthening team spirit, self-confidence, and a sense of belonging. Young people with disabilities who have the opportunity to participate in adapted sports and recreational programs emphasize the positive impact of these activities on their quality of life. However, the availability of adapted sports programs and infrastructure still varies between local communities.

Digital participation occupies an increasingly important place in the lives of young people. Social networks, online platforms, digital services, and tools enable young people with disabilities to access information, connect with others, participate in public debates, and advocate for change. For young people with visual impairments, the use of accessibility technologies such as screen readers and accessible applications represents a key prerequisite for equal participation in the digital space. Nevertheless, inaccessible platforms and digital content continue to pose barriers to full participation.

Participation of young people with disabilities in public and political life remains limited. Although advisory bodies, public debates, and consultative processes exist, young people with disabilities are rarely systematically included in decision-making processes that directly affect their lives. Their participation is most often realized through initiatives of civil society organizations, while institutional mechanisms still do not provide sufficient space for continuous and meaningful inclusion.

Despite these challenges, there are clear indications that young people with disabilities and young people with visual impairments have strong potential for social engagement. When accessible conditions, support, and openness of the community are ensured, young people

actively engage and contribute to social development. Creating an environment that encourages their participation represents an important step toward a society in which inclusion is not an exception, but a standard.

## Slovenia

Young people with visual impairments and young persons with disabilities in Slovenia have access to opportunities in the areas of education, mobility, employment, and social participation, with the support of national policies and specialized services, as envisaged by the Action Programme for Persons with Disabilities 2022–2030. For young people with visual impairments, access to accessible learning materials, digital content, and mobility support is particularly important for enabling full and equal participation in all areas of life.

Although opportunities exist in various areas, their effective use largely depends on the availability of adequate support and on its timely provision.

### Education

Most young people with visual impairments and young persons with disabilities in Slovenia are educated in mainstream educational institutions, with the support of individualized educational programs, specialized adaptations, assistive technologies, and professional services. Educational pathways are available in vocational and higher education, with universities and vocational schools providing student support services, accessibility measures, and academic accommodations. At universities, contact people for supporting students with disabilities operate, providing counseling, adjustments to examination requirements, and access to learning materials in accessible formats.

For blind and partially sighted students, timely access to accessible learning materials—such as Braille, tactile graphics, and digital content compatible with screen readers—is essential. In Slovenia, support for adapted materials is provided through specialized organizations rather than a single standardized national resource system. While the Centre IRIS maintains a library and produces a limited number of adaptations primarily for its own educational programme, the UBPS through its Library named after Minka Skaberne, plays a substantially broader role by preparing around 45 books annually in various accessible formats.

Despite these efforts, delays and unequal access remain common across institutions. Challenges arise not only from non-standardized teaching resources but also from regular course materials, particularly when schools delay announcing lists of materials for each academic year. This often results in late delivery of materials and insufficient time for adaptation and preparation.

UBPS also contributes through scholarship support, notably via the Milica Abram Fund, established through a bequest intended to assist blind and partially sighted students in universities. Each year, approximately six to seven students receive scholarships amounting to around €10,000 in total. At the systemic level, the decline of the former secondary school centre for blind and partially sighted students in Škofja Loka and the gradual shift of Centre IRIS

toward predominantly autism-related services have raised concerns about the erosion of dedicated expertise in education of blind and partially sighted. Current advocacy efforts therefore focus on separating IRIS into two distinct institutions to preserve specialized professional support for blind and partially sighted learners. In response to the shortage of tiflopedagogues in Slovenia, the state has also introduced scholarships for students pursuing specialised training abroad in the field of education for the visually impaired.

## Mobility

Slovenia supports youth mobility through discounts on public transport, initiatives to improve transport accessibility, and rehabilitation programs that develop orientation and independent mobility skills. For young people with visual impairments, orientation and mobility training, the use of a white cane, and the application of tactile or digital navigation tools are particularly important for safe and independent movement.

Despite these measures, barriers in mobility still exist, including limited availability of tactile pathways, uneven implementation of audible signals at pedestrian crossings, and varying levels of public transport accessibility, particularly outside larger urban areas. Participation of young people with visual impairments and young persons with disabilities in international mobility programs, such as Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps, is gradually increasing, supported by inclusive youth exchanges and adapted volunteering engagements, in line with European Union inclusion guidelines.

## Employment

Employment opportunities for young persons with disabilities in Slovenia are supported through professional rehabilitation measures, educational and training pathways, supported employment, and workplace adaptation, in accordance with the Act on Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities. Young people with visual impairments and other young persons with disabilities can access vocational guidance, rehabilitation services, and employer incentives through employment services and authorized service providers.

The Employment Service of Slovenia provides the support of rehabilitation counsellors, who offer guidance in cases of long-term health problems or disability when these represent a barrier to employment. Rehabilitation counselling includes assessing the appropriateness of obtaining disability status, participation in proceedings before the Rehabilitation Commission of the Employment Service, access to the right to be included in vocational rehabilitation services, preparation of an assessment of employment possibilities for people with disabilities and offer support in the employment processes.

For young people with visual impairments, the transition to employment is often made more difficult by employers' insufficient awareness of assistive technologies, as well as workplace digital systems that are not fully compatible with screen readers. Despite these challenges, adapted vocational rehabilitation services and support programs contribute to the development of employable skills and improve access to the labor market.

## Participation and Community Inclusion

Young people with disabilities in Slovenia participate in the work of youth organizations, non-formal learning programs, volunteering, and cultural activities, although levels of participation vary, and many organizations record an overall decline in youth engagement. This trend is also present among young people with visual impairments and is linked to changes in participation preferences, reduced interest in formal membership, and the existence of persistent accessibility barriers. Organizations of persons with disabilities and youth centers increasingly cooperate to improve accessibility and inclusion, in line with the National Youth Programme 2023–2030.

For young people with visual impairments, participation in activities largely depends on the accessibility of information, registration platforms, and communication channels, which are not always fully compatible with screen readers. Inclusive camps, workshops, and digital literacy programs implemented by organizations such as the UBPSŠ therefore remain important forms of social participation for young people with visual impairments.

Overall, Slovenia provides a wide range of opportunities for young people with visual impairments and young persons with disabilities to be included in community life. However, the extent to which young people can fully benefit from these opportunities depends on consistent implementation of accessibility principles and the continuous removal of physical, digital, and attitudinal barriers, with digital accessibility remaining a particularly important area for improvement.

## Croatia

For the systemic improvement of the position of young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities in Croatia, it is necessary to act simultaneously in the areas of education, employment, accessibility, and community participation. It is crucial to ensure a genuinely inclusive education system, which includes early developmental support, timely assessment of needs, the availability of typhlotechnical aids and other assistive technologies, textbooks and learning materials in accessible formats, and continuous support from professional staff. Teachers and professors need to be provided with additional training in inclusive methods of work and teaching, with clearly defined standards and system-wide accountability, rather than relying solely on individual efforts.

In the labor market, it is necessary to improve employment and job retention programs by ensuring high-quality and timely incentives for employers, mentoring or workplace job assistants, flexible forms of work, as well as systemic adaptations of workplaces and working environments. Special attention should be given to the development of career guidance that is available to young people with disabilities already at the secondary school level, including professional practice and internships in the real sector.

In parallel, the state and local self-government units, along with simplifying procedures for accessing employment incentives for persons with disabilities, should ensure accessible public

transport, digital accessibility of public services, adequate typhlotechnical aids and assistive technologies, as well as the development of personal assistance and sighted guide services, so that young people can study, work, and actively participate in social life independently.

Finally, it is of particular importance to include young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities themselves in decision-making processes, through advisory bodies, working groups, and public consultations, as well as to ensure stable financial support for their organizations. Only through a combination of legislative measures, concrete support services, and genuine partnership with organizations of persons with disabilities is it possible to ensure that young people with disabilities in Croatia live, learn, and work as equal and visible members of the community.

## Bosnia and Herzegovina

State authorities and their institutions provide a limited number of concrete opportunities. Most real opportunities come from associations of persons with visual impairments, other organizations that bring together persons with disabilities, as well as from the entrepreneurship sector.

Entrepreneurs are willing to employ young people with visual impairments when they are adequately educated and trained for specific jobs. The greatest employment opportunities are identified in the media sector, dispatch centers, education, and health care.

Laws regulating the employment of persons with disabilities create certain opportunities, but it is necessary to further improve and expand education and vocational training programs for persons with visual impairments.

Cooperation with associations from neighboring countries opens additional opportunities, not only for short-term and occasional mobility and education programs, but also for laying the foundations for long-term improvement of opportunities within the country itself.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a tourist country with growing infrastructure and an increasingly developed tourism offer, which opens new opportunities that have so far been insufficiently utilized.

The development of new technologies and their increasing accessibility open previously closed opportunities for travel, education, employment, and active participation of persons with visual impairments in the social life of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

## Cyprus

### Civic and political participation

The participation of young persons with disabilities in civic and political life represents an important driver of change, as it enables influence over policies and programs that directly affect

their everyday lives. In Cyprus, young persons with disabilities take part in civic processes through various channels, expressing their views on youth programs, accessibility measures, and local policies.

At the same time, local and national non-governmental organizations in Cyprus, such as the Cyprus Confederation of Organizations of the Disabled and the Pancyprian Organization of the Blind, represent important platforms through which young people can express their views and become more actively involved in policy consultations and advocacy campaigns. In this way, their needs and voices are recognized and taken into account at both the national and European levels.

In addition, educating young persons with disabilities about their rights, as well as about the importance of public engagement and speaking out, is essential for achieving real change. Programs focused on this area aim to strengthen young people's leadership skills, empower them to express their views publicly and participate actively in decision-making processes, and develop their capacity to contribute through their actions to concrete and long-term changes in society.

### Participation in education

Participation in education does not imply only attendance in classes, but also includes the active involvement of pupils and students through leadership roles, extracurricular activities, and peer mentoring programs. These forms of participation represent important aspects of the educational process, as they enable young persons with disabilities to engage in school and academic life through clubs, competitions, pupil and student parliaments, and other initiatives. Inclusive spaces within educational institutions are continuously being adapted to allow the equal participation of young persons with disabilities in these activities.

Peer mentoring programs are of particular importance, as they enable a two-way exchange of experiences and knowledge. Through these programs, young persons with disabilities strengthen their self-confidence and sense of self-worth, demonstrating that they themselves have something to contribute to the community, while at the same time receiving support from their peers.

Inclusive educational programs further contribute to enhancing participation in education, as they provide young persons with disabilities, including young people with visual impairments, with access to assistive technologies, adapted learning materials, and individualized support. Such an approach increases their involvement in the learning process, encourages active participation in the classroom, and contributes to a higher-quality educational experience.

### Participation in culture and recreation

Participation in culture and recreation plays a significant role in the development of social skills among young persons with disabilities, strengthening their self-confidence, and encouraging engagement in physical activities, thereby enhancing inclusion and peer interaction. These forms of participation are enabled through adapted sports programs available in Cyprus, including municipal recreational activities and Paralympic sports.



HRVATSKI  
SAVEZ  
SLIJEPIH



**Emphasys**  
CENTRE



In Cyprus, numerous cultural activities are also available, such as accessible theatre workshops, music programs, and various festivals organized across the island. In addition to providing enjoyment and space for personal expression, these activities contribute to greater participation of young persons with disabilities in the life of local communities and strengthen their sense of belonging.

## Most Common Barriers and Obstacles Identified in the National Context

Despite the existence of legislative frameworks, strategic documents, and various support programs, young persons with disabilities and young persons with visual impairments in all countries covered by this handbook continue to face numerous obstacles that limit their full and equal participation in society. These barriers are not always immediately visible, as they often stem from the way laws are implemented in practice, from the lack of adapted services, or from deeply rooted attitudes and structural limitations within systems.

Barriers occur across different areas of life, including accessibility of the physical and digital environment, education, employment, mobility, access to information, as well as participation in social and political processes. They may be institutional, infrastructural, communicational, socio-economic, or related to attitudes and prejudices, and they often operate simultaneously, reinforcing the sense of exclusion and limiting the opportunities available to young people.

This chapter provides an overview of the most common barriers and obstacles identified in national contexts, with the aim of highlighting patterns shared across different countries, as well as the specific factors that shape the position of young persons with disabilities and young persons with visual impairments at the national level. Understanding these barriers represents an important foundation for further improvement of policies, services, and practices aimed at achieving genuine inclusion and equal opportunities for all young people.

### Montenegro

Despite the fact that Montenegro has been continuously developing legislative, institutional, and programmatic mechanisms aimed at improving the position of young persons with disabilities, including young persons with visual impairments, numerous barriers still strongly shape their everyday lives. These barriers are neither isolated nor single-layered—they are interconnected, often overlap, and reinforce one another, creating additional pressure on young people and their families in the process of exercising rights that are formally recognized.

The experiences of young persons with disabilities in Montenegro point to a gap between normative solutions and their practical implementation. Barriers appear in almost all areas of life—from access to information and the physical environment, through education and employment, to social participation and psychological support. Their intensity and form often depend on the type of disability, place of residence, and availability of support, which further deepens inequalities among young people.

#### Access to Information and Digital Accessibility

Access to information is the foundation for equal participation in contemporary society, yet it is precisely in this area that young persons with disabilities, and especially young persons with

visual impairments, identify some of the most pronounced barriers. Digital content produced by institutions, educational establishments, cultural organizations, and private entities is often not aligned with digital accessibility standards.

Young people who use screen readers and other assistive technologies face inaccessible websites, documents that are not readable with assistive tools, poorly structured content, and documents in formats that prevent independent use. Similar challenges are present for young people with other types of disabilities as well, especially when information is available only in a single format, without adaptation to different needs.

As a consequence, young people are often forced to rely on the assistance of others, which directly affects their independence, privacy, and sense of equality. An additional problem is the fact that information about mobility programs, education, employment, or opportunities for social participation is often not timely, not clearly structured, and not available in accessible formats, which is why a significant number of young people remain outside these opportunities—not due to a lack of interest, but due to a lack of information.

### Physical Accessibility and Mobility

Physical accessibility of public spaces and infrastructure remains one of the most visible barriers for young persons with disabilities in Montenegro. Although certain urban areas show progress through the introduction of tactile surfaces, audible traffic lights, and adapted pedestrian zones, these examples are limited and unevenly distributed.

Young persons with visual impairments, as well as young persons with physical disabilities, in smaller communities face unadapted urban planning solutions, the absence of tactile paths, poor sidewalk conditions, a lack of signage, and frequent parking of vehicles on pedestrian surfaces. Such an environment affects not only the ability to move, but also the sense of safety, self-confidence, and willingness of young people to independently engage in activities outside the home.

Inaccessibility is additionally evident inside institutions and in health and educational facilities, where clear signage, adapted entrances, and trained staff are often lacking. This makes it harder for young people to use basic public services and deepens the feeling of exclusion.

### Education and Support Within the Education System

Formal education is one of the key areas shaping young people's life trajectories, their professional opportunities, and the degree of social inclusion. Although Montenegro has established an inclusive education system and ratified relevant international documents guaranteeing the right to education without discrimination, young persons with visual impairments and young persons with disabilities still face numerous systemic, infrastructural, and practical barriers during schooling and study.

Inclusive education in Montenegro is formally aimed at including children and young persons with disabilities in the mainstream education system. However, in practice the quality of inclusion varies significantly and often depends on the individual engagement of teachers,

available resources, and the level of understanding of the specific needs of pupils and students with disabilities. This approach creates unequal conditions in education and leads to an unequal position of young people across different educational institutions.

One of the most pronounced obstacles in formal education is the lack of literature and teaching materials in accessible formats. Young persons with visual impairments throughout primary, secondary, and higher education face the unavailability of textbooks, scripts, and professional literature in Braille, audio format, or accessible electronic versions. This barrier directly affects the ability to study independently, prepare for classes, and take exams, which is why young people are often forced to rely on assistance from family members, personal assistants, or organizations of persons with disabilities.

Although adapting teaching materials is a legal obligation, in practice it is often implemented through project activities or volunteer work, without a systemic and sustainable solution. This model leads to uncertainty, delays in providing materials, and additional burden on young people during the educational process.

An additional challenge is the insufficient availability of assistive technology and technical support within educational institutions. Screen-reading software, magnification tools, adapted computers, and other assistive resources are not standard equipment in schools and universities, but are provided sporadically and often depend on individual initiative. This particularly affects young people from smaller communities and families with limited financial resources.

Young persons with visual impairments and young persons with disabilities also point to insufficient preparedness of teaching and academic staff for inclusive work. Teachers and professors often do not have adequate training on the specificities of different types of disabilities, the use of assistive technologies, and the adaptation of teaching methods. The consequence is inaccessible presentations, reliance on visual materials without verbal explanations, writing on the board without reading the content aloud, and insufficiently flexible approaches to assessment.

The problem is further complicated by a lack of support in the form of classroom assistants, who are not available to all pupils and students who need them. Without adequate support, following classes becomes significantly more difficult, especially in subjects that rely on graphical representations, diagrams, tables, and practical exercises.

Architectural barriers also remain present in a large number of educational institutions. The absence of tactile guiding paths, inaccessible entrances, the lack of elevators, and unadapted sanitary facilities particularly affect young persons with disabilities who have mobility difficulties, further limiting their independent movement and participation in school and student life.

The transition to online teaching, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, further exposed the depth of accessibility problems. Digital platforms, online classrooms, and teaching content were often not adapted for users of screen readers and other persons with disabilities. The use of

numerous visual elements without adequate explanation resulted in additional marginalization of young persons with visual impairments in the learning process.

All of these barriers directly influence the choice of educational programs, as young people often give up desired secondary schools or faculties because of inaccessibility. This limits their professional opportunities and deepens inequality compared to peers without disabilities.

From all of the above, it can be concluded that young persons with visual impairments and young persons with disabilities in Montenegro remain in an unequal position within formal education. Improving accessibility of the education system, availability of materials, training for teaching staff, and systemic support is a fundamental prerequisite for exercising the right to education and achieving full social inclusion of young persons with disabilities.

### Non-formal Learning

Non-formal learning is an important segment of youth development, as it enables the acquisition of additional knowledge, skills, and competencies that are often not covered by formal education. Through seminars, workshops, trainings, courses, and exchanges, young people have the opportunity to strengthen personal and professional capacities, increase employability, and participate more actively in social processes. However, for young persons with visual impairments and young persons with disabilities in Montenegro, access to non-formal learning is still burdened by numerous barriers.

One of the first obstacles arises already at the stage of information and application. Calls for participation, agendas, and application forms are often provided in inaccessible formats, most commonly as PDF documents that are not compatible with screen readers. Instead of being available in simple and readable formats, such as Word documents, young persons with visual impairments are forced to convert materials themselves, which requires additional time and effort and often leads to missed deadlines.

Upon arrival at a seminar, workshop, or training, young persons with visual impairments and young persons with disabilities face inaccessible materials distributed to participants. Work programs, manuals, brochures, and other content are most often available only in standard print, without large print, contrast adjustments, Braille, or audio formats. Persons with partial visual impairments are additionally excluded due to small font size and poor design, while persons with complete visual impairment become entirely dependent on the assistance of others.

Although some young people use modern technologies such as text-reading applications, smart devices, or assistive aids, this cannot and must not replace the organizer's obligation to provide accessible materials. It should especially be taken into account that not all young persons with visual impairments and young persons with disabilities are digitally literate, nor do they have financial means to obtain expensive assistive equipment, which is often not available through the health or social protection system.

An additional challenge is the way educational content is delivered. Presentations used during seminars and workshops often contain a large number of graphic elements, photos, tables, and diagrams that are not verbally explained. Expressions such as “as you can see on the slide” completely exclude young persons with visual impairments from the learning process, because they do not provide any information about what is being displayed.

In segments intended for group work and practical exercises, methods are often used that are not adapted for persons with disabilities—writing on sticky notes, sorting cards, commenting on photographs or other visual materials. This approach further hampers equal participation and places young persons with disabilities in a passive position, undermining the basic principle of non-formal learning as an inclusive and participatory process.

A particular problem concerns the evaluation of educational activities. Evaluation forms are most often in standard print or in electronic formats that are not accessible to screen reader users. This denies young persons with visual impairments the ability to independently and anonymously express their opinion on program quality, further deepening the feeling of exclusion.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the shift to online forms of non-formal learning further revealed existing accessibility problems. Many learning platforms, online courses, and digital tools were not adapted for persons with visual impairments and other persons with disabilities. Inaccessible presentations, the lack of verbal explanations, and reliance on visual elements placed young persons with disabilities in a significantly less favorable position than other participants.

All of these obstacles contribute to reduced participation of young persons with visual impairments and young persons with disabilities in non-formal learning, discourage their activity, and further deepen differences in acquiring knowledge and skills. Non-formal learning, which should be flexible, open, and inclusive, in practice often becomes yet another area where existing inequalities are reproduced.

Removing barriers in the area of non-formal learning is crucial for empowering young persons with visual impairments and young persons with disabilities, because it is precisely through these processes that they develop self-confidence, social skills, professional competencies, and a sense of belonging to the community.

## Employment and the Labor Market

Employment is one of the most sensitive and challenging areas for young persons with visual impairments and young persons with disabilities in Montenegro. Although education and acquiring qualifications represent an important prerequisite for entering the labor market, the employment process for this group is still marked by numerous barriers, prejudices, and systemic shortcomings that place them at a disadvantage compared to young people without disabilities.

After completing secondary or higher education, young persons with visual impairments and young persons with disabilities strive to enter the world of work and achieve professional

independence. However, in practice they often face insufficient support from competent institutions in the process of professional empowerment, as well as a low level of readiness among employers to provide them with employment opportunities. Prejudices and stereotypes about the abilities of persons with disabilities remain strongly present, leading to their competencies, knowledge, and potential being questioned at the very start of the employment process.

Young persons with visual impairments often state that during job interviews they are indirectly made aware that employers are not prepared to adapt the workplace, work processes, or environment to their needs. Instead of assessing actual skills and professional qualifications, the focus is often placed on disability as an obstacle, rather than on the opportunities and capacities the young person possesses. Such an approach results in loss of self-confidence, feelings of discouragement, and reduced motivation to actively seek employment.

Similar challenges are present for young persons with other types of disabilities. Young persons with physical disabilities often encounter inaccessible work environments, architectural barriers, a lack of adapted equipment, and rigid organizational structures that do not recognize the need for flexibility. These obstacles further complicate employment, even when young people possess the required education and job-related skills.

A particular problem is the inaccessibility of the job application process itself. Application forms, online platforms, and vacancy documentation are often not adapted for screen reader users or for persons who rely on assistive technologies. Such barriers can discourage young people at the very beginning and prevent them from applying at all.

Due to limited opportunities and low levels of adaptation, young persons with visual impairments and young persons with disabilities often cannot find employment in the profession for which they were educated. Instead, they are forced to retrain or shift toward jobs considered feasible without workplace adaptation, which further limits their professional choices and long-term career development.

Although the Law on Professional Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities provides numerous benefits for employers—including wage subsidies, funds for workplace adaptation, and financing of a work assistant—these measures are insufficiently used in practice. Due to underdeveloped awareness and fear of additional obligations, employers often choose to pay penalties rather than employ a person with a disability, missing the opportunity to create an inclusive work environment.

Young persons with disabilities also face challenges in entrepreneurship. Although entrepreneurship is recognized as a potential alternative path to employment, numerous bureaucratic, financial, and organizational barriers make it difficult to start a business. The lack of targeted support programs, mentoring, and financial incentives further limits the ability of young persons with visual impairments and young persons with disabilities to develop entrepreneurial initiatives.

All of these obstacles contribute to employment of young persons with visual impairments and young persons with disabilities in Montenegro progressing more slowly and requiring significantly greater effort than is the case for young people without disabilities. Without systemic support, employer sensitization, and consistent application of legal mechanisms, young people remain at risk of long-term unemployment, economic dependence, and social exclusion.

Employment of young persons with visual impairments and young persons with disabilities should not be viewed as a social measure, but as an investment in human capital and equal participation in society. Removing barriers in this area is crucial for achieving independence, dignity, and full social inclusion of young people.

### Participation in Cultural Life

Although the position of young persons with visual impairments and young persons with disabilities in the field of culture is relatively rarely discussed in public discourse, culture remains an area where barriers and forms of exclusion are still pronounced. Cultural life, as an important segment of social participation, personal development, and youth identity, remains insufficiently accessible to young people with different types of disabilities, affecting both their visibility and their ability to participate actively in cultural processes.

Cultural institutions and cultural content in Montenegro are in many cases not adapted to the needs of young persons with visual impairments. Inaccessibility most often includes the absence of audio description during theatre performances and film screenings, a lack of audio or tactile information in museums and galleries, inaccessible exhibitions, and the lack of tactile guiding paths and orientation plans in Braille that would facilitate independent movement and navigation within cultural institutions. Because of these barriers, young persons with visual impairments are often unable to attend cultural events independently or to follow cultural content on an equal basis.

Similar challenges exist for young persons with other types of disabilities, particularly young persons with physical disabilities. Cultural spaces often include architectural barriers such as stairs without ramps or elevators, narrow entrances, inaccessible toilets, and inadequately arranged space for wheelchair users. In such circumstances, even when cultural events are formally open to all, young persons with disabilities are effectively excluded from participation. This practice not only limits their ability to be consumers of culture, but also discourages them from developing as artists, performers, or cultural creators.

The process of inclusive education, which in practice in Montenegro is often implemented inconsistently, further contributes to insufficient inclusion of young persons with visual impairments and young persons with disabilities in cultural activities already during schooling. Pupils rarely participate in drama, literary, and music clubs, school performances, and other cultural initiatives, affecting the development of their talents, self-confidence, and sense of belonging. The absence of support and adaptation leads many young people to be insufficiently encouraged to explore their potential, or to withdraw from cultural activities due to fear of rejection and misunderstanding by peers and teaching staff.

A particular challenge is the inaccessibility of higher education institutions in the arts, such as art academies, which due to architectural and organizational barriers remain difficult to access for young persons with disabilities. As a result, young persons with visual impairments and young persons with disabilities rarely choose to enroll in these programs, even when they have interests and talents in music, acting, literature, or other artistic disciplines.

With regard to cultural creation, young persons with visual impairments most often choose poetry and prose writing, music, and acting, while young persons with disabilities participate in other forms of artistic expression as well. However, opportunities to present their work to the broader community are limited. Cultural activities in which they participate are often carried out within projects of organizations of persons with disabilities, which do not have sufficient visibility in the wider cultural field nor systemic support for promoting the work of young authors.

Because of insufficient promotion and weak representation in institutional culture, the wider public often remains unfamiliar with the talents and potential of young persons with visual impairments and young persons with disabilities. A prevailing public attitude still suggests that persons with disabilities can only be consumers of culture, but not cultural creators, which further deepens marginalization and affects the self-confidence of young people who want to engage in art.

From the above, it can be concluded that young persons with visual impairments and young persons with disabilities remain insufficiently affirmed in the field of culture, both as consumers and as active participants and creators. Removing architectural, communicational, and social barriers, along with systemic support for inclusive cultural practices, are key steps toward creating a cultural space in which all young people have equal opportunities to participate, create, and be visible.

## Mobility

Mobility is one of the fundamental prerequisites for independent living, equal participation in society, and the exercise of rights in education, employment, culture, and social life. For young persons with visual impairments and young persons with disabilities in Montenegro, mobility has multiple significance, because it directly affects their independence, sense of safety, and ability to make decisions about their own lives.

Despite certain advances in improving accessibility of public space, the mobility of young persons with disabilities remains marked by numerous infrastructural, systemic, and social obstacles. These barriers are not uniform and differ depending on the type of disability, place of residence, and availability of local support services.

For young persons with visual impairments, one of the key challenges is insufficient adaptation of the urban environment. Tactile guiding paths, contrast markings, audible traffic lights, and clear signage exist only in certain parts of larger cities, while in smaller communities they are almost entirely absent. Uneven installation of tactile surfaces, frequent damage or interruptions, and inadequate maintenance further hinder safe and independent movement.

Young persons with disabilities who have mobility difficulties face numerous architectural barriers, including stairs without ramps or elevators, narrow entrances to public buildings, inaccessible sidewalks, and inadequate crossings. These obstacles often prevent even basic movement through the city, access to institutions, cultural events, or social gatherings.

Public transport represents a particular challenge, as it is still not fully accessible for young persons with disabilities. For young persons with visual impairments, the absence of audio announcements, inaccessible information about routes and line changes, and insufficiently trained staff make public transport a stressful and unsafe experience. Young people who use wheelchairs often encounter inaccessible vehicles, malfunctioning ramps, or lack of space for safe entry and exit.

A significant aspect of mobility also concerns the insufficient availability of training for independent movement and orientation. Although programs exist that provide training in the use of the white cane and mastering basic routes, they are not systematically regulated nor evenly available across Montenegro. The lack of mobility instructors and the limited scope of such training further complicate the process of gaining independence.

For young persons with disabilities who rely on assistive devices or support services, mobility is often conditioned by the availability of community services such as personal assistance, door-to-door services, or a sighted guide. Although these services are extremely important, their availability depends on local policies and funding, resulting in uneven access and unequal living conditions across municipalities.

Mobility of young persons with disabilities is not limited to everyday movement, but also includes the possibility of travel and participation in educational, cultural, and international programs. Although international mobility represents an important opportunity for personal and professional development, young people often emphasize the lack of logistical support, information, and assistance while traveling. These challenges particularly affect young persons with visual impairments, for whom additional preparation and support are necessary to safely navigate new environments.

In addition to infrastructural and systemic barriers, social barriers are also present, such as insufficient public awareness, stereotypes, and overly protective perceptions. Such approaches often lead to lowered expectations of young persons with disabilities and further limit their independence and freedom of movement.

All of these obstacles affect not only physical mobility, but also the psychological sense of safety, self-confidence, and readiness of young people to actively participate in society. The lack of accessible and safe mobility often leads to isolation, reduced participation in education, employment, and cultural life, as well as dependence on family or other forms of support.

From the above, it can be concluded that improving mobility for young persons with visual impairments and young persons with disabilities in Montenegro requires a systemic approach that includes adapting public space, developing accessible transport, strengthening support services, and continuous education of all stakeholders. Mobility is not a privilege, but a basic

right and a prerequisite for full and equal participation of young persons with disabilities in all segments of social life.

### Social, Psychological, and Societal Barriers

In addition to infrastructural and institutional barriers, young persons with disabilities in Montenegro also face pronounced social and psychological challenges. Limited access to cultural, sports, and social activities affects their socialization and sense of belonging.

Social prejudices, paternalistic approaches, and lowered expectations are still present, negatively affecting the development of self-confidence and personal value among young people. Long-term exposure to barriers often leads to feelings of insecurity, fear of rejection, and withdrawal from social activities, while access to psychological support remains limited.

#### Insufficient Intersectoral Cooperation

One systemic problem that further deepens these obstacles is insufficient and fragmented cooperation between education, social and health protection, employment services, and civil society organizations. Young people and their families are often forced to connect institutions themselves, repeat procedures, and navigate unclear responsibilities, instead of the system functioning in a coordinated, user-oriented way.

### Slovenia

Despite the existence of a supportive legislative framework and growing commitments to inclusion, young persons with visual impairments and young persons with disabilities in Slovenia still face barriers that affect their participation in education, mobility, employment, and social life. These barriers arise from a combination of practical challenges, systemic shortcomings, uneven policy implementation, and varying levels of public awareness, as also recognized in the Action Programme for Persons with Disabilities 2022–2030.

#### Systemic and coordination barriers

One recurring barrier for young persons with visual impairments and young persons with disabilities in Slovenia is fragmented coordination between the education system, the social protection system, and health and rehabilitation services. Families are often forced to navigate complex administrative procedures on their own, while responsibilities between different institutions are not always clearly defined, despite the existing legislative framework, including the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities Act.

Differences in service capacities significantly affect access to specialized support. The limited availability of qualified professionals and the lack of comprehensive services can restrict timely access to orientation and mobility training for young people with visual impairments, as well as access to early intervention, therapies, or behavioral support for other young people with disabilities.

## Barriers in education

Although inclusive education is formally well established, young people with visual impairments and young persons with disabilities may face delays or uneven access to appropriate support. For pupils and students with visual impairments, timely access to accessible teaching materials—such as Braille, tactile graphics, and digital content compatible with screen readers—remains a recurring challenge. Differences in school practices, non-standardized teaching materials, and late delivery of reading lists can reduce preparation time and negatively affect learning outcomes.

Additional barrier includes a lack of specialized professionals. Differences in institutional capacities, levels of coordination, and staff expertise contribute to uneven implementation of individualized education programmes in line with ZUOPP-1. Varying levels of awareness and experience among teaching staff further influence expectations and classroom adaptations, especially for pupils and students with intellectual, developmental, or psychosocial disabilities.

## Barriers in mobility and physical accessibility

Barriers in mobility continue to affect the independence and participation of young persons with visual impairments and young persons with disabilities. Limited availability of tactile paths, uneven application of audible signals at pedestrian crossings, and varying levels of accessibility of public transport create obstacles to safe and independent movement, especially outside larger urban areas.

For many young people, inconsistent application of accessibility standards results in different levels of safety, independence, and ease of movement, with challenges more pronounced in rural areas where public transport and service availability are limited.

At the National Centre for Comprehensive Rehabilitation of Blind and Partially Sighted Persons, which operates within the Eye Clinic in Ljubljana, mobility and orientation training is provided as part of rehabilitation services. However, this training is not always available immediately when a person needs it, as access is subject to waiting lists, which may delay the start of training.

## Barriers in digital and information accessibility

Digital accessibility remains a cross-cutting barrier that affects education, employment, mobility, and participation in society. Online platforms, registration systems, websites, and mobile applications are not always fully compatible with assistive technologies, especially screen readers, which significantly limits independent use of digital services.

These challenges persist despite existing legal obligations set out in the Digital Accessibility Act, as well as European accessibility standards, including the WCAG guidelines.

Blind and partially sighted persons are also active users of smartphones, social media, and digital communication tools. However, they cannot participate on an equal basis if images, graphics, and visual content are not equipped with alternative text (alt text). The absence of such descriptions creates a significant barrier to access to information, communication and social participation in digital environments.

## Barriers in employment

Despite existing measures for professional rehabilitation and employment support, young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities often face barriers during the transition from education to employment. For young people with visual impairments, insufficient employer awareness of assistive technologies, as well as the use of workplace digital systems that are not fully compatible with screen readers, can limit access to employment opportunities. It frequently occurs that employers lack adequate knowledge about blindness and visual impairment, and, because of prejudice and misconceptions, they decide not to offer them an opportunity for employment. These challenges are also highlighted by organizations such as the European Blind Union, which reports that the average unemployment rate among blind and partially sighted people of working age exceeds 75 percent.

## Social and psychosocial barriers

Young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities may face social and psychosocial barriers that affect their participation in community life, youth activities, and non-formal learning. For blind and partially sighted people, communication channels and activity formats that rely heavily on visual interaction can reduce opportunities for inclusion, particularly when alternative forms of communication are not considered.

Due to inaccessible environments, information and activities, blind and partially sighted young people are often excluded from informal socializing, youth activities and spontaneous social interactions, which limits opportunities to build social networks and may lead to loneliness and social isolation. They may also experience lower self-esteem, internalized stigma and increased psychological strain, often resulting from exclusion, prejudice and the constant need to adapt. In addition, overprotectiveness can hinder the development of independence and autonomy, which are essential for the transition to adulthood. The Union of the Blind and Partially Sighted of Slovenia systematically addresses these challenges through the implementation of special social programmes that, through professional support and peer assistance, both strengthen self-confidence and create opportunities for greater social inclusion. One such programme is the Network of Guides for the Prevention of Social Exclusion of Blind and Partially Sighted, which has been operating for more than 25 years and serves as a bridge between blind and partially sighted users and sighted companions, enabling more equal participation in society.

It is also crucial that systematic awareness-raising activities aimed at overcoming prejudice related to blindness and visual impairment are continuously implemented, targeting both professional audiences and the general public, as awareness-raising is explicitly recognised as a key obligation under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Article 8).

## Croatia

The most common barriers to achieving mobility, education, employment, and full participation of young persons with visual impairments and young persons with disabilities in the Croatian national context are the result of a combination of structural, organizational, and social

limitations. Although legal frameworks exist, their implementation is often insufficient and uneven. Accessibility of public spaces, transport, and digital services is frequently partial or merely symbolic, while the lack of intersectoral cooperation and coordination between institutions creates gaps in the support system.

The education system is still not fully prepared for inclusive practice. A shortage of typhlopedagogues and other specialized professionals, limited availability of adapted teaching materials, as well as insufficient provision of typhlotechnical aids and assistive technologies, significantly affect the ability of young persons with visual impairments to achieve equal educational experiences.

In the labour market, barriers manifest through a low level of employer awareness, a lack of adapted workplaces and training programmes in shortage occupations, as well as a lack of knowledge, competencies, and work experience among young persons with visual impairments. An additional challenge is the lack of so-called “soft” skills, along with complex and slow administrative procedures, which often discourage young people in the process of actively entering the labour market.

In addition, social and psychosocial services, including personal assistance, sighted guide support, and mental health support programmes, are not equally available across the entire territory of the country and often depend on project-based funding. This leads to insecurity in the continuity of support and occasional interruptions in service provision.

Finally, social prejudices, insufficient involvement of young persons with disabilities in decision-making processes, and the lack of systematic investment in inclusive policies and infrastructure remain key barriers that make it more difficult for young persons with disabilities to participate equally and actively in society.

## Bosnia and Herzegovina

Assistive devices for persons who are fully or partially visually impaired, such as typhlotechnical aids, are exempt from customs duties, but are not exempt from value-added tax.

Public infrastructure adapted for persons with visual impairments, such as tactile guiding paths or adapted traffic lights, is almost non-existent in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

There is no organized training of guide dogs, nor a systemic training programme for personal assistants to support persons with visual impairments.

Specialized educational programmes for blind persons are very rare. The programmes that do exist are largely outdated and do not include education on the use of modern assistive technologies.

There is no systemic funding for associations of persons with visual impairments or for their activities. Support is mostly limited to occasional, project-based public calls.

At the level of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, one of the two main administrative units, there is a law on the employment of persons with disabilities; however, employers continue to show a pronounced level of distrust toward employing persons with visual impairments. Examples of their employment remain rare.

## Cyprus

### Physical and spatial barriers

It is no secret that there are numerous physical and spatial barriers that limit the participation and active inclusion of young persons with disabilities in everyday life. Among the most common obstacles are staircases without ramps, narrow corridors and passageways, inaccessible toilets, and poor architectural solutions that do not allow free movement and greater mobility when needed. These barriers are present in many frequently used spaces, including schools, public buildings, and transport infrastructure.

Although accessible spaces are prescribed by newer laws and construction standards, older infrastructure, which is very widespread in Cyprus, often does not allow for simple adaptations. As a result, spatial inaccessibility remains a persistent challenge. Although public transport, such as buses and taxis, is gradually becoming more accessible, limitations still exist that do not allow full independence in movement and participation, especially in rural areas of the island.

### Social prejudices and stereotypes

Social prejudices and stereotypes represent a significant barrier to the inclusion of young persons with disabilities. They manifest through social marginalization, low expectations, and pronounced stigmatization by peers, teachers, employers, and sometimes family members. Myths and misconceptions about disability can lead to the underestimation of individuals, insufficient encouragement of their development, and the denial of opportunities to demonstrate their abilities, like everyone else.

Young persons with disabilities often have fewer opportunities to participate in social, professional, and educational activities. In addition, peer violence and discrimination in public and educational settings further limit social development and undermine self-confidence. For this reason, raising public awareness and reducing discrimination, prejudice, and stereotypes has been recognized as one of the key priorities of decision-makers.

### Barriers in the field of education

Although significant progress has been made in the area of inclusive education, barriers that limit the equal participation of young persons with disabilities still exist. One of the most common challenges relates to the lack of specialized support within the school system, such as trained teachers, teaching assistants, and adapted teaching materials. Some schools do not have access to textbooks in large print or Braille, accessible digital content, or assistive technologies.

The lack of inclusive teaching methods can lead to a segregated educational environment in which young persons with disabilities are marginalized, resulting in reduced participation and weaker engagement in the learning process. An additional challenge is the transition from secondary to higher education, as higher education institutions often do not provide adequate accommodations, adapted teaching materials, or academic mentoring.

### Barriers in the field of employment

For young persons with disabilities in Cyprus, employment represents one of the key issues. Despite measures such as the employment quota scheme, the unemployment rate among young persons with disabilities remains high, while opportunities for professional development are limited. Workplace accommodation is often uneven, and employers frequently lack sufficient knowledge or experience in adapting working conditions for employees with disabilities.

An additional challenge is the mismatch of skills, as young persons with disabilities often do not have access to career guidance or vocational training aligned with labor market needs. Prejudices, lack of self-confidence, and low expectations on the part of families and employers further limit employment opportunities, slowing the process of social inclusion and economic independence.

### Barriers in the field of digital accessibility

Despite progress in legislation related to public sector accessibility, access to digital information and technologies remains a challenge. Not all websites, mobile applications, and electronic public services fully meet accessibility standards, and some employment and education platforms are not compatible with screen readers or do not offer accessible formats for persons with visual impairments.

These digital barriers further deepen social isolation and limit opportunities for personal development, as they prevent young people from accessing important information, applying for jobs or educational programs, participating in online learning, and actively engaging in civic processes.

### Institutional and administrative barriers

Young persons with disabilities often face additional challenges in administrative procedures and bureaucratic processes. Enrollment in specialized programs, obtaining disability certification, or exercising the right to financial support often involves complex, lengthy, and difficult-to-understand procedures. Insufficient coordination between ministries, schools, and service providers can lead to gaps or delays in the provision of support.

In addition, certain programs are available only in specific geographical areas or require formal applications that are not fully accessible, further complicating the situation of young people from rural areas or those without a strong support network.

### Financial barriers

Financial constraints continue to significantly affect access to services and the ability of young persons with disabilities to participate. The costs of specialized equipment, assistive

technologies, transport, therapies, and private lessons are often considerably higher for families of young persons with disabilities. Although state benefits provide a certain level of support, they are often insufficient to cover all costs, and delays in payments further increase financial pressure.

The lack of adequate funding for inclusive education, extracurricular activities, and supported employment programs further affects the ability of young people to participate equally in educational, social, and professional pathways.

## National initiatives and examples of good practice

Despite the numerous challenges and barriers faced by young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities in Montenegro, a range of initiatives has been developed in recent years that represent important steps toward a more inclusive and accessible society. These initiatives have emerged within the framework of institutional reforms, local policies, the activities of civil society organizations, as well as through cooperation with international partners, and together they contribute to improving the quality of life of young people.

Examples of good practice in the national context demonstrate that it is possible to develop functional models of support that respond to the real needs of young people with disabilities and young people with visual impairments. They cover various areas—from education, employment, and mobility, to access to information and public services, as well as cultural and social participation. Although these initiatives are often not evenly distributed or systemically harmonized, their significance lies in the concrete changes they bring to the everyday lives of young people.

This chapter provides an overview of national initiatives and practices that have been recognized as positive examples in Montenegro. The focus is placed on solutions that contribute to greater accessibility, the empowerment of young people, the development of independence, and their more active inclusion in the community. Through the analysis of these examples, attention is drawn to the potential for further improvement of existing models and their wider application in different settings.

### Montenegro

Despite the fact that young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities in Montenegro continue to face numerous challenges and uneven access to services, a range of initiatives has been developed over the past several years that can be recognized as examples of good practice in the national context. These initiatives originate from various fields of action—the institutional system, local self-governments, the education sector, civil society organizations, and international cooperation—and indicate a gradual shift toward an approach that more fully acknowledges the needs of young people with disabilities.

A common characteristic of these initiatives is the effort to improve accessibility, empowerment, and social inclusion of young people within existing systems and resources, with an increasingly clear recognition that inclusion does not imply only the formal realization of rights, but also the creation of functional support in everyday life. This chapter provides an overview of the most significant initiatives identified as positive examples, with a focus on changes that contribute to greater accessibility, capacity building, and more active participation of young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities in society.

## Institutional initiatives

Within the framework of education system reforms, Montenegro has, in the recent period, improved certain support mechanisms for pupils and students with disabilities. Particularly notable are the strengthening of the role of professional teams in schools, the introduction and implementation of individual education plans, as well as increased involvement of centers and services that provide support to children and young people with developmental difficulties. These measures aim to adapt the educational process to diverse student needs, including those of young people with visual impairments.

Cooperation between educational institutions and experts in the field of assistive technologies is becoming increasingly present, while teaching staff are encouraged to attend training in inclusive education. Although these initiatives are not evenly developed across all environments, concrete positive effects are recognized in practice. Teachers are becoming more familiar with ways of adapting teaching materials, schools are more frequently investing in technical and assistive equipment, and pupils and students with disabilities receive more individualized support and greater opportunities for equal participation in the educational process.

In the field of employment, national programs of professional rehabilitation represent one of the most concrete institutional responses to the needs of persons with disabilities. Through vocational training, work practice, and empowerment programs, young people with disabilities are given opportunities to gain work experience and develop skills that were previously difficult to access. These programs are of particular importance for young people with visual impairments, as they contribute to strengthening their employability and self-confidence during the transition from education to the labor market.

Positive practice is also recognized through financial incentives for employers who employ persons with disabilities. This measure has, to a certain extent, contributed to increased interest among employers and the development of jobs that can be adapted to different types of disabilities, including visual impairment. Although barriers still exist, such mechanisms represent an important step toward creating a more inclusive work environment.

In the domain of accessibility of public services, certain state institutions and local authorities have initiated processes to improve digital and communication accessibility. These processes include adapting websites, improving the visual and functional identity of digital platforms, and producing materials compatible with assistive technologies. Although these changes are still not systemically uniform, they represent a clear shift compared to the previous period and can serve as positive examples for further improvement of institutional practice.

## Initiatives of non-governmental organizations

A significant contribution to improving the position of young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities in Montenegro comes from the work of civil society organizations that continuously develop programs aimed at empowerment, independence, and active participation of young people in society. Particularly notable are the activities implemented by

the Blind Union of Montenegro and the Association of Youth with Disabilities of Montenegro, whose work represents a recognizable example of good practice in the national context.

The Blind Union of Montenegro has a long-standing role in providing direct support to persons with visual impairments, with a particular focus on young people. One of the key initiatives of the Union relates to training for independent movement and orientation, including systematic training in mobility with the use of a white cane. These trainings are of special importance for young people with visual impairments, as they form the basis for independent functioning, access to education, employment, and social activities. Through individual and group work, young people acquire practical skills for navigating urban environments, mastering everyday routes, and moving safely in different surroundings.

In addition to mobility, the Blind Union of Montenegro implements a range of educational and empowerment programs covering digital literacy, the use of assistive technologies, development of life and work skills, and psychosocial support. Of particular importance is work with young people through the organization of workshops, trainings, and counseling activities that contribute to strengthening self-confidence, a sense of independence, and belonging to the community. Through the work of the Youth Committee, the Union further encourages active participation of young people with visual impairments in planning activities, advocating for rights, and creating initiatives that respond to their real needs.

A special segment of the work of the Blind Union of Montenegro relates to ensuring accessible formats of information and educational materials, which represents one of the key prerequisites for equal education, cultural participation, and social inclusion of young people with visual impairments. Although the adaptation of teaching and other materials is a legal obligation, in practice inaccessible literature remains one of the greatest barriers that young people face during primary, secondary, and higher education. Through the work of its Braille printing house, the Blind Union of Montenegro continuously adapts textbooks, scripts, manuals, and other educational materials into Braille, as well as enlarged and digitally accessible formats. This support includes primary and secondary school pupils as well as students, enabling them to follow classes on an equal basis and fulfill academic obligations. Adaptation of literature is often carried out in cooperation with educational institutions and young people themselves, responding to concrete needs in real time and reducing the risk of exclusion from the educational process.

In addition to printed materials, the Union records and publishes poetry and prose content in audio format in its radio studio, recognizing the importance of audio content for young people with visual impairments. Through this initiative, access to literature is ensured, while young creators—poets and authors with visual impairments and young people with disabilities—are actively affirmed. Through this practice, literary creativity becomes available in audio format and visible in the cultural space, contributing to breaking stereotypes and strengthening the cultural identity of young authors with disabilities. Such activities confirm that accessibility is not merely a technical issue, but a prerequisite for full participation in society.

The Association of Youth with Disabilities of Montenegro has developed a strong and recognizable model of work focused on young people with disabilities, including young people with visual impairments, with a particular emphasis on education, employment, independent living, and social activism. The organization implements numerous programs that provide support to young people during their studies, as well as more broadly—through employability training, development of professional skills, mentoring, and counseling. One of the significant contributions of the Association is reflected in programs that empower young people to recognize and use mechanisms for the protection of their rights, to actively participate in decision-making, and to engage in public and advocacy processes. Through workshops, trainings, and campaigns, young people with disabilities develop skills in public speaking, leadership, and participation, thereby strengthening their visibility and influence in society.

The Association of Youth with Disabilities of Montenegro also plays an important role in promoting accessibility in physical and digital environments and, through cooperation with institutions, educational establishments, and employers, contributes to improving practices that enable equal participation of young people with disabilities. Through international projects and cooperation with partners from the region and the European Union, young people are enabled to participate in exchanges, educational activities, and mobility programs, which further contributes to their personal and professional development.

A significant contribution to improving the rights and mobility of young people with disabilities also comes through initiatives of the Association related to independent living and movement. Particularly notable is advocacy for the right to use guide dogs, as a key means of independent mobility for persons with visual impairments. Through public campaigns, advocacy activities, and cooperation with institutions, the Association highlights the need to remove administrative, infrastructural, and social barriers that hinder the use of guide dogs in public spaces, public transport, educational institutions, and the work environment. This initiative is of special importance for young people with visual impairments, as the right to a guide dog is directly linked to freedom of movement, education, employment, and social participation.

The Association of Youth with Disabilities of Montenegro is also recognizable for its initiative related to the right of all students with disabilities to free study at all universities in Montenegro. This initiative is based on the principle of equal opportunities and aims to remove financial barriers that further hinder access to higher education for young people with disabilities. Through advocacy for this measure, the Association points out that the costs of studying, combined with additional expenses for assistive technology, adapted materials, and support, represent a serious obstacle for a large number of young people. Advocacy for free studies has a broader social significance, as it contributes to increasing the number of highly educated persons with disabilities, their employability, and more active participation in society.

The initiatives of the Blind Union of Montenegro and the Association of Youth with Disabilities of Montenegro clearly demonstrate that civil society organizations play a key role in filling the gaps that exist within the institutional system. Their work not only provides direct support to young people, but also contributes to the development of more inclusive policies, greater social

sensitivity, and the creation of conditions for active, independent, and dignified participation of young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities in all segments of social life.

### International programs and cooperation

Mobility programs and international partnerships represent a significant resource for improving the position of young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities in Montenegro. Thanks to cooperation between civil society organizations, international organizations, and donors, many young people have been given the opportunity to participate in activities that go beyond the framework of the national system and open space for personal, professional, and social development.

Through programs such as Erasmus+ and other international initiatives, young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities participate in youth exchanges, trainings, seminars, study visits, and volunteer programs. These activities provide experiences that the domestic system often cannot fully ensure, including stays in inclusive and accessible environments, familiarity with different support models, and learning through direct contact with peers from other countries.

International mobility contributes to the development of intercultural competencies, strengthening of communication and social skills, as well as building self-confidence and independence. For many young people with disabilities, such programs represent their first experience of traveling without relying on family, which has a strong impact on their perception of their own abilities and limits.

The knowledge and experiences that young people acquire through international programs are often transferred to the local context through involvement in the work of civil society organizations, the initiation of new initiatives, or more active participation in advocacy and youth processes. In this way, international mobility does not affect only individuals, but also contributes to the development of the community as a whole.

Cooperation between international partners, civil society organizations, and institutions in Montenegro has resulted in the development of innovative programs and working models, particularly in the areas of accessible education, digital skills, and employability. Through these collaborations, digital platforms for accessible learning are developed, training programs for entrepreneurial and professional skills are implemented, and career guidance programs adapted to young people with disabilities are created.

International programs and cooperation thus become an important complementary mechanism to national policies, as they provide young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities with concrete opportunities for development, networking, and active participation in the broader European and international space.

## Initiatives of local self-governments

Although the position of young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities in Montenegro varies significantly from municipality to municipality, in recent years certain advances at the local level have been observed that represent examples of good practice. In some environments, local self-governments increasingly recognize the need to respond to the specific needs of young people with disabilities through their policies, services, and projects, and to include them in the community in a more equal manner.

In some municipalities, the needs of persons with disabilities, including young people with visual impairments, have been recognized in local strategic documents and plans. This approach opens space for planning and financing inclusive activities, improving the accessibility of public spaces, and developing support services available at the local level. Although these measures are not always systematically elaborated, their inclusion in local documents represents an important step toward institutionalizing support.

A significant example of good practice is the “door-to-door” service implemented by the Secretariat for Social Welfare of the Capital City of Podgorica. This service provides an accessible vehicle intended for persons who use wheelchairs, as well as other persons with disabilities who need support in mobility. The service is of particular importance for young people with disabilities, as it enables more independent performance of everyday activities, access to healthcare institutions, rehabilitation centers, educational institutions, and participation in social and cultural events. This type of support directly affects increased independence and reduced social isolation of young people.

An important local support mechanism is also the Seeing Companion service, implemented by the Blind Union of Montenegro and financially supported by the municipalities of Podgorica and Nikšić. This service enables young people with visual impairments to receive support in movement and the performance of everyday tasks, including visits to institutions, educational and healthcare facilities, cultural contents, and other public spaces. Financial support from local self-governments for this service demonstrates recognition of its importance and represents an example of cooperation between local authorities and civil society organizations with the aim of improving the quality of life of young people with visual impairments.

In addition to concrete services, in some municipalities local projects are implemented that include educational campaigns, public events dedicated to accessibility, and workshops aimed at developing youth policies that take into account the needs of young people from vulnerable groups. These initiatives are often implemented in cooperation with civil society organizations and represent a positive example of connecting local institutions, experts, and the community itself.

Although these examples are still limited and not evenly represented in all municipalities, they indicate the potential of local self-governments to contribute, through targeted investments, planning, and cooperation, to creating a more inclusive environment for young people with disabilities and young people with visual impairments. Where there is political will, institutional

openness, and cooperation with organizations working directly with young people, the local level becomes a key actor in improving their everyday lives and social inclusion.

## Slovenia

### Union of the Blind and Partially Sighted of Slovenia

The Union of the Blind and Partially Sighted of Slovenia is the umbrella organisation that connects nine inter-municipal associations of blind and partially sighted people and operates at the national level. It is also a representative organisation for blind and partially sighted persons, meaning that it participates in systemic and legislative matters affecting blind and visually impaired people.

Through the co-financing of its activities by the Foundation for Financing Disabled and Humanitarian Organisations (FIHO), UB PSS implements ten special social programmes designed to support greater independence and more equal participation in society for blind and partially sighted people. The main programmes include:

- Library for the Blind and Partially Sighted (Minka Skaberne Library)
- Informative Activities for the Blind and Partially Sighted
- Technical Aids for the Blind and Partially Sighted
- Network of Guides for the Prevention of Social Exclusion of Blind and Partially Sighted
- Advisory and Information Centre (Eye Clinic Liaison Officer)
- Health Maintenance Programmes for Blind and Partially Sighted
- Programs for Blind and Partially Sighted Children, Youth and Families
- Sports and Chess for Blind and Partially Sighted
- Lifelong Learning for Blind and Partially Sighted
- Cultural Participation and Creativity for Blind and Partially Sighted

The youth programme brings together blind and partially sighted young people and offers safe spaces for peer interaction, mutual support and the development of self-advocacy skills. These programme responds to the fact that inclusive education systems often provide fewer opportunities for informal socialising and peer support, which are nevertheless essential for personal development.

Young participants engage in cultural activities, while sports competitions organised by UB PSS foster team spirit, self-confidence and active participation.

In the field of education, UBPSS plays a key role (alongside with Center IRIS) by adapting and converting educational materials into accessible formats, thereby contributing to equal access to learning and information for blind and partially sighted learners.

In 2023, within the framework of the Lifelong Learning Programme for the Blind and Partially Sighted, UBPSS established an advocacy group focusing on the employment of blind and partially sighted people. The group consists of blind and partially sighted members with diverse educational backgrounds and a wide range of work experience, with a focus on improving employment opportunities for blind and partially sighted. The group has implemented the “See You at Work” campaign, within which various educational and informational materials are being developed, including the Guide to the Employment of Blind and Partially Sighted Persons for Employers. In addition to presenting workplace adaptations and assistive technologies used by blind and partially sighted people, the campaign also highlights success stories of blind and partially sighted who are successfully employed, as well as the perspectives of their employers. The group believes that examples of good practice can be an effective means of informing employers and increasing their openness to employing blind or partially sighted people. Members of the group participate in career and employment fairs and take part in various awareness-raising events aimed at employers. At the same time, the group actively connects with other key stakeholders in the field of employment of blind and partially sighted, thereby strengthening cooperation and the exchange of knowledge and experience. In parallel, members of the advocacy group provide peer support to one another and receive training that enables them to advise other blind and partially sighted individuals who are seeking support or information related to employment.

In addition to its specialised social programmes, UBPSS also implements national and international projects focused on strengthening the competences of young people. Examples include the Erasmus+ project Unanimously to Obtain Skills, that took place in 2022 and 2023 in cooperation with the Croatian Blind Union, aimed at capacity building and skills development among blind and partially sighted youth.

### Inter-municipal associations of the blind and partially sighted – local rehabilitation, social inclusion, and community engagement

Inter-municipal associations of the blind and partially sighted (MDSS) operate in nine local communities across Slovenia and provide direct, community-based support to persons with total and partial visual impairments, including young people. By bringing together professionals such as typhlopedagogues, social workers, and information technology instructors, MDSS implement locally accessible programs that support independence, functional skills, and social participation.

Their activities combine rehabilitation support with social and community engagement, including counselling, training in digital skills, support in the use of accessible technologies, and participation in leisure, sports and cultural activities. Through cooperation with municipalities, schools, and local service providers, MDSS strengthen inclusion at the local level and provide

young people with opportunities for peer interaction, development of practical skills, and a sense of belonging, contributing to the reduction of social isolation.

### The Slovenian Association of Disabled Students (DŠIS) – academic support and peer inclusion of students with disabilities

The Slovenian Association of Disabled Students provides support and advocates for the rights of students with disabilities, including blind and partially sighted students, within the higher education system. The organization supports access to academic accommodations, accessible learning environments, and the realization of student rights through mentoring support, peer networks, and cooperation with universities and disability coordinators.

Beyond the academic environment, DŠIS also promotes inclusion by supporting the participation of young persons with disabilities in Erasmus+ programmes and the European Solidarity Corps, ensuring inclusive practices and appropriate individual support.

### Prehod mladih + project (Youth Transition + Project)

PREHOD MLADIH + is a project aimed at reducing the share of inactive young people with disabilities by supporting their transition from education to the labour market. Through targeted project activities, it contributes to smoother and more inclusive pathways from school into employment. The project is implemented within a national partnership of 13 project partners, all providers of vocational rehabilitation services, and is coordinated by the Association of Vocational Rehabilitation Providers in the Republic of Slovenia (ZIZRS). During the project, 2,500 young people with disabilities from across Slovenia are expected to participate. The project runs from 25 August 2025 to 30 September 2029 and is co-financed by the Republic of Slovenia and the European Union under the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), with EU co-financing amounting to 85% in the Eastern Slovenia cohesion region and 40% in the Western Slovenia cohesion region.

### Vključen svet – Inclusive World Initiative

On 10 March 2023, a consultation meeting was held at the National Council Hall, bringing together representatives of persons with disabilities, employers and the state. The long-term objective of the project is to facilitate the integration of persons with disabilities into the labour market, while the purpose of the consultation was to establish an initial platform for cooperation through the presentation of different perspectives on the current employment situation of persons with disabilities and, above all, to secure a commitment to closer cooperation among all three stakeholder groups. The “Vključen svet” (Inclusive World) project draws attention to shortcomings in the labour market system with the aim of achieving long-term structural changes that will enable persons with disabilities to become full members of the workforce, while allowing the economy to make better use of their full career potential. Representatives of all three key pillars of the project—persons with disabilities, the business sector and the state—were actively involved in the discussion of the project’s ideas and objectives.

## National Center for Comprehensive Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (NC CRSS)

NC CRSS operates at the Eye Clinic in Ljubljana, and it is the only specialised rehabilitation centre in Slovenia offering interdisciplinary rehabilitation for blind and partially sighted people. The Centre provides integrated support in one location, including medical, psychological, educational and social services, delivered by an ophthalmologist, nurse, psychologist, special education teacher and social worker. Comprehensive rehabilitation for blindness and visual impairment is a healthcare entitlement, available to all blind and partially sighted people who are health insured, regardless of age, social status or degree of visual impairment.

### Additional examples of inclusive practice

Inclusive practices are also present in the work of organizations operating with different groups of persons with disabilities. CIRIUS Kamnik provides integrated education, therapy, and rehabilitation for children and young people with physical and multiple disabilities, while the Centres for Hearing and Speech in Ljubljana and Maribor provide diagnostic, therapeutic, and counselling support to children with hearing impairments and speech and language difficulties.

Inclusive youth work and international mobility are further supported through the activities of organizations such as Zavod ODTIZ, which integrates principles of accessibility and inclusion into youth exchanges within the Erasmus+ programme and international cooperation projects. In addition, several local youth centres, with the support of the Youth Council of Slovenia, are gradually strengthening inclusive practices in youth work by improving accessibility and cooperating with organizations of persons with disabilities, thereby enabling greater participation of young people with visual impairments and other young persons with disabilities in mainstream youth programmes.

## Croatia

In the Republic of Croatia, a range of national initiatives and strategic documents shapes the framework for improving mobility, education, employment, and social participation of young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities. National plans for equalizing opportunities, inclusive education policies, and the legal right to personal assistance form the basis on which contemporary support models are being developed.

In the area of mobility, examples of good practice include the modernization of public transport, the development of tactile guiding paths, audible signaling, and organized transport for persons with disabilities, especially in larger urban environments.

In education, positive examples are recognized in systems of early developmental support, a network of experts providing support to children and young people with visual impairments, as well as the expansion of digital accessibility and the application of assistive technologies at all levels of education.

In the labour market, incentive measures for professional rehabilitation, employment, and subsidizing workplace adaptations are being implemented, while public awards and partnership projects further motivate employers to employ persons with disabilities. Examples of good practice in the public sector, social enterprises, and certain branches of the economy that show greater openness to inclusive employment are particularly encouraged.

At the community level, the legal right to personal assistance, the development of sighted guide services, the availability of psychosocial support, and participation in advisory bodies contribute to empowering young persons with disabilities for active participation in social and political life.

In addition to the above, persons with visual impairments and all persons with disabilities exercise the right to an inclusive allowance, with the possibility of using the personal assistance service provided by personal assistants, sighted guides, and communication intermediaries; the right to obtain part of typhlotechnical aids and assistive technologies; the right to home help; and, as needed, the right to a guaranteed minimum benefit in accordance with the person's social status. Additional and comprehensive support is also provided by the basic member organizations in local communities, at all levels of action.

From 2025 onward, all these policies are further strengthened through the implementation of 18 pillars of independent living, which derive from a European framework aligned with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

A particularly important national initiative relates to continuous advocacy toward the Croatian Health Insurance Fund, with the aim of regular and timely inclusion of new, technologically advanced assistive technologies and typhlotechnical aids on the List of Orthopaedic and Other Aids, in accordance with contemporary European standards and the development of new technologies. The goal of these activities is to ensure that persons with visual impairments and persons with disabilities can, without delay, use modern solutions that increase their independence, safety, and participation in everyday life.

All of the above initiatives together represent a strong foundation for creating an environment in which young persons with disabilities become equal, visible, and active participants in society at all levels.

## Bosnia and Herzegovina

The few existing examples of opportunities and initiatives come exclusively from local associations and unions and are aligned with their financial and organizational capacities. Institutional initiatives in this field practically do not exist.

The Blind Union at the state level continuously carries out advocacy activities and actively participates in processes aimed at improving the legislative framework.

## Cyprus

### Initiatives in the field of inclusive education

The Special Education Law (113(I)/1999) represents the basic legal framework for supporting inclusive education in Cyprus. This law provides resource teachers, professional assistants, and accessible teaching materials for pupils and students with disabilities. Within this framework, Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are developed, enabling academic support tailored to the individual needs of learners. In this way, pupils with disabilities are enabled to participate more fully and on a more equal basis in the educational process, as well as in social life within educational institutions.

### Employment and vocational training programmes

Within the framework of the Quota Employment Scheme, certain positions in the public sector are reserved for qualified persons with disabilities. Vocational training programmes are aimed at developing skills among young persons with disabilities that are aligned with labour market needs, while supported employment programmes provide professional counselling, mentoring, and workplace adaptations.

Mentoring programmes further facilitate the transition from education to employment, contributing to increased self-confidence, the building of professional networks, and improved long-term employability of young persons with disabilities.

### Assistive technology and accessibility programmes

Laws such as the Law on the Accessibility of Websites and Mobile Applications of the Public Sector (50(I)/2019) and the Law on the Accessibility of Products and Services (57(I)/2024) have contributed to improving digital and physical accessibility in Cyprus. Non-governmental organizations, such as the Pancyprian Organization of the Blind (POB), provide training in digital literacy, the use of Braille, and assistive technologies.

These activities enable young persons with visual impairments to participate more equally in social, professional, and educational activities, increasing their independence and quality of life.

### Community participation and youth work programmes

Community-based programmes, often implemented by municipalities and non-governmental organizations, provide young persons with disabilities with opportunities to participate in sports, artistic, volunteering, and cultural initiatives. Participation in these activities contributes to young people's personal development, the strengthening of leadership skills, and the improvement of social inclusion and community participation.

### Advocacy and awareness-raising activities

Advocacy and public awareness-raising represent a central part of the work of numerous non-governmental organizations, such as POB and KYSOA. Through workshops, campaigns, and other initiatives, including the marking of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, these



organizations contribute to reducing stigma and improving understanding of issues related to inclusion, accessibility, and the human rights of persons with disabilities.

## The Voice of Young People with Visual Impairments and youth with disabilities: Conclusions of Transnational Panel Discussions

### Introduction to the transnational panel discussions

Panel discussions represent one of the key elements of this chapter, as they enable the direct hearing of the experiences, views, and needs of young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities. Through open dialogue and the exchange of opinions, panel participants spoke about the challenges they face in everyday life, as well as about opportunities and solutions that can contribute to greater accessibility and inclusion.

The aim of organizing the panel discussions was to identify key barriers in access to information, education, mobility, and participation in community activities, as well as to examine existing support mechanisms and possibilities for their improvement. A particular value of the panel discussions lies in the fact that the conclusions are based on the personal experiences of young people, thereby providing an authentic and direct insight into their real needs and challenges.

The first panel discussion focused on access to information and the identification of key barriers in the field of information provision. Participants highlighted the importance of digital technologies and assistive tools, but also the limitations arising from inaccessible digital platforms, inadequate content formats, and insufficient implementation of digital accessibility standards.

The second panel discussion was oriented toward the needs, opportunities, and possible solutions related to the participation of young people with disabilities in education, mobility, youth work, and community activities, with particular emphasis on the importance of systemic support, timely adaptation of materials, and the active role of young people themselves in decision-making processes.

The conclusions presented in this chapter should not be viewed as isolated opinions, but as an important contribution to understanding the position of young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities in the partner countries. Their purpose is to point to concrete challenges faced by young people, while also serving as a starting point for further improvement of policies, practices, and programmes aimed at greater accessibility and equal participation of young people.

### Conclusions of the First Transnational Panel Discussion – Access to Information

The first panel discussion was dedicated to the topic of access to information and the identification of key barriers faced by young people with visual impairments. Within the first set of questions, the ways in which young people with visual impairments access relevant and

important information were examined. The experiences of the panel participants indicate that key information is most often obtained by combining several different sources. One of the main limitations highlighted was the inaccessibility of certain media, digital platforms, and websites, with emphasis placed on the fact that the availability of information largely depends on its type and purpose.

Although young people with visual impairments most often obtain information through online platforms, and although technological development has significantly facilitated access to information, educational institutions, universities, and organizations of persons with disabilities were also identified as important sources of information. In addition, radio, television, and social media continue to be present as sources of information. When it comes to social media, one participant pointed out that certain platforms, although very widely used, are not developed in an accessible way for young people with visual impairments. It was particularly emphasized that the social network Instagram does not provide an adequate level of accessibility, as photographs and video content generally lack descriptions, nor is there an option that would allow users to receive clear and complete information about the published content.

The discussion continued with an examination of the most accessible and least accessible sources of information. In comparison with Instagram, which according to participants' experiences proved to be one of the least accessible platforms, Facebook was recognized as a more accessible source of information, primarily due to the option of automatic photo description, which is of great importance for users with visual impairments. In addition to social networks, barriers to accessing information were also identified on numerous websites that are largely based on visual content without descriptions or alternative text. Nevertheless, positive examples of certain portals were mentioned, particularly in the field of healthcare, which demonstrate certain steps toward adapting content for a broader population.

One participant emphasized that a large amount of online content is accessible via the Google search engine when using screen readers, and that applications of certain news agencies represent a good example of taking into account the needs of users with visual impairments. As an additional positive example, artificial intelligence–based tools such as the Bixi bot or Be My Eyes applications were mentioned, which can describe photographs and video content that have not been previously adapted, provided that they can be shared within the application.

Participants also reflected on traditional media, with radio being assessed as significantly more accessible than television. Print media were recognized as among the least accessible, although their content can to some extent be adapted through the use of applications that enable photographing and text conversion. It was concluded that the situation in this area is gradually changing, but that a clear division between accessible and inaccessible sources of information still exists.

One participant pointed out that the internet, as such, is accessible to everyone, and that information can be found relatively smoothly through the Google search engine, whereas this is not the case with a large number of individual websites. TikTok was mentioned as an accessible and interesting social network, while Facebook and Instagram, despite the large amount of

information published on them, remain problematic from the perspective of accessibility. The importance of tools such as ChatGPT was particularly emphasized, as they can serve as a useful source of information for young people with visual impairments, as well as for young people without disabilities. The option of audio communication, combined with the possibility of subsequently obtaining a written transcript, was assessed as especially useful, particularly for young people with partial visual impairments who do not use screen readers. However, participants agreed that such tools can serve as a starting point for obtaining information, while additional research is necessary to obtain precise and verified information.

Within the first panel discussion, the question was also considered as to whether young people with visual impairments miss opportunities to participate in conferences, online events, or educational activities due to inaccessible information. Participants stated that such situations do occur, especially when information about events is not available or not communicated in a timely manner. One participant shared an experience of an online training session that he was unable to follow because it was based exclusively on visual presentations without additional explanations, while during in-person attendance at the same training he was able to exchange opinions and receive clear clarifications. An additional example mentioned was a foreign language course in which the instructor wrote content exclusively on the board using a marker, which made it impossible for persons with partial visual impairments to follow the class, despite the interesting and high-quality teaching content.

Participants also pointed out that persons without disabilities who conduct educational activities often lack sufficient knowledge about ways of adapting content, and that inaccessibility is most often unintentional. Increased interaction with young people with visual impairments contributes to a better understanding of their needs, which in turn influences changes in educators' approaches, adaptation of materials, and improvement of the overall educational process. The need to inform the wider public about the challenges faced by young people with visual impairments, as well as about assistive technologies and formats necessary for accessibility, was emphasized.

A specific part of the discussion was dedicated to barriers in access to information, such as digital inaccessibility, inappropriate formats, delayed information, and unclear communication. Advertisements on websites and in applications were highlighted as a significant barrier, as they interfere with the functioning of screen readers and disrupt the continuity of reading content. In addition, a large number of digital platforms do not comply with accessibility standards, and visual elements often lack appropriate alternative text. Problems also arise during cookie consent processes, where management options are minimal and difficult to identify, as well as with the inability to maintain stable positioning on certain parts of websites due to constant content changes. Although tools for blocking advertisements exist, users often avoid them due to concerns related to privacy. Application updates represent an additional challenge, as they frequently disrupt existing levels of accessibility, which is why young people with visual impairments sometimes decide not to update the software they use.

When asked which types of information are most difficult to access in accessible formats in the partner countries of the project, participants' responses were consistent. It was concluded that challenges in Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro are very similar, and that accessible information remains very limited. Young people with visual impairments are often forced to seek assistance from others or to use alternative ways of obtaining information, making the process slower and more complex compared to young people without disabilities. Particular difficulties were highlighted in the field of banking, where screen readers often fail to recognize key information, leading users to rely on calls to call centers. A negative experience was also cited regarding the verification of bank cards via telephone, where due to the inaccessibility of the process, entering the security code required more time than anticipated.

The final part of the discussion was devoted to critical barriers affecting the participation of young people with visual impairments in various areas of social life. One of the greatest obstacles identified was inaccessible literature in the educational process, which has long-term consequences for self-confidence and future life decisions of young people. Participants shared experiences in which students had to additionally search for and adapt literature, often losing time, while scripts and materials frequently contained a large number of non-adapted visual representations. As a positive example, practice from Serbia was mentioned, where the national library has a reading room for persons with total and partial visual impairments, and professors adapt and electronically deliver materials to students.

Experiences from Croatia indicate that accessibility in education largely depends on individual schools and the level of awareness of teaching staff. Participants believe it is important to involve parents in this process in order to further facilitate cooperation with teachers. One participant pointed out that during early schooling she did not have the opportunity to take written exams, but only oral ones, which significantly limited her ability to demonstrate her full capacities. It was concluded that teachers play a key role in the independence and progress of young people with visual impairments, and that it is necessary to ensure equal opportunities for development and the expression of potential.

Finally, participants also pointed to the lack of universal design in modern technologies, even among global companies. As an example, the transition from Touch ID to Face ID technology was mentioned, which represents a serious challenge for users with visual impairments. Such examples confirm the need for a systemic approach to universal design, in order for digital services to be accessible to all users in an equal and high-quality manner.

## Conclusions of the Second Transnational Panel Discussion – Needs, Opportunities, and Solutions for the Equal Participation of Young Persons with Disabilities

The second panel discussion was organized with the aim of identifying the current situation regarding needs, opportunities, and possible solutions related to the participation of young persons with disabilities in education, mobility, employment, youth work, and social processes in

general. The first set of questions concerned the needs in the field of informing young people with disabilities, with a particular focus on the role of organizations, schools, and institutions, that is, on whether it is necessary to adapt materials and improve the clarity of communication.

One of the panel participants believed that young people, if they possess a certain level of digital literacy, can independently adapt the necessary materials to their needs, and that today it is significantly easier than before to manage literature and books. In his view, the situation has improved compared to earlier periods, given that adapted magazines also exist, which means that extensive additional adaptations are not always necessary. Another participant partially agreed with this view but emphasized that independent adaptation of materials, although positive in terms of independence, takes up a significant amount of time for young people with visual impairments—time that could otherwise be devoted to learning. From personal experience, he stated that during his studies he had to allocate funds from his own budget to have books scanned and made accessible, which represents an additional financial and organizational burden. It was emphasized that this challenge should not be viewed as an individual problem, but as a systemic one, and that institutions need to take responsibility for the timely adaptation of teaching materials so that young people with disabilities can enter subsequent educational and life stages on an equal footing and adequately prepared.

A similar situation is present in secondary schools, where there are various educational tracks and where literature often changes, further emphasizing the need for a systemic approach to adapting educational content. As a positive circumstance, it was highlighted that all partner countries involved in the project are signatories to the Marrakesh Treaty, but it was emphasized that its provisions must be consistently implemented in practice. Participants also pointed to the problem of incorrect institutional approaches, where initiatives are sometimes launched that formally aim to support young people with visual impairments but in practice result in partial and inadequate solutions. An example cited was the adaptation of textbooks exclusively in audio format, which deprives pupils of the opportunity to develop reading and writing skills. In this way, the importance of basic and primary literacy is diminished, whether it concerns Braille for persons with visual impairments or standard print for sighted persons.

Experiences from Croatia indicate the existence of programmes for adapting textbooks into accessible formats for primary education, both in Braille and in large print. However, a key problem identified was the financing of these activities, as they are mostly implemented through projects and via organizations of persons with disabilities, rather than through systemic support from state institutions. In practice, this leads to situations in which pupils without disabilities receive textbooks at the beginning of the school year, while pupils with visual impairments wait several months for their adapted textbooks. Although significant support is provided by organizations of persons with disabilities, parents, family members, and teaching assistants in certain schools, it was concluded that the system in this area still does not function satisfactorily. A similar situation exists at universities, where the adaptation of literature largely depends on individual faculties and the engagement of professors.

Within the discussion on needs and everyday challenges of young people with disabilities, one participant's testimony further illustrated the importance of assistive technologies and individual strategies in overcoming barriers. The participant stated that in most cases she manages to access information independently, but that in situations where she encounters obstacles she relies on technical aids or support from her surroundings. As basic tools, she highlighted software for magnifying content on her phone and computer, as well as the use of handheld and electronic magnifiers. During schooling and studies, she also used a telescope for distance viewing, especially for reading tables, charts, and other content displayed on boards in classrooms and lecture halls. Speaking about digital technologies, she emphasized that the greatest barriers are inaccessible applications, as well as the presence of advertisements, excessive visual elements, poor contrast, and CAPTCHA mechanisms, which often prevent independent use of digital platforms. Situations in which teaching and lectures rely exclusively on visual presentations without adequate verbal explanation were singled out as particularly problematic, as they further hinder content comprehension. With regard to education, the participant stated that additional difficulties were posed by scripts and printed materials and that, although an electronic magnifier was a temporary solution, it would be optimal for teaching materials to be available in electronic format so that she could independently adapt them to her needs.

Based on the views expressed, it was concluded that information must be available in accessible formats and adapted in a timely manner in order for young people with disabilities to participate equally in the educational process.

The second set of questions related to the accessibility of education, mobility, employment, and youth work, with particular attention to the accessibility of educational institutions, youth programmes, and mobility opportunities. It was noted that Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina, within exchange and mobility programmes such as Erasmus, are considered associated countries with less experience, while Croatia and Slovenia, as members of the European Union, have a wider range of opportunities.

A participant from Croatia stated that during her studies she often had the opportunity to apply for mobility programmes, but emphasized that although the general population has access to participation, young people with disabilities do not have access to accessible mobility programmes. Although such programmes formally exist, adaptation mechanisms—such as engaging an assistant—are lacking, and additional support costs are not provided for within the programmes, which in practice prevents equal participation. Other participants recognized this as a significant problem, emphasizing the importance of mobility for learning about new cultures, exchanging experiences, and personal development.

The discussion also highlighted the need for greater initiative on the part of young people with disabilities themselves. One participant shared his experience of learning Esperanto, which enabled him to participate in conferences and congresses across Europe, emphasizing that there are various ways to gain international experience if there is personal motivation. Building on this view, another participant stated that young people with disabilities are often too

conformist, and that every new experience—especially travel—is important for broadening horizons and personal growth.

When asked whether they feel welcome and included in youth work, volunteering, and community activities, one participant shared his experience of volunteering in the Netherlands. During that experience, young people with total and partial visual impairments participated in volunteer activities, including physical work. Although it was not a long-term professional perspective, the experience was assessed as extremely valuable, as it enabled meeting young people from different parts of Europe and the world, as well as fostering a sense of acceptance and inclusion.

Within the discussion on necessary improvements and programme solutions, it was emphasized that partner countries lack better information about formal and non-formal learning programmes. The need to improve foreign language learning was particularly highlighted, as teaching for pupils with visual impairments in primary and secondary schools in Montenegro was often implemented in an improvised manner. Due to frequent changes in textbooks, adapted foreign language textbooks in Braille did not exist, even though Braille is crucial for persons with total visual impairments, both as a primary script and for the development of reading skills.

One of the concluding questions related to what schools, youth organizations, and institutions should improve in order to encourage greater activity among young people with disabilities. Education of staff in educational institutions and other organizations was highlighted as a key activity, particularly in the area of attitudes, approaches, and communication toward young people with disabilities. It was emphasized that through continuous training, staff must acquire knowledge about the challenges faced by young people with disabilities, as well as about ways of adapting literature, information, and activities in line with their needs. It was concluded that society will be richer and more inclusive once the focus shifts from limitations to potential and when young people with disabilities are given the opportunity to participate equally in all social processes.

The final part of the discussion was devoted to practical changes that would have a positive impact on the everyday lives of young people with disabilities. It was emphasized that a greater number of youth activities can contribute to their social inclusion, but that it is equally important to restore regional connectivity, which was largely lost after the 1990s. Participants stressed the importance of exchanging experiences through in-person meetings, rather than exclusively online, as such encounters can be a strong impetus for change in local communities. It was concluded that change begins with young people with disabilities themselves, who must be visible and active in society, aware that through their engagement and personal development they contribute to changing perceptions and creating a higher-quality and more inclusive environment.

## Recommendations for Improving the Position of Young People with Visual Impairments and Young Persons with Disabilities

Improving the position of young people with visual impairments and young persons with disabilities in Montenegro requires a comprehensive, long-term, and coordinated approach that goes beyond partial solutions and occasional interventions. An analysis of the legislative framework, available services, opportunities for education, employment, mobility, and participation, as well as identified barriers and examples of good practice, clearly indicates the need for systemic measures that will ensure real, not merely formal, inclusion of young people.

The recommendations presented in this chapter are based on the experiences and needs directly expressed by young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities, as well as on findings gathered through national analyses and transnational exchanges within the Youth IMPACT project. They reflect the real challenges that young people face in everyday life, but also the potential that exists within institutions, local communities, and the civil sector.

The aim of these recommendations is not only to improve individual areas, but to establish an interconnected system of support that encompasses accessibility of information, high-quality inclusive education, greater availability of services for mobility and independent living, more equal access to the labour market, and active participation of young people in society and decision-making processes. Particular emphasis is placed on the need to strengthen intersectoral cooperation and ensure consistent implementation of existing legal and strategic solutions.

This chapter aims to serve as a practical and strategic framework for decision-makers, institutions, local self-governments, civil society organizations, and international partners, as well as a tool for young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities in advocating for their rights. The recommendations are directed toward creating an environment in which young people will have equal opportunities to be educated, employed, mobile, participate in social processes, and lead independent and dignified lives.

### Montenegro

Improving the position of young people with visual impairments and young persons with disabilities in Montenegro requires a consistent shift from normative solutions to their full and measurable implementation in practice. Although the legislative and strategic framework largely recognizes the rights of persons with disabilities, the everyday experiences of young people indicate the existence of a significant gap between prescribed rights and their actual availability. The recommendations in this chapter are aimed at strengthening the bridge between policies and the real lives of young people by improving accessibility, independence, employability, and social participation.

## Accessibility of information and the digital environment

Digital accessibility represents a fundamental prerequisite for the independent functioning of young people in contemporary society. Young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities continue to face inaccessible websites, documents, and digital services, which often forces them to rely on the assistance of others. It is necessary for obligations already defined in laws and European standards to be applied systematically, with clearly defined institutional responsibility for the accessibility of digital content.

Special attention should be devoted to the development of unified, accessible sources of information on rights, services, and programmes for young people with disabilities, as well as to continuous training of institutional staff in accessible communication. Digital inclusion should not depend on the goodwill of individuals, but should become a standard of public administration and local self-governments.

## Education and availability of teaching materials

The education system plays a key role in shaping the life opportunities of young people with disabilities. Although inclusive education is normatively established, its implementation in practice remains uneven and often depends on individual initiatives of teachers or the capacities of schools. It is necessary to systematically strengthen the competencies of teaching staff, improve the availability of assistive technologies, and ensure that accessible educational materials become the rule rather than the exception.

In this context, the standardization of Braille represents one of the key recommendations. Completion of this process would enable consistent use of Braille in education, publishing, public communication, and information provision, thereby significantly improving the independence and equality of young people with visual impairments. Braille is not merely an educational issue, but a foundation for lifelong learning, employability, and active civic participation.

## Mobility and independent movement

Independent movement represents the foundation for education, employment, and social life of young people with disabilities. Although positive developments exist, the accessibility of public spaces, public transport, and support services remains limited and territorially uneven. It is necessary to develop sustainable programmes of orientation and mobility training, supported by the state and local communities, as well as to systematically improve the physical accessibility of public areas and public transport infrastructure.

It is important that young people with disabilities are actively involved in the planning and evaluation of urban and transport solutions, as their experiences directly point to real barriers and practical solutions. Mobility must not be a privilege, but a basic right that enables independence and a dignified life.

## Employment and professional development

Despite existing measures of professional rehabilitation and employment subsidies, young people with disabilities continue to face employer prejudice, inaccessible work environments, and a lack of adapted opportunities for gaining work experience. It is necessary to strengthen programmes of professional practice, career counselling, and mentoring, with stronger cooperation between institutions, the private sector, and civil society organizations.

Special emphasis should be placed on the development of modern and digital professions, as well as on support for entrepreneurship among young people with disabilities. Employment should not be viewed exclusively through a social lens, but as an investment in human potential and a contribution to societal development.

## International mobility and non-formal learning

International mobility and non-formal learning programmes represent a powerful mechanism for empowering young people with disabilities, but they remain only partially accessible. It is necessary to ensure that inclusive mobility becomes an integral part of all youth and educational programmes, with adequate logistical, financial, and assistive support.

Establishing a national contact point for inclusive mobility would contribute to better information and preparation of young people for participation in international programmes, thereby increasing their independence, self-confidence, and visibility in the European context.

## Active participation of young people in society and culture

Young people with disabilities remain insufficiently included in decision-making processes, cultural life, and public policies. Their participation often remains limited to project-based activities, without systemic institutional support. It is necessary to ensure accessible participation mechanisms, including youth councils, public consultations, and advisory bodies.

In the field of culture, particular attention should be paid to the physical, communication, and programme accessibility of cultural institutions and events, so that young people with disabilities can be equal consumers and creators of cultural content. Cultural participation has a strong impact on the sense of belonging, self-confidence, and social visibility of young people.

## Alignment of laws, policies, and practice

One of the key challenges in Montenegro is insufficient monitoring of the implementation of laws and strategies in practice. It is necessary to establish clear mechanisms for monitoring, evaluation, and reporting on the implementation of policies relating to young people with disabilities, with the active involvement of civil society organizations and young people themselves.

Consistent implementation of existing legislation, alongside continuous improvement of policies based on the real experiences of users, represents the foundation for improving the everyday lives of young people with disabilities and for creating a sustainable system of support.

## Slovenia

Based on an analysis of the national context, several measures have been identified that could further strengthen the inclusion, participation, and independence of young people with visual impairments and young persons with disabilities in Slovenia. The recommendations below are directed toward the development of policies, education, support services, youth work, and mobility. They build on the commitments defined in the Action Programme for Persons with Disabilities 2022–2030 and are aligned with the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

### Strengthening early identification and specialized support in mainstream education

Slovenia should continue to strengthen early identification of visual impairments and ensure timely and consistent access to specialized support from the very beginning of schooling. Mainstream schools would benefit from clearer guidelines for adapting teaching materials and working methods, as well as from regular professional training of teaching staff in the field of inclusive practices, in line with the Act on the Placement of Children with Special Needs. Attention should be paid to increasing the availability of specialized professionals, including typhlopedagogues, and to addressing existing capacity gaps and uneven regional coverage. Improving cooperation between mainstream schools and specialized institutions, such as the IRIS Centre, would contribute to better knowledge transfer and continuity of professional support, ensuring more uniform and predictable assistance for pupils with visual impairments across the country.

One possible measure would be the mandatory group-based participation of blind and partially sighted pupils in the final stage of primary education. This could take the form of a two- to three-week “living in a community” programme, in which older primary school pupils would take part in structured learning of independent living skills with professional support. The programme would focus on the development of practical daily-life skills, both within a family context and in preparation for independent living, including orientation and mobility, access to information, enhanced digital skills, and the use of assistive technologies. Such an approach would support a more gradual and well-supported transition towards autonomy and adulthood.

### Ensuring timely access to accessible teaching materials and digital content

Ensuring equal access to textbooks, workbooks, and digital teaching materials in accessible formats is essential for the full participation of pupils and students with visual impairments. When accessible versions are not available at the same time as standard materials, families often face additional organizational burdens in coordinating with schools and service providers. Slovenia would benefit from national initiatives that promote the standardization of teaching materials and the systematic production of accessible formats from the outset. Advocacy activities of the Union of the Blind and Partially Sighted of Slovenia highlight the importance of integrating accessible versions into regular publishing processes, which would improve

predictability, reduce pressure on families, and create more coherent and inclusive learning conditions.

### Expanding access to assistive technologies and strengthening digital inclusion

Accessible technologies—such as screen readers, magnification software, Braille displays, and accessible mobile applications—are crucial for the independence and participation of young people with visual impairments. Access to these tools may vary depending on individual entitlements and the capacity of schools and professionals to support their effective use. Strengthening training for teachers, counsellors, and youth workers, along with raising awareness among employers and public institutions, would contribute to more consistent use of accessible technologies in education, everyday life, and employment. Ensuring compliance of public-sector websites, educational platforms, and digital tools with accessibility standards, in accordance with the Digital Accessibility Act and WCAG guidelines, remains a key step toward full digital inclusion.

### Strengthening inclusive youth participation and peer-support structures

Inclusive youth participation contributes to the development of self-confidence, social skills, and independence among young people with visual impairments and young persons with disabilities. Inter-municipal associations of the blind and partially sighted (MDSS) provide important local spaces for peer connection and participation, complemented by national initiatives of the Union of the Blind and Partially Sighted of Slovenia. Strengthening cooperation between organizations of people with disabilities, mainstream youth centres, and youth organizations—along with targeted training for youth workers, would support more inclusive and sustainable youth work practices. Expanding opportunities for peer mentoring, youth leadership, and participation in decision-making processes is aligned with the objectives of the National Youth Programme 2023–2030.

### Improving mobility and accessibility in local communities

Orientation and mobility training is essential for the independence of young people with visual impairments, but its effectiveness depends on accessible and predictable environments. Municipalities could further support safe and independent movement by improving pedestrian routes, crossings, tactile markings, and audible signals at intersections, in line with accessibility obligations prescribed by the Act on Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities. Promoting accessible municipalities—an approach already adopted in several local communities in Slovenia—would contribute to more systematic improvements in physical accessibility, information provision, and public spaces. Ensuring the accessibility of digital navigation tools and public information systems would further enhance the autonomy and everyday mobility of young people with visual impairments.

Due to the clear need UB PSS plans to develop a concept for the training of rehabilitation technicians, drawing on the model of the National Professional Qualification “Rehabilitation Technician” developed by the ONCE Foundation (Spain). The objective is to establish a

specifically qualified professional profile at upper-secondary level, oriented towards practical education and hands-on training, with a strong focus on supporting blind and partially sighted people in everyday life situations and within the home environment. This practice-oriented workforce would strengthen independent living skills and complement existing rehabilitation and support services.

### Strengthening intersectoral cooperation and service coordination

Cooperation between the education system, rehabilitation services, social protection, youth organizations, and cultural institutions should be further strengthened to ensure continuity of support for young people with visual impairments and young persons with disabilities. Establishing more structured cooperation mechanisms—such as joint programmes, shared professional training, and clearer referral pathways—would help reduce fragmentation and improve coordination among services. Such approaches are consistent with European disability policy recommendations and would contribute to a more coherent and sustainable support system.

### Improving data, digital accessibility, and access to culture

Reliable data on young blind and partially sighted people in Slovenia remain limited, as information is dispersed across institutions and membership in inter-municipal associations of blind and partially sighted people is voluntary. Although a national register of blind and partially sighted people is being developed within the National Center for Comprehensive Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired, it is not yet sufficiently established for comprehensive analyses. Strengthening coordinated data collection and monitoring would enable better service planning and the development of evidence-based policies.

At the same time, ensuring that digital platforms, online learning environments, and cultural resources comply with accessibility standards is essential for the full participation of young people with visual impairments and young persons with disabilities. Strengthening the implementation of the Act on the Accessibility of Websites and Mobile Applications, as well as continued investment in accessible digital libraries and cultural content—including institutions such as the Minka Skaberne Library, would further support equal access to information, culture, and leisure activities.

## Croatia

For the systemic improvement of the position of young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities in the Republic of Croatia, it is necessary to act simultaneously in the areas of healthcare, education, employment, accessibility, and community participation. It is essential to ensure a truly inclusive education system that includes early developmental support, timely and high-quality needs assessment, availability of typhlotechnical aids and assistive technologies, textbooks and teaching materials in accessible formats, as well as continuous support from professional associates. Teaching staff need to be provided with additional training in inclusive working methods, along with clearly defined standards, system

accountability, and institutional support, rather than relying exclusively on the personal engagement of individuals.

In the labour market, it is necessary to improve programmes for employment and retention through higher-quality and timely incentives for employers, the development of workplace mentoring, flexible forms of work, and systemic adaptations of workplaces and working environments. Particular attention should be paid to the development of career guidance that is accessible to young people with disabilities already at the secondary-school level, including professional practice and internships in the real sector.

In parallel, the state and local self-government units should ensure accessible public transport, digital accessibility of public services, and the further development of personal assistance and sighted guide services, in order to enable young people to study independently, work, and participate equally in social life.

It is especially important to include young people with visual impairments and young people with disabilities themselves in decision-making processes, through advisory bodies, working groups, and public consultations, with stable and long-term financial support for their organizations.

Only through a combination of legislative measures, concrete and accessible support services, and genuine partnership with civil society organizations is it possible to substantially improve the position of young people with visual impairments in the Republic of Croatia. For these recommendations to be implemented in a high-quality and sustainable manner, strong intersectoral cooperation is necessary, that is, the active involvement of all ministries and their close cooperation and partnership in line with the highest standards.

Unfortunately, social awareness and the responsibility of certain sectors are still not at the required level, as disability issues continue to be viewed predominantly as the exclusive responsibility of the social welfare system. Visual impairment, however, affects all aspects of an individual's life and therefore requires coordinated and responsible action from all sectors—from education and healthcare, through employment, transport, and digitalization, to culture, sport, and public administration.

## Bosnia and Herzegovina

It is necessary to harmonize the legislative framework and adapt it to the real needs of persons with visual impairments and their organizations, that is, non-governmental associations. Institutions must have clear and binding responsibility to ensure the construction and development of public infrastructure adapted to persons with visual impairments.

It is extremely important to increase the number of educational programmes, as well as educational institutions, where necessary, that are adapted to persons with visual impairments. A greater number of available programmes would provide young persons with visual impairments with more opportunities for education, vocational training, and employment.

At the same time, it is necessary to strengthen the capacities of organizations that bring together persons with visual impairments so that they can independently implement non-formal education programmes. In addition, it is necessary to develop a clear formal framework, including curricula and study programmes, for the education of assistants working with persons with visual impairments.

Cooperation and the exchange of experiences with organizations of persons with visual impairments from other countries represent an additional important element in improving the support system. A good example and a solid foundation for such cooperation is the joint work on the Youth IMPACT project.

## Cyprus

### Policies and legal frameworks

It is necessary to further strengthen the implementation of existing laws and regulations, as well as their continuous improvement. The state should ensure that already established legal and by-laws are consistently respected and applied in practice, in order to properly promote inclusion, equality, and the rights of persons with disabilities across all sectors of society.

### Education and training

The continuous development of inclusive education and support systems should be one of the key priorities, not only from the perspective of accessibility, but also with the aim of personal development and skills enhancement of young persons with disabilities. Accessible educational resources, assistive technologies, and qualified professional staff should also be available in higher education institutions, such as colleges and universities.

Young people with disabilities can benefit significantly from vocational and career guidance programmes, which would facilitate their transition from education to the labour market and contribute to informed decision-making regarding their further professional development.

### Employment opportunities

Initiatives from both the public and private sectors are necessary in order to increase employment opportunities for young persons with disabilities. Expanding the Quota Employment Scheme, encouraging supported employment programmes, and ensuring reasonable workplace accommodations can significantly contribute to greater access to quality and sustainable jobs.

It is particularly important to improve employers' awareness of the potential of young persons with disabilities, as well as to provide incentives for their employment, thereby contributing to the reduction of prejudice and the strengthening of inclusion in the labour market.

### Accessibility and technology

Improving and consistently applying accessibility standards in public spaces, transport, and digital services represents another important priority. Investments in mobility aids, accessible

websites, and assistive technologies can significantly enhance participation and independence of young persons with disabilities.

At the same time, educating young people in digital literacy and the use of adaptive technologies contributes to improving their educational and employment prospects, as well as greater independence in everyday life.

### Awareness-raising and advocacy

Awareness-raising and advocacy represent key mechanisms of social development and should be at the centre of efforts aimed at combating prejudice and stereotypes about persons with disabilities. Non-governmental organizations, educational institutions, and media campaigns can significantly contribute to reducing stigma and changing social attitudes.

Young persons with disabilities should be enabled to actively participate in public debates, consultations, and decision-making processes through various advocacy initiatives, so that their voices are recognized and taken into account.

### Cooperation and support services

Improving support services is possible through strengthening cooperation between local authorities, non-governmental organizations, and state institutions. Simplifying procedures for access to specialized programmes, financial support, and obtaining disability certification would contribute to reducing administrative barriers.

Through individualized counselling and mentoring, tailored to the needs of each individual, young persons with disabilities can be enabled to achieve more successful integration and more active participation in social, educational, and professional spheres.

## Conclusion

The Inclusive Horizon Handbook represents a comprehensive reflection of the shared realities, challenges, and aspirations of young people with visual impairments and youth with disabilities across the partner countries. Developed within the framework of the Youth IMPACT project, the handbook brings together institutional analyses, European policy frameworks, and, most importantly, the lived experiences of young people whose everyday lives are shaped by accessibility, support systems, and social attitudes. Its value lies in its ability to connect these dimensions into a coherent narrative that highlights both systemic shortcomings and concrete opportunities for long-term change.

Across national contexts, young people with disabilities, including those with visual impairments, continue to face structural barriers that limit their full participation in education, employment, mobility, and community life. Although legislative frameworks increasingly recognize disability rights and align with international and European standards, the implementation of these rights remains uneven. In practice, access to support often depends on place of residence, institutional capacity, or project-based initiatives, rather than on stable and coordinated systems. This fragmentation has a direct impact on young people's ability to plan their educational pathways, transition into employment, and develop independent and fulfilling lives.

A central theme throughout the handbook is the fundamental importance of accessibility as a prerequisite for equality. For youth with disabilities, accessibility goes far beyond the physical environment and includes digital spaces, communication channels, information, and attitudes. Young people consistently emphasize that inaccessible websites, educational platforms, public services, and administrative procedures exclude them at the very first point of contact. Without access to information in usable formats, participation in education, employment programs, youth initiatives, and decision-making processes remains limited, regardless of formally guaranteed rights. From their perspective, accessibility is not an additional accommodation, but the foundation upon which autonomy, participation, and dignity are built.

The comparative overview of partner countries demonstrates that, despite differences in legal systems and service organization, the experiences of young people with disabilities are strikingly similar. Inclusive education is formally promoted, yet its quality and effectiveness often depend on individual commitment, availability of specialized professionals, and local resources. Many young people describe delays in receiving accessible learning materials, insufficient use of assistive technologies, and uneven understanding of disability among educational staff. These challenges become particularly evident during transitions between different levels of education and from education to employment, where coordinated and continuous support is often lacking. Young people stress that such continuity is essential for maintaining motivation, confidence, and equal opportunities.

Employment and independent living represent key aspirations for youth with disabilities, but also areas where systemic gaps are most visible. Young people report facing prejudice, low expectations, limited workplace adaptations, and complex administrative procedures. At the

same time, their experiences clearly show that when adequate support, assistive technologies, and inclusive working environments are provided, they are fully capable of contributing professionally and socially. Independence, as understood by young people with disabilities, is not defined solely by employment or financial autonomy, but by the ability to make decisions, move freely, access services, and participate in community life on equal terms.

The handbook highlights the crucial role of civil society organizations and organizations of persons with disabilities as spaces of empowerment, peer support, and advocacy. From the perspective of young people, these organizations often represent the first environments in which their voices are heard and their experiences validated. Through youth programs, mentorship, international mobility, and advocacy initiatives, young people with disabilities develop skills, self-confidence, and a sense of belonging. However, the handbook also makes clear that inclusion cannot rely primarily on the non-governmental sector. Sustainable progress requires strong institutional responsibility, stable funding of support services, and effective coordination between education systems, social protection, employment services, and youth policies.

At the European level, international frameworks and programs are perceived by young people with disabilities as important sources of opportunity and empowerment. European accessibility standards and mobility programs such as Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps demonstrate how inclusion can function in practice when flexibility and individualized support are integrated into program design. Participation in international mobility is often described as transformative, strengthening independence, self-confidence, and active citizenship. These experiences reinforce the conclusion that barriers do not arise from a lack of ability or motivation among young people, but from systems that are not yet fully adapted to diversity.

A defining strength of the Inclusive Horizon Handbook is its emphasis on the perspectives of young people themselves. Their contributions reveal not only challenges, but also resilience, determination, and a strong desire to be actively involved in shaping policies and practices that affect their lives. Youth with disabilities consistently express that they do not wish to be viewed solely as recipients of support, but as partners in decision-making processes. Their perspective challenges institutions to move beyond formal or symbolic inclusion toward meaningful participation and shared responsibility.

In this sense, the handbook functions both as an analytical document and as a call to action. It calls on policymakers, public institutions, educators, employers, and youth organizations to recognize inclusion as a continuous and coordinated process that requires accountability, dialogue, and sustained commitment. Legal frameworks and strategies provide an essential foundation, but genuine inclusion is achieved only when these frameworks are translated into accessible services, inclusive environments, and everyday practices that respect diversity.

The Inclusive Horizon Handbook therefore represents more than a project outcome. It serves as a foundation for future initiatives, a tool for advocacy, and a reference point for policy development. By integrating the perspectives of youth with visual impairments and youth with disabilities, it contributes to a shared vision of a society in which all young people are supported to learn, work, participate, and shape their own futures with dignity, autonomy, and equal opportunities.

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10. Government of the Republic of Slovenia. Act on the Guidance of Children with Special Needs (ZUOPP-1).
11. Government of the Republic of Slovenia. Accessibility of Websites and Mobile Applications Act (ZDSMA).
12. Government of the Republic of Slovenia. Action Programme for Persons with Disabilities 2022–2030.
13. Government of the Republic of Slovenia. National Youth Programme 2023–2030.
14. Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (SURSTAT).
15. University Medical Centre Ljubljana.
16. Center IRIS – National Resource Centre for Blind and Partially Sighted Children.
17. Inter-municipal Associations of the Blind and Partially Sighted (MDSS).
18. Union of the Blind and Partially Sighted of Slovenia (UBPSS).
19. Minka Skaberne Library for the Blind and Partially Sighted.
20. Zavod ODTIZ.
21. Employment Service of Slovenia.

22. Public Scholarship, Development, Disability and Maintenance Fund of the Republic of Slovenia.
23. Foundation for Financing Disabled and Humanitarian Organisations of Slovenia.
24. Government of Montenegro. Constitution of Montenegro
25. Government of Montenegro. Law on Prohibition of Discrimination of Persons with Disabilities.
26. Government of Montenegro. Law on Social and Child Protection.
27. Government of Montenegro. Law on Electronic Administration.
28. Government of Montenegro. Strategy for the Integration of Persons with Disabilities in Montenegro.
29. Government of Montenegro. Youth Strategy of Montenegro.
30. Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Dialogue.
31. Ministry of Public Administration.
32. State Election Commission of Montenegro.
33. Statistical Office of Montenegro (MONSTAT).
34. Gov.me.
35. Savez slijepih Crne Gore.
36. Udruženje mladih sa hendikepom Crne Gore.
37. Government of the Republic of Croatia. Constitution of the Republic of Croatia.
38. Government of the Republic of Croatia. Anti-Discrimination Act.
39. Government of the Republic of Croatia. Act on the Register of Persons with Disabilities.
40. Government of the Republic of Croatia. Act on Inclusive Allowance.
41. Government of the Republic of Croatia. Act on Personal Assistance.
42. Government of the Republic of Croatia. National Plan for the Development of Social Services.
43. Government of the Republic of Croatia. National Youth Programme.
44. Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy.
45. Croatian Institute of Public Health.
46. Office of the Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities.
47. National Centre for External Evaluation of Education.
48. Croatian Union of the Blind.

49. Croatian Union of Associations of Persons with Disabilities.
50. Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina.
51. Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Law on the Protection of Persons with Disabilities.
52. Republic of Srpska. Law on Social Protection.
53. Brčko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Law on Social Welfare.
54. Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Policy on Disability in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
55. Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina.
56. Institute for Statistics of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.
57. Republic Institute of Statistics of Republika Srpska.
58. Union of the Blind of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.
59. Union of the Blind of Republika Srpska.
60. Union of the Blind of Herzeg-Bosnia.
61. Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth. Special Education.
62. Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities. National Strategy and Action Plan on Disability.
63. European Commission. Students and staff with physical, mental or health-related conditions (Erasmus+).
64. European Disability Forum. Accessible DATA Project – Cyprus country report.
65. Open University of Cyprus. Internal Regulations for Persons with Disabilities.