

## MANIFESTO

### Context

This Manifesto was developed within "***Our voice counts!***" project, which is implemented in Bucharest, Buzău and Râmnicu Sărat counties and is aimed at children and young people with hearing and visual impairments from 7 school units. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities "explicitly recognizes disability as a **human rights issue**" and mentions the attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society. "The 2019 national report on the monitoring of the rights of children with disabilities" showed that 1/3 of parents declared that discrimination against their children due to disabilities happens mostly in the community.

The project approaches the issue of disability from the human rights perspective. Romania is committed to mobilizing the necessary resources so that no person with disabilities is discriminated, marginalized or excluded, in accordance with the international conventions to which Romania is a party: the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, "A society without barriers for disabilities" 2015 – 2020 Strategy.

The project proposes a set of educational activities for knowledge of their rights and advocacy to make their voices heard. It also brings a holistic approach to disability, directly involving the beneficiaries, together with multiple stakeholders in the community, an approach that has the power to achieve their educational, social and professional inclusion.

In a globalized world, where the focus is on integration, acceptance of diversity and tolerance, the children and young people with visual and hearing impairments have great difficulties regarding social integration and insertion in the labor market. The challenges consist in the reluctance of a part of the community regarding children and young people with disabilities, attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society, on an equal basis with others.

**The particularities of the target group (people with visual and hearing impairments):** a low ability to communicate and the fear of moving away from their community. Some of them have associated deficiencies. The share comes from poor, single-parent or disorganized families, disinterested in children's progress. Many parents in rural areas are unaware of the existence of special schools and keep their children at home. After finishing school, they find it difficult to find a job.

**The beneficiaries of the project:** direct - 940 children and young people with hearing and visual impairments, from 7 school units. Indirect beneficiaries: pupils from 10 mainstream schools, teachers, parents, citizens, NGOs, collaborators, experts, decision-makers.

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## Barriers

The National Authority for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Children and Adoptions (NARPDCA) carried out, with the support of the World Bank, the first Diagnosis<sup>1</sup> of the situation of people with disabilities in Romania.

(ii) The diagnosis assesses the compliance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in eight main areas: (i) Accessibility and mobility, (ii) Effective protection of the rights of persons with disabilities, (iii) Employment, (iv) Social protection (including habilitation/rehabilitation), (v) Social services and independent living (including community integration), (vi) Education, (vii) Health, (viii) Social participation (political and public).

Within the project, 48 beneficiaries: children and young people with hearing and visual impairments, volunteers from mainstream schools and libraries, teachers analyzed for four areas, from those mentioned above, the main barriers faced by the direct beneficiaries of the project and formulated solutions for their full integration in the community.

## Education:

- a. the old school syllabi (for example, those from 1992 are still valid for primary school classes);
- b. the disappearance from the curriculum frameworks (which are not adapted to the specifics of the deficiency anyway) of the subjects that contributed to an overwhelming extent to the formation of the ability to communicate verbally (for example: labial reading, speech technique, language structuring);
- c. the lack of textbooks, curricular aids, adapted didactic materials (games for speech development and personal development, imaging material so important for receiving information);
- d. The lack of self-esteem and anxiety about fitting into a group and being rejected.

## Health:

- a. the lack of essential information on the boxes of medicines for people with visual impairments (for example, the expiry date, or the minimum recommended dose);
- b. the lack of a sign language interpreter in the hospitals on-call room;
- c. the issuance of the A5 type medical certificate only in physical format, for which a trip to the hospital/clinic registry is required;
- d. people with visual impairments do not benefit from periodic specific ophthalmological consultations due to a lack of funds;
- e. the double taxation of people with disabilities - according to the law, they benefit from health insurance without paying the contribution, but when they are employed, the health contribution is withheld from their salary.

## Occupation:

- a. they find it very difficult to find suitable jobs for their skills and abilities;
- b. security problems at the workplace (arrangement of entrances, communication paths, arrangement of the workplace, arrangement of toilets, lack of devices with braille language, computers equipped with screen readers, etc.);

<sup>1</sup> Made within the project "Consolidation of the coordination mechanism for the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities" implemented by the National Authority for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Children and Adoptions with the technical support of the World Bank.

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- c. coworkers avoid them, because they don't understand them. In turn, if they are not understood, they isolate themselves;
- d. lack of mime-gestural interpreters;
- e. Difficult access to tertiary education that would help them to get a job;
- f. Discrimination / bullying they are subjected to at work.

### **Accessibility and mobility:**

- in the absence of sign language interpreters (there are very few authorized at the national level) and in the absence of verbal communication skills, deaf people do not know how to make themselves understood, how to explain what they want to know or to do. The listeners do not know how to relate to them, how to communicate, how to explain something to them;
- often, without the support of parents or a hearing person, people with hearing impairments cannot, for example, fill in a typed form, formulate a request correctly, make an expense budget, tell the doctor what symptoms have, to apply for a loan, etc.;
- lack of special traffic lights / auditory instruments on public transportation;
- the impossibility of movement due to the lack of infrastructure in mainstream schools.

**We, the children and young people from “Our voice counts!” project ask the competent authorities to take urgent measures to remove the barriers faced by the people with hearing and visual impairments!**

### **General requirements**

- ❖ **Updated manuals** and adapted to the learning needs of people with disabilities, both for the secondary, tertiary and higher cycle;
- ❖ **Assistants** and psychologists present in the school for the children with disabilities who want to study in mainstream schools;
- ❖ **Career preparation** within non-formal activities coordinated by specialists;
- ❖ **Counseling people with disabilities** to find a suitable job;
- ❖ **Encouraging the inclusion of people with disabilities in the labor market** (creating more facilities for companies);
- ❖ **Inclusion in the Romanian Classification of Occupations (COR) of new jobs**, suitable for each type of disability;
- ❖ **Medical services provided** for the approvals required to obtain the disabled person certificate;
- ❖ **Issuing in digital format** the medical certificate type A5;
- ❖ **Elimination of double contribution** to health insurance when they are employed;
- ❖ **Adaptation of websites** for all types of disabilities – presentation of essential information in editable format so that it can be transcribed in braille;
- ❖ The existence of some **information points / guides** at the entrance for people with disabilities in public institutions;
- ❖ The purchase within the mainstream education institutions of **braille printers**, of smart tablets that have software for transcribing information;

### **Specific requirements for the people with hearing impairments**

- **Hiring mime-gestural interpreters** in public institutions to facilitate the access of people with hearing disabilities to public services and their payment (Mime-gestural interpreters should be present in local institutions according to article 69 and 70 /law 448/2006);

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- **The presence of a sign language interpreter in the hospitals on-call room** or of some solutions - sign language video interpretation system in hospitals / pharmacies;
- **Specialized staff** / sign language interpreters in the mainstream schools, and in the special schools;
- Mimic-gestural interpretation of TV news / subtitles in Romanian for news / entertainment programs / Romanian films.

### **Specific requirements for the people with visual impairments**

- Purchase of braille devices in institutions and companies to facilitate the employment of people with visual impairments;
- Traffic lights with sound system in all locations;
- Audio/tactile guidance system in public institutions;
- Permission to enter stores with dogs that help them orient themselves;
- Prohibition of moving electronic scooters on sidewalks and prohibition of abandoning them in the middle of sidewalks;
- Electronic screens in all means of transportation, to signal the stations, and in trains to announce the station a few minutes before the train stops; Audible signals for public transportation related to door location and bus/tram number etc.;
- Essential information on medicine boxes, in Braille language – expiration date, recommended dose;
- Access to banking services – ATM headsets / voice services;
- In the mainstream schools, the placement of bars for people with visual impairments and the inscriptions and the school map in braille;
- Marking with a sound signal the electrically operated doors.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

We urgently request all stakeholders to take our requests seriously. We believe that we have the right to shape our future because it is our future. We need everyone's cooperation to make this happen.

We are fully committed to promote this manifesto in order to raise awareness and attract involvement to strengthen our voices throughout Romania.

**“Working together for a green, competitive and inclusive Europe”.**

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The website of “Our voice counts!” project:

<https://www.agenda21.org.ro/en/ourvoicematters.html>

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