



ENSA General Assembly 2025/2026

Innovation in Action

Date: Brussels December 2 2025

Venue: Delegation of Regione Lombardia Place du Champ De Mars, 2

The European Union is preparing to launch its landmark first-ever Anti-Poverty Strategy this year, aiming to lift a crucial 15 million people from poverty by 2030.

This ambitious goal, however, faces a significant risk of failure if it does not place the challenges of persons with disabilities at its absolute core. The current data is stark: nearly 29% of persons with disabilities in the EU are at risk of poverty and social exclusion, a figure dramatically higher than their non-disabled peers and one that tragically keeps rising, with poverty levels among this group increasing in 13 Member States over the last decade. For women with disabilities, this risk climbs even higher to 29.7%.

Poverty for this community is a complex, structural issue driven by multiple, compounding factors. While employment is often touted as the pathway out of poverty, many persons with disabilities are relegated to low-paid, part-time work or face exploitative practices in segregated workshops. This struggle is compounded by flawed social security systems, where attempts to find work result in the reduction or complete loss of essential disability allowances, creating a powerful disincentive to seek employment. Furthermore, the issue of missed opportunities in education is critical, with 24.6% of young persons with disabilities leaving education and training early, severely limiting their long-term career prospects.

Perhaps the most overlooked factor is the hidden cost of disability. Living with a disability involves significant extra costs, from accessible housing and transportation to assistive devices, that can consume over half of a household's disposable income. Coupled with the rising cost of living, which now sees housing costs absorbing 30.4% of their income, these burdens are worsening dramatically. Additionally, informal carers, predominantly women, also face a higher poverty risk due to lost income while providing essential support, especially where state services are lacking.

To ensure the Strategy succeeds, the EU must implement targeted reforms. This includes moving beyond general data collection to gather disaggregated data on poverty by disability type, launching vital research into the additional costs of living in an inaccessible society, and providing guidance on the adequacy of allowances. Crucially, systemic reforms must be introduced to allow individuals to retain their disability allowance while earning an income. Finally, the EU must dedicate more funding toward truly inclusive education, employment, and support for informal carers, including compensation for lost pension contributions. Without these specific, structural changes, the EU risks leaving millions of its most vulnerable citizens behind.

With a focus on the intersection of the EU's Anti-Poverty Strategy and the pressing reality for persons with disabilities, who face a disproportionately high risk of poverty, this event will explore the crucial and frontline role of local authorities, the municipalities and regional bodies, in implementing inclusive strategies, breaking down systemic barriers, and preventing the underlying causes of poverty right where people live.

The discussion will also be the opportunity to better understand linkages between poverty and disability in European Countries, like in Italy.



Program

Morning Session (10 am - 1 pm)

Poverty's Frontline: Local Authorities Driving Disability Inclusion in the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy

Organized by: Disability Thematic Group of European Network of Social Authorities (ENSA), CBM Italy and Lombardy Region

In collaboration with: *European Local Inclusion and Social Action Network (ELISAN), COFACE, European Association of Service Providers for Person with Disabilities (EASPD), European Network Independent Living (ENIL), Council of Europe, Conference of INGOs - Sport Committee and Inclusive Territories Environment and Health Committee, Disabled Peoples' International DPI, Autonomous Region of Friuli Venezia Giulia, Veneto Lavoro, Municipality of Belluno.*

09:45 - 10:00 Arrival participants

10:00 - 10:10 Welcome

- Giuseppe Costa, Director Lombardy Region Delegation;
- Annalisa Bisson, ENSA Legal Representative and Veneto Region, Director of International Relations;

10:10 - 10:20 Opening

- Maria Jose Rico Llorca, General Director, Instituto Valenciano de Servicios Sociales (IVASS), ENSA Coordinator of the Disability Thematic Group;
- Anthony Polychronakis, City of Rotterdam, ENSA Coordinator of the Older Adults Thematic Group;

10:20 - 10:35 Keynote Intervention

- Valeria Spazzoli, European Commission - DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion
"The EU Anti-Poverty Strategy: Ensuring inclusion and protection of vulnerable people at the Core"

10:35 - 11:30 Unpacking Poverty for Persons with Disability in Europe

Discussants:

- Sebastian Gonzalez, COFACE, Advocacy C Policy Officer on Disability and Care Policies - *The family dimension of poverty and disability*;
- Chiara Anselmo, CBM Italy, Advocacy Director - *Poverty and Disability in Italy*;
- Roberto Daffonchio, Lombardy Region, Deputy Director DG Family Affairs, Social Solidarity, Disability and Equal Opportunities (tbc) - *The Lombardy Region's role in supporting individual life projects for persons with disabilities*.
- Gianna Zamaro, Autonomous Region Friuli Venezia Giulia, Director Social, Health and Disability Policies - *No One Left Behind: Regional Leadership in Disability-Inclusive Development*
- Camilla Franzin, Veneto Lavoro, Manager of the Specialist Service For Targeted Employment Placement at the Public Employment Centre of the Treviso territorial District - *Methodologies for the Labour Market Inclusion of People with Disabilities in Veneto*
- Q&A

11:30 - 11:45 - Coffee break

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11:45 - 13:00 - The Enabling Team: Service Providers, Sport, and the Path to Independent Living

Discussants:

- Irene Bertana, EASPD, Senior Policy Officer - *The role and needed frameworks for support services to enable poverty reduction*
- Paolo Gamba, Vice Mayor, Stefano Perale, Head of Cabinet, Belluno Municipality *The Belluno's example: Reimagining Ability*
- Jean Luc Simon, DPI Europe Chairperson - *Balancing Work and Benefits: Challenges in Disability Support*
- Christian Saint Lezer, Council of Europe, Conference of INGOs, Sport Committee - *Sports as a tool for the social inclusion of persons with disabilities*
- Antonella Candiago, ENIL Policy Officer - *Fueling Independent Living and Fighting Poverty*
- Q&A

13:00

Concluding remarks

- Michele Dolcetti, CBM Italy, Head of development C institutional donors - Italia
- Anthony Polychronakis, City of Rotterdam, ENSA Coordinator of the Older Adults Thematic Group

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Afternoon Session (2:30 pm -5:00 pm)

ENSA General Assembly

Chair: Annalisa Bisson, Legal Representative of ENSA network and Director of International Relations, Veneto Region

2:30 pm - 3:30 pm

- **Opening** - by chair, Annalisa Bisson,
- **Fostering Collaboration: New Members Share Their Key Priorities:**
 - Lombardy Region (Italy), Roberto Daffonchio, Lombardy Region, Deputy Director DG Family Affairs, Social Solidarity, Disability and Equal Opportunities
 - Research Centre, Innovation in Care University of Applied Sciences of Rotterdam (the Netherlands), Judith van Zwienen
 - Cristina del Canto Mozas, Castilla y León Social Services Regional Government (Spain)
 - Municipality of Belluno, Stefano Perale Head of Cabinet
 - CBM Italy, Lea Barzani, Director external relations
 - Sara Tonelli, UPIPA Provincial Union of Institutions for Assistance, Italy
 - Association of friends, caregivers, and people with Dementia and Neurodegenerative brain diseases of Cyclades- Embrace Memory, South Aegean, Cyclades
 - Cooperativa Sociale Namastè ETS (Sicily Caltagirone)

3:30 pm - 4.40 pm

- **Collaboration Proposals**
 - Veneto Region, Silvia Faggian, Directorate of Social Services, Organizational Unit for Addictions, Third, New Marginalization, and Social Inclusion
 - Barbara Maculan, President Social Cooperative Equality, project LACE Learning Communities for Empowering Foster Parents
 - Dr. Ivan Scaratti General Director Fondazione Elisabetta Germani,
 - Dr. Julie Vanderlinden, PhD Odisee University of Applied Sciences,
 - Cooperativa Sociale Margherita Vicenza
 - Prof. Giorgio Perilongo, Professor of Pediatrics, Technical-Scientific Coordinator, Regional Coordination for Rare Diseases, Veneto Region, Padua University Hospital.
 - Dott.ssa Giulia Volpato, Ass P63 Syndrome- Rare Disease- Red Project

- Q & A Open Dialogue,
Francesca Rossi Belgian-Italian Chamber of Commerce, Municipality of Belluno

5:00 pm

- Closing remarks by chair



With the support of the Inclusive Territories Environment and Health Committee

