

## The Nicosia Declaration

### *From Margins to Mainstream: Integrating Accessibility and Universal Design Across Higher Education Curricula*

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*Nicosia, 10 September 2025*

In a world that aspires to uphold human rights, equity, and social justice, higher education must serve as a catalyst for inclusive transformation. In 2025, millions of people in Europe and beyond remain excluded or underserved due to inaccessible environments and services. As Higher Education and professional development systems fail to meaningfully embed principles of accessibility and universal design in their curricula, pedagogies, and institutional structures, many professionals globally lack basic knowledge and competences around disability and universal design, accessibility and assistive technology, hindering the potential of their contribution to creating equal opportunities for all and more inclusive societies.

The absence or marginal integration of accessibility and universal design in higher educational content not only limits opportunities for persons with disabilities but perpetuates systemic ableism and reinforces exclusionary practices and institutional discrimination. Research evidence indicates that even where accessibility and universal design or assistive technology are included in the design and delivery of Higher Education curricula, they are too often confined to technical fields or treated as optional accommodation rather than essential components of academic excellence, human rights, and participation to society.

This state of affairs undermines the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), the European Accessibility Act, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and broader commitments to inclusive education. It also represents a critical missed opportunity to cultivate learning environments that reflect and celebrate the diversity, interdependence, and potential of all learners.

We, the undersigned, call for immediate, coordinated, and structural action by all relevant stakeholders to integrate accessibility, universal design and assistive technology as core elements of higher education policy, curriculum design, institutional governance, and quality assurance mechanisms.

We affirm the following principles and priorities for action:

1. **Recognize accessibility, universal design and assistive technology as rights-based imperatives**, not optional content or mere technical considerations and embed them as cross-cutting themes in all curricula across disciplines and academic levels.

2. **Reform national and institutional policy frameworks** to include mandatory training on integrating accessibility and universal design in the curricula for raising awareness, familiarizing with basic concepts, and/or developing deeper competences depending on discipline, for faculty, instructors, programme creators, higher education leaders and other stakeholders, supported by legal and financial mechanisms.
3. **Revise accreditation and quality assurance standards** to require the integration of accessibility and universal design, curriculum development, course delivery, assessment, and learning outcomes across all programmes, in terms of either as a separate topic or a topic integrated in other courses according to discipline.
4. **Promote interdisciplinary and intersectoral collaboration** among universities, user organizations, professional bodies, and accessibility experts to co-design curricula that teach about accessibility and at the same time embrace inclusive pedagogies, and learning materials.
5. **Ensure participation of persons with disabilities** and their representative organizations in all processes related to curriculum design, implementation, and evaluation.
6. **Develop and support communities of practice**, staff development programmes, and international mobility schemes that advance consideration of accessibility and universal design in Higher Education curricula across disciplines.
7. **Promote the establishment of national advisory bodies on accessibility and universal design** in Higher Education, involving diverse stakeholders (such as persons with disabilities, the industry, students representatives, external academics, accessibility experts and other) and tasked with providing strategic guidance and monitoring progress in their curricula development.
8. **Support innovation in technologies** that align with universal design principles and promote equitable access to digital and physical environments, products and services.
9. **Raise public awareness** and celebrate excellence in accessible societies through awards, research funding, and dissemination of good practices.
10. **Foster a cultural shift** within higher education institutions toward valuing diversity, dismantling ableist assumptions, and advancing justice for all.

The signatories of this declaration commit to these principles and to working collaboratively—across countries, sectors, and disciplines—to ensure that accessibility, universal design and assistive technology are no longer peripheral considerations, but central pillars of inclusive, high-quality, and forward-looking higher education.

Nicosia, 10 September 2025

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