



The Local Inclusion Agenda methodology

Toolkit

About VNG International

VNG International is the International Cooperation Agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG). Rooted in the Netherlands' rich tradition of local governance, we invest in empowering local governments worldwide to build better futures for all. Established in 2001, we focus on practical and innovative solutions that enhance the capacity and resilience of local governments.

VNG International designs and manages large, complex projects across a variety of sectors, collaborating with a diverse range of donors, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Commission, World Bank, and USAID. We take pride in our ISO-9001 certified quality management system, which underpins our commitment to high standards and client satisfaction. Our success is driven by our ability to combine local expertise with international knowledge, enabling us to implement solutions that are both practical and effective.

Together with local governments and their citizens, we are creating resilient, thriving communities that are equipped to face the future. At VNG International, we are not just building projects—we are building better futures for all.

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Executive summary

The Local Inclusion Agenda (LIA) methodology supports municipalities and their partners in making inclusion a core element of local governance. Disability inclusion is the primary entry point of this toolkit, reflecting its origins in the UNCRPD (United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities). The approach is designed for broader use. The LIA is a general, practical tool that can be applied to any group at risk of exclusion. It can also be used in contexts where participation, accessibility, and equity must be strengthened.

This LIA toolkit brings together the essential components of the LIA methodology, including its conceptual foundations, six-domain Index, and 11-step Roadmap. It also includes LIA Action Cards used for planning, monitoring, and joint decision-making. It draws on lessons from Dutch municipalities as well as international pilots in Burundi, Ethiopia, and South Sudan. It shows how the approach can be adapted to different governance systems and resource environments.

The LIA toolkit is designed as both a planning instrument and a learning resource. It can be used to develop or update inclusion agendas, facilitate dialogue, strengthen cooperation, and monitor progress. Its flexible structure supports local authorities in making inclusion a sustained part of everyday governance, rather than a standalone project.

VNG International offers the LIA as a practical service to municipalities, programmes, and development partners, seeking to institutionalise inclusion. For this purpose, VNG International offers training, facilitation, technical guidance, and peer-to-peer learning. In that way, VNG International supports local governments in embedding the LIA into planning cycles, sector strategies, and programme designs. This service approach ensures that the LIA becomes a living, adaptable methodology, which is relevant to disability inclusion but also gender, youth, migration, and intersectional inequalities.

Abbreviations

CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DMC(s)	Disability Mainstreaming Committee(s)
HR	Human Resources
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
IT	Information Technology
LIA	Local Inclusion Agenda
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OPD	Organisation of Persons with Disabilities
PWD(s)	Persons with Disabilities(s)
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SROI	Social Return on Investment
UCLG	United Cities and Local Governments
ULIA	Universal guidelines of Local Inclusion Agenda
UNCRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
WHO	World Health Organization

Definitions

Accessibility

The removal of physical, digital, communication, and institutional barriers so everyone can participate equally.

Disability Inclusion

The meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in all aspects of society on an equal basis with others.

Inclusion

The practice of ensuring that all people can participate fully and equally in society.

Local Inclusion Agenda

A participatory process and action plan that helps local governments make policies, services, and public spaces more inclusive.

“Nothing about us without us”

The principle that persons with disabilities must be actively involved in decisions, policies, and actions that affect their lives.

Organisation of Persons with Disabilities

An organisation led, governed, and represented by persons with disabilities to promote their rights and interests.

UNCRPD

An international human rights treaty that promotes, protects, and ensures the full and equal rights of persons with disabilities.



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Section 1. Introduction

Inclusion is everyone's business and responsibility. In every country and community, different groups of people are excluded from fully participating in society. Inclusion is a fundamental principle of good governance and a condition for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)¹. Local governments play a crucial role in ensuring that all people can participate in political, social and economic life. Still, many groups continue to experience barriers to participation and recognition. Persons with disabilities in particular face persistent obstacles in accessing services, navigating public spaces, influencing decisions and exercising their rights. According to the World Health Organization, more than one billion people, or 1 in 6 globally, live with a disability². This number is even higher in contexts affected by conflict, poverty or fragile health systems, where risks of disability-related exclusion are often underestimated.³

This toolkit focuses specifically on disability inclusion. Persons with disabilities often experience structural, intersecting, and frequently overlooked barriers. Their situation provides a clear and urgent entry point for strengthening inclusive governance. The principles, tools and participatory processes at the heart of the LIA can also be applied to other groups at risk of exclusion. This includes women and girls, older persons, youth, people with a migration background, and those facing socio-economic inequalities. Disability inclusion therefore serves as a practical starting point for creating a wider culture of inclusion.

Although many national and international frameworks, including the UNCRPD, emphasise the rights of persons with disabilities, local implementation often remains uneven. Municipalities and district authorities may face challenges such as limited awareness, lack of resources, or fragmented responsibilities. As a result, inclusion initiatives may be ad hoc or dependent on individual leadership rather than embedded in systems. Local authorities frequently need practical guidance on how to translate rights and commitments into concrete actions, policies and institutional arrangements.

1. *United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), Principles of Effective Governance for Sustainable Development (New York: United Nations, 2018)*

2. *World Health Organization, Disability and Health, Fact Sheet, updated 2023.*

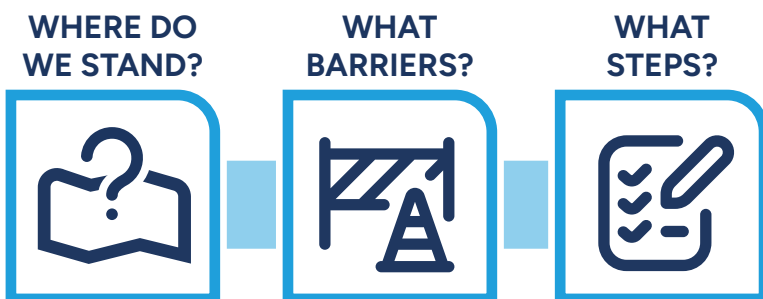
3. *UNHCR, Disability among Refugees and Conflict-affected Populations (Geneva: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2019)*

The LIA responds to local authorities' need for practical guidance. It provides a structured yet flexible process that helps municipalities identify barriers, set shared priorities, engage with communities and Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs), and embed inclusion in everyday governance. The LIA does not replace existing plans or strategies. Instead, it strengthens them by ensuring that inclusion becomes an organising principle for local development, decision-making and service delivery. The LIA grounds inclusion in a participatory, iterative and practical process. In that way, it supports local authorities in turning values into action and making inclusion a sustained responsibility, rather than a one-off project.

More than a product or still document, the LIA is a process. It is a shared pathway that builds awareness, creates trust, clarifies priorities, and empowers change through local leadership. **Rather than copying a Dutch model, this toolkit focuses on translation, not transplantation, ensuring every LIA is rooted in local realities and responsive to local needs.**

At its core, the LIA supports local governments and communities answer three key questions:

1. Where do we stand in terms of inclusion?
2. What barriers are persons with disabilities facing?
3. What concrete steps can we take, starting now, to remove these barriers and build an inclusive society?





The We Are Able! (WaA!) programme¹ was implemented in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda to empower persons with disabilities to advocate for their right to food, land, and livelihood opportunities. It ensures their active participation in decision-making processes, enabling them to provide for themselves and their families, and be valued members of their communities.

1. The We are Able! (WaA!) programme was a 5-year strategic partnership funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and implemented with ZOA, African Disability Forum, SeeYou, Leprosy Mission International, The Hague Academy for Local Governance and VNG International from 2021-2025.

Section 2. What is the Local Inclusion Agenda?

A Local Inclusion Agenda (LIA) is a public authority's action plan for making its policies, services and environment more inclusive and accessible to all. It provides a structured way for municipalities to identify barriers, set priorities, and act together with the community. It places particular emphasis on the lived experiences and expertise of persons with disabilities. The LIA helps local authorities translate commitment to the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities into concrete steps, within their existing policy and planning cycles.

A Local Inclusion Agenda is a public authority's action plan for making its policies and services accessible to all, developed together with the community, especially Persons with Disabilities.

The LIA was originally developed in the Netherlands, as a way for municipalities to operationalise the UNCRPD. It builds on direct dialogue and co-creation with persons with disabilities and their representative organisations, ensuring that their perspectives shape local planning.

Did you know?

- 15% of the global population lives with a disability
- Persons with disabilities are 2x more likely to experience poverty
- Less than 2% of elected officials globally live with a disability

Source: World Health Organization, 2025

The LIA brings people together around a common agenda. It helps municipalities strengthen coordination, align existing initiatives and embed inclusion within policies, programmes and administrative routines. It supports local actors in developing a shared understanding of gaps and opportunities, formulating ambitions and working jointly towards more inclusive local development. By combining participation, practical tools and institutional anchoring, the LIA offers a realistic and sustainable pathway for making inclusion part of everyday governance.



Section 3. The Local Inclusion Agenda: A Two-Sided Tool

The Local Inclusion Agenda (LIA) is both a set of commitments and a practical method for putting those commitments into action. It reflects the municipality's ambition to work towards a more inclusive society. It also provides a structured process for authorities, communities, and OPDs to identify barriers, set priorities, and monitor progress together. This dual character makes the LIA a strong instrument for embedding inclusion in everyday governance and ensuring that it becomes an integral part of planning, budgeting and service delivery.

4 CORE PRINCIPLES:

PARTICIPATION



AUTONOMY



EQUALITY



SOLIDARITY



The LIA process is guided by four core principles that reflect the values underpinning inclusive governance. **Participation** emphasises the right of persons with disabilities to influence decisions that affect their lives and highlights the importance of understanding their lived experiences and the structural barriers that can limit meaningful engagement. **Autonomy** affirms the right of persons with disabilities to make their own choices and contribute their expertise to policymaking and decision-making processes. **Equality** recognises that all individuals have the same rights and inherent value, regardless of ability, and reinforces the responsibility of public authorities to create the conditions for equal opportunities and full, effective participation. **Solidarity** frames inclusion as a shared social responsibility rather than a charitable act, underscoring the collective commitment required



to build more inclusive societies. Together, these principles ensure that the LIA remains firmly rooted in rights, dialogue, and shared responsibility.

The Roadmap: The How

The Roadmap provides the practical steps through which municipalities develop, implement and sustain their LIA. It sets out a clear and accessible sequence that helps local authorities move from awareness to action, from identifying needs to monitoring progress. Each step encourages participation and co-creation, ensuring that persons with disabilities (and other groups at risk of exclusion) are included throughout the process. The Roadmap is flexible and can be adapted to local circumstances, allowing municipalities to start where they are and to move at a pace that is feasible and meaningful for them.

The Index: The What

The Index outlines the content areas that together shape a LIA. It groups daily life into six domains that affect inclusion in a person's living environment and community:

1. Education & Development;
2. Housing and living;
3. Work & Income;
4. Leisure;
5. Transport
6. Wellbeing, Health and Support.

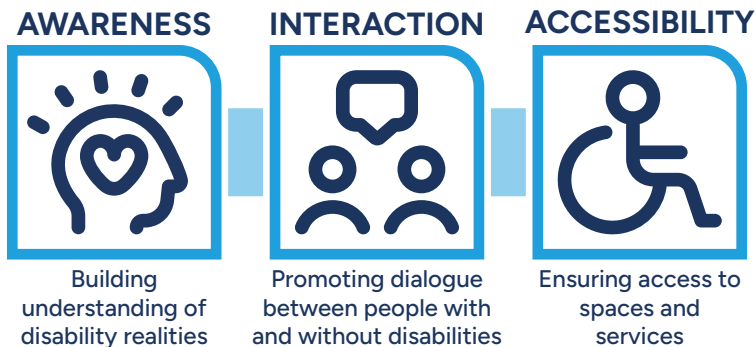
These domains help local authorities map what is already in place, identify gaps and set priorities for action. The Index does not replace existing policy instruments. Instead, it supports local authorities in looking across sectors and ensuring that inclusion is integrated into policies, plans and services. Combined with the participatory process of the Roadmap, the LIA provides a comprehensive approach to inclusive local development.

When local action addresses all areas of life, persons with disabilities are no longer treated as exceptions: they become full, equal participants in society.

The LIA is anchored in a set of commitments and principles that guide its implementation in practice. At its foundation are **three key commitments** that serve as preconditions for effective inclusion:

- **Awareness**, which involves building understanding among public officials, citizens, and institutions about the lived experiences of persons with disabilities and the value of inclusive planning;
- **Interaction**, which promotes ongoing dialogue between people with and without disabilities to challenge assumptions, shift perspectives, and foster the social model;
- **Accessibility**, which ensures that physical, digital, and procedural barriers are removed so that everyone can use, understand, and participate in public spaces and access services.

KEY COMMITMENTS



The strength of the Local Inclusion Agenda (LIA) methodology lies in its universality and applicability across diverse legal, political, and cultural contexts. From Dutch municipalities to rural communities in South Sudan, and anywhere else in the world.

These commitments are guided by **four principles** that reflect the values behind inclusive governance:

- **Participation**, as the right to influence and partake into decision-making that affect them;
- **Equality**, recognising that all individuals have the same rights and inherent value, regardless of ability;
- **Solidarity**, which frames inclusion as a shared social responsibility rather than a charitable act;
- **Autonomy**, affirming that Persons with disabilities must have the freedom and control to make decisions about their own lives.

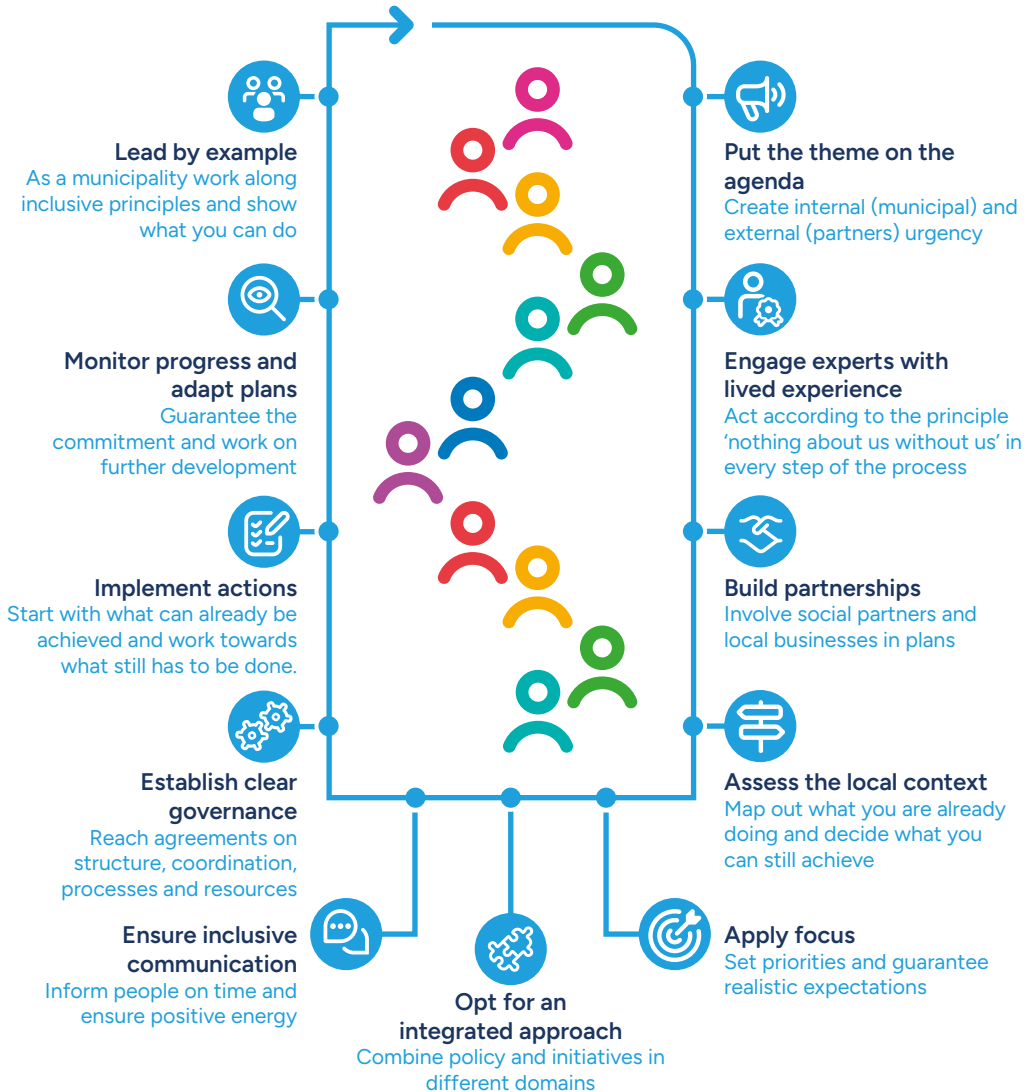
Together, these commitments and principles create a framework for a **governance culture** that is inclusive, equitable, and empowering.



What truly sets the LIA apart is its **ability to translate the principles of inclusion into everyday local governance**, not through top-down mandates, but through genuine, bottom-up engagement. Designed and led by persons with disabilities, the LIA is rooted in lived experience and shaped by local realities.

Ultimately, the LIA is a tool that turns inclusion from a distant goal into a shared practice. It redefines the role of persons with disabilities in society: not as recipients of support, but **as equal partners in building more inclusive, responsive, and resilient communities**.

ROADMAP TO A LOCAL INCLUSION AGENDA



Section 4. The 11 Steps of the Local Inclusion Agenda

Materialising vision into action

A shared commitment to inclusion is an important starting point, but meaningful change requires a clear and structured process. The 11-step LIA Roadmap provides practical guidance for translating inclusive values into concrete decisions, services, and institutional practices at the local level. It offers municipalities and their partners a common framework for identifying barriers, setting priorities, taking action, and monitoring progress, while ensuring the active involvement of persons with disabilities and their representative organisations throughout the process.

The strength of the roadmap lies in its flexibility. Municipalities can enter the cycle at any stage, depending on their context and existing initiatives, and adapt the sequence of steps to local priorities and timelines. Tested and refined in both Dutch municipalities and through the We Are Able! programme in six African countries, the roadmap has proven effective in strengthening collaboration, building trust, and supporting the development of sustainable inclusion plans.

Together, the 11 steps form a continuous cycle of participation, reflection, and improvement. By embedding inclusion within existing planning and decision-making processes, the roadmap helps local governments move beyond one-off initiatives and build an inclusive way of working that strengthens over time.

For a detailed explanation and examples of the 11 steps, see Annex 1.

Lessons from the Netherlands:

The Local Inclusion Agenda (LIA) has been shaped through the experience of Dutch municipalities since the ratification of the UNCRPD. Municipalities were encouraged to develop their own LIAs and to work directly with persons with disabilities and their representative organisations. Over time, this has generated a rich body of practical insights on what enables inclusive local governance.

A first lesson highlights the value of cooperation with experience experts and Organisations for Persons with Disabilities (OPDs). Their involvement made inclusion more concrete and helped local authorities understand barriers that may be overlooked from within the administration. Advisory groups, regular consultations and joint working sessions supported co-creation and strengthened trust.

Secondly, municipalities also learned that an integrated approach is essential.



The existence and active implementation of a Local Inclusion Agenda foster this transversal approach. Embedding inclusion in existing planning instruments, budgets and policy frameworks proved more effective than setting up separate projects. The LIA encouraged departments to work together, align their initiatives and link their efforts to shared ambitions across the six Index domains.

A third lesson concerns the importance of political and administrative commitment. Municipalities that clearly prioritised inclusion, allocated responsibilities and created coordination structures were able to move from awareness to concrete action more effectively. Leadership helped ensure continuity, even when staff or political priorities changed.

Monitoring and follow-up formed another key lesson. Municipalities that created mechanisms to track progress, review actions and report openly were better able to maintain momentum. They also adjust their plans when needed. Continuous monitoring strengthened transparency and accountability, both internally and towards the community.

Where municipalities have embraced the LIA, several tangible outcomes are emerging:

- Adjustments in local policies, budgets, or service delivery.
- Stronger cooperation with OPDs and civil society.
- Inclusion embedded in local development and planning documents.

Dutch municipalities found that working with the LIA fosters a culture of learning. Inclusion develops over time rather than through one-off measures. Municipalities that approached the LIA as an iterative process were able to gradually improve their practices. They draw lessons from successes and challenges and learn from each other through peer exchange.

Lessons from We Are Able!: Contextualising The Local Inclusion Agenda

Through the We Are Able! Partnership, a five-year-programme that helps persons with a disability achieve a sustainable, fully-fledged place in their community, so that they have greater food security. The LIA was introduced and adapted in several African countries. These experiences show how the LIA can be applied in diverse governance systems and resource environments. Its participatory approach supports inclusive local development. Although contexts differ, several shared lessons emerge from Burundi, Ethiopia and South Sudan.



Burundi: anchoring inclusion in a changing local governance landscape

In Burundi, the LIA was implemented in four communes. At that time, the country was undergoing major administrative reform, reducing 119 communes to 42. This restructuring created both challenges and opportunities. The LIA helped communes strengthen collaboration with OPDs, improve internal coordination, and integrate inclusion into planning processes. Regular dialogue between authorities and OPDs increased understanding of barriers faced by persons with disabilities and led to more responsive local actions.

The experience also showed that sustainability depends on developing simple monitoring mechanisms. It also depends on ensuring that commitments are carried forward during administrative handovers. The LIA encouraged communes to document decisions and actions more systematically. This will be essential for scaling the approach across the new administrative map once early results are consolidated.

Ethiopia: adapting the LIA to a federal and decentralised system

In Ethiopia, the LIA was applied in a federal context where responsibilities for social inclusion are divided across multiple levels of government. The approach helped clarify roles between local authorities and community structures and supported districts in identifying their priorities within the six Index domains. Close collaboration with OPDs and community leaders made it possible to shape local agendas based on lived experience.

The process highlighted the importance of flexibility. Security dynamics, local capacity differences and administrative complexity required adapting the pace and format of LIA activities. Despite these challenges, local authorities recognised the value of a structured and participatory approach.

It was especially useful for organising dialogue, coordinating departments, and building ownership of inclusion priorities. This even led to the setting up of the so called “Disability Mainstreaming Committees (DMCs)” in local governments.



South Sudan: building inclusive practices in fragile and humanitarian settings

In South Sudan, the LIA was introduced in a context marked by fragility, humanitarian response and limited resources. Local governments and community actors found the LIA useful for structuring discussions on inclusion. Furthermore, it was useful to clarify how persons with disabilities could be more actively involved in planning and service delivery. Working with OPDs increased visibility of disability issues and helped authorities better understand local needs.

The South Sudan experience showed that the LIA can function as a capacity-building tool in settings where local governance structures are still developing. Facilitators played an important role in guiding dialogue, strengthening coordination and ensuring that inclusion was linked to broader community priorities. Even in difficult circumstances, the LIA offered a practical entry point for building trust and improving collaboration between authorities, OPDs and civil society.

Overall lessons

Across countries, several common lessons emerged. The LIA provides a flexible framework that can be adapted to different levels of institutional maturity. Co-creation with OPDs strengthens the relevance of local plans and enhances trust between authorities and communities. Challenges remain, including limited funding, staff turnover, and uneven participation. Still, the Ethiopian and South Sudanese experience show the LIA can be adapted to low-resource contexts. It can also function in complex, post-conflict settings by building on existing governance structures rather than creating new ones. The model has helped translate national commitments on disability rights into local practice, it shows that when inclusion is institutionalised, it becomes both achievable and sustainable.

Challenges in Implementing the Local Inclusion Agenda

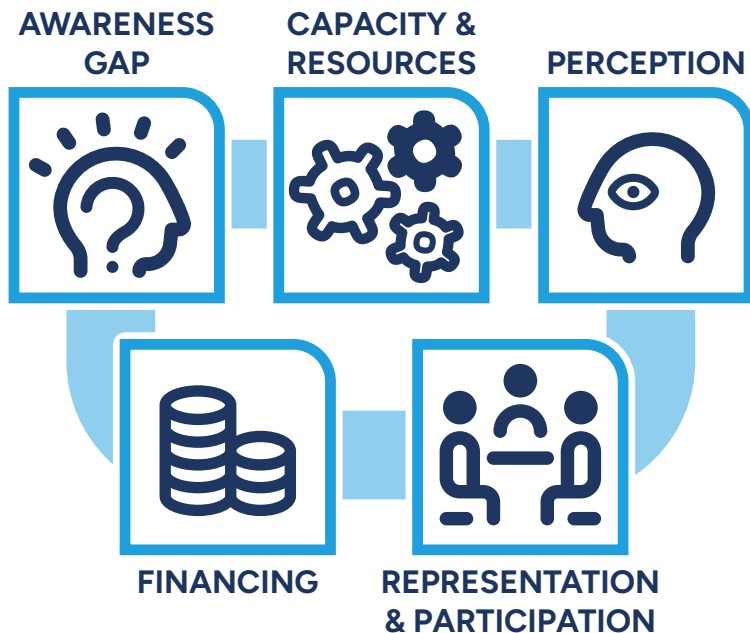
Experience from the Netherlands and other countries shows that translating inclusion principles into practice is not without obstacles. While the LIA provides a clear framework, its implementation depends heavily on local awareness, capacity, and political will. Several recurring challenges have emerged from the field:

1. **Awareness gap:** Some municipalities remain unaware that developing a Local Inclusion Agenda is not only good practice but also a legal obligation under UNCRPD in the Netherlands. Without national enforcement or incentives, progress often relies on the commitment of a few motivated officials or local champions.
2. **Limited capacity and resources:** Even where there is awareness, municipal staff frequently cite limited time, technical expertise, or funding as barriers. Competing priorities can delay or dilute inclusion efforts, particularly when there is no dedicated budget line for accessibility or participation.
3. **Perception problem:** Some local governments believe they already address accessibility and inclusion informally and therefore see little need to formalize these efforts in an official agenda. This perception can lead to complacency and missed opportunities for systematic change.
4. **Financing and incentives:** Because inclusion efforts are often locally mandated but nationally incentivized, municipalities sometimes question why there is no earmarked funding from the central government. This uncertainty can hinder planning and implementation unless alternative financing mechanisms, such as grants, partnerships, or social return agreements, are in place.
5. **Representation and participation:** In communities without strong OPDs, municipalities may wrongly assume there are “no persons with disabilities” in their area. This invisibility bias excludes those most affected and undermines the participatory foundations of the LIA.

Together, these challenges highlight that achieving inclusive local governance requires more than policy guidance. It demands **ongoing advocacy, capacity development, and partnership-building to ensure that inclusion becomes**

embedded in the daily practice of government.

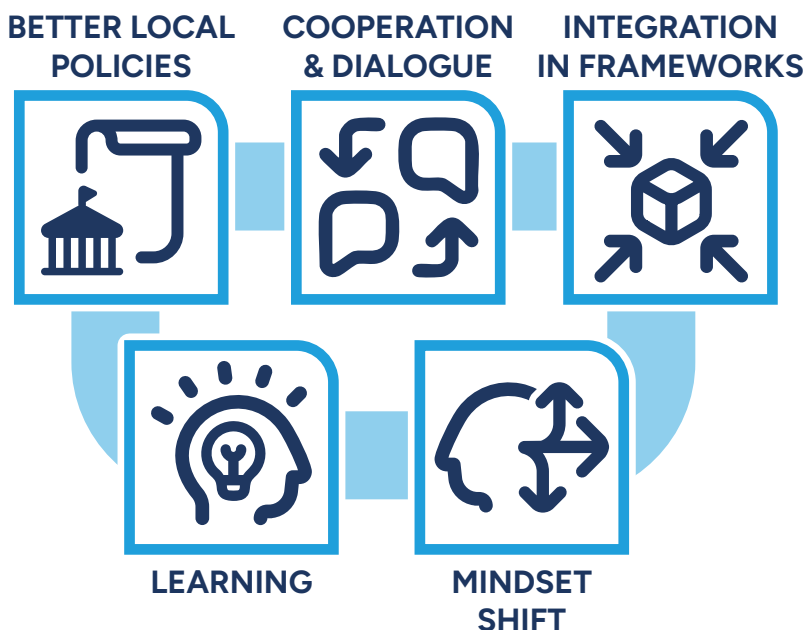
Key Achievements of the Local Inclusion



Agenda

Where LIAs have been developed and implemented, they have proven to be a strong driver of change. Municipalities that embraced the approach report more inclusive policies, stronger partnerships, and a gradual shift in how local governance is understood and practiced. Rather than being perceived as a bureaucratic exercise, the LIA has acted as a catalyst for learning, cooperation, and institutional renewal.

A key achievement has been the improvement of local policies and service delivery. Through the LIA process, municipalities reviewed existing plans, budgets and regulations with an inclusion lens. In doing so, they identified barriers that had previously gone unnoticed. This has resulted in concrete changes, such as more accessible public buildings, redesigned transport routes and more inclusive employment and communication practices. Many of these improvements came not from major investments but from integrating inclusion systematically into everyday planning.



The LIA has also strengthened cooperation and dialogue between local governments, OPDs and civil society. It has created structured spaces where lived experience directly informs municipal action. Advisory panels, participatory workshops and regular consultations have helped institutionalise participation and build trust between authorities and communities. This culture of dialogue has become essential to sustaining inclusion.

Another important development is the integration of inclusion into local planning frameworks. Municipalities now embed inclusion objectives in multi-annual plans, budgets, and strategies. Disability inclusion is becoming a cross-cutting principle across housing, mobility, education, information, and governance. This mainstreaming turns inclusion into both a shared vision and a practical component of daily municipal work.

The LIA has also triggered a continuous learning process. Municipal teams use the approach to reflect on progress, share lessons and adjust strategies. In the Netherlands, municipalities have organised peer learning sessions and friendly competitions to highlight inclusive innovations. This reinforces the idea that progress is achievable and worth celebrating. This peer exchange has encouraged replication and scale-up.

Perhaps the most significant achievement is the shift in mindset that the LIA process brings. As inclusion becomes anchored in routines and structures, local governments begin to see it as part of their core business. It is no longer viewed as an additional task, but to strengthen governance overall. Inclusion improves accountability, transparency and service quality for all citizens. This change in perspective helps secure long-term ownership and makes inclusion more resilient to political transitions.

Taken together, these achievements show that the LIA is not simply a compliance framework but a transformative process. It supports municipalities in building inclusive institutions, fostering genuine participation and delivering tangible improvements in people's lives. When locally owned, inclusion becomes both practical and sustainable.

Sustaining the Local Inclusion Agenda through Disability Mainstreaming Committees (DMCs)

Ensuring the sustainability of the LIA is central to transforming it into a permanent feature of local governance. Pilots have shown that only then inclusion becomes lasting. This requires both systems and people: formal structures that hold the agenda together, and empowered actors who can carry it forward.

Many municipalities have found that creating **Disability Mainstreaming Committees (DMCs)**, or similar cross-sectoral bodies, is a practical way to secure continuity. These committees bring together departments, OPDs, and community representatives to coordinate implementation, share lessons, and monitor progress. By assigning clear responsibilities, documenting actions, and maintaining dialogue, they prevent inclusion from fading once external support or political attention shifts.

At the same time, **capacity development** is vital for sustainability. Training local staff, OPDs, and community facilitators ensures that inclusion principles and skills are retained within institutions. When knowledge stays local, momentum continues. The LIA also encourages **cyclical reflection and renewal**. Municipalities periodically review their inclusion agendas, assess results, and update priorities. This adaptive process transforms inclusion from a one-off plan into an evolving culture of governance.

From local experiments to systemic change: scaling up the Local Inclusion Agenda

The LIA has evolved into a tested and adaptable methodology for inclusive governance. It helps municipalities translate commitments to participation, accessibility, and equality into concrete local action. Across the Netherlands and the We Are Able! partner countries, the LIA has shown that inclusion works best when it is locally led and co-created with citizens. When embedded in municipal systems, it can strengthen institutions and bring lasting improvements to communities.

Experiences demonstrate that inclusion becomes achievable when key conditions are present: political will, cooperation with OPDs and practical guidance to operationalise commitments. For inclusion to persist, it must progress from isolated initiatives to institutional practice, from temporary project activity to an ongoing public duty. Scaling up the LIA means turning lessons from successful pilots into a structured process. This process can be replicated and adapted by any municipality to its context.

As the next step, these insights and tested practices will form the basis to develop Universal guidelines on the Local Inclusion Agenda (ULIA). ULIA will serve as a global reference framework that captures the core principles, steps, and governance conditions of the LIA. It will enable municipalities worldwide to adopt, adapt, and institutionalise inclusive practices in alignment with the UNCRPD. These global guidelines will be developed together with the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG). UCLG is the ideal partner due to its immense global reach and political legitimacy and strong experience in disability inclusion. Discussion sessions took place in early 2026 where local and regional governments, as well as representatives from OPDs, through the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) forum, discussed the relevance and implementation of the LIA worldwide.

Scaling up inclusion also requires investing in the capacities and relationships that sustain it. Sustainability begins when inclusion becomes part of a municipality's institutional identity. This happens when LIAs are formally embedded in structures, supported by stable coordination mechanisms and accompanied by clear roles and responsibilities. Many local governments have established Disability Mainstreaming Committees (DMCs) or inclusion task forces that bring departments, OPDs and community representatives together around shared goals. These bodies ensure continuity, follow up on

commitments and maintain focus beyond individual leaders or project cycles.

Capacity building is equally essential. The training-of-trainers and action-learning approach within the We Are Able! programme has equipped local officials, OPDs, and facilitators with knowledge and confidence. This enables them to continue the LIA process independently. The LIA invests in both people and systems to foster local ownership. It ensures inclusion continues through skills, relationships, and institutional memory. The institutional shift occurs when inclusion becomes part of how local authorities plan, budget and deliver services. Municipalities in the Netherlands have done this by integrating their LIAs into annual planning cycles, reporting systems and budget allocations. They have established advisory panels, community consultations and accessible communication channels. These anchor inclusion in everyday governance. In partner countries such as Burundi, Ethiopia, and South Sudan, local governments co-created LIAs with OPDs and civil society. They report stronger cooperation, clearer priorities, and higher accountability. These experiences show that inclusion must be embedded in the methods and routines of governance, instead of being treated as an isolated theme.

Scaling up the LIA is not only about replication; it is about nurturing a community of practice that learns, exchanges and adapts. The LIA provides a shared framework that can be applied in diverse settings, whether urban or rural, stable or fragile. The same methodology can support work on gender, youth, migration or other intersecting issues wherever participation and accessibility are needed.

Supportive national and international frameworks are also important for upscaling. National governments and local government associations can recognise the LIA as a legitimate planning and accountability tool. It is linked to the SDGs and the UNCRPD. Donors and partners can reinforce this by providing flexible, multi-year support aligned with the LIA cycle. They can also invest in long-term capacity rather than short-term outputs.

The LIA as a methodology and a service offered by VNG International

The LIA is emerging not only as a methodology but also as a practical service. Municipalities and other actors can draw on it to make inclusion an integral part of local governance. The LIA provides a structured process of co-

creation between governments, OPDs and communities. It is not a checklist or compliance requirement, but a flexible and participatory approach that can be adapted to different inclusion priorities.

VNG International makes this service accessible to municipalities worldwide through hands-on technical expertise. Our support includes guidance in developing a local inclusion roadmap and action plan, and training and coaching for municipal officials and OPDs.



It also includes facilitation of inclusive planning and multi-stakeholder dialogue, plus tools for monitoring and peer learning. Municipalities also gain access to a growing international network of inclusive local governments, that exchange lessons and inspire one another.

Through this service model, municipalities can access:

- A tested and adaptable roadmap for developing inclusion agendas;
- Technical guidance and facilitation tailored to their context;
- Peer-to-peer learning and structured exchanges with other municipalities;
- Tools such as the LIA Roadmap and Index for planning, benchmarking, and monitoring;
- Support to institutionalise inclusion through cycles of reflection, renewal, and accountability.

The development of ULIA will strengthen this service offer by providing universally applicable guidelines. These guidelines bring together proven LIA elements into a coherent, scalable, and globally recognised tool.

ULIA will ensure consistency across countries while allowing for contextualisation, helping local authorities align local inclusion efforts with global standards and commitments. This service vision thus ensures that the momentum created by pilot initiatives becomes a **global offer**, connecting municipalities through shared learning and mutual accountability.



Towards a Global Community of Inclusive Local Governments

The next step is to consolidate these experiences into a **global community of inclusive municipalities**. Each new LIA strengthens collective capacity for participatory, rights-based governance. Through international exchange, peer review, and joint reflection, the LIA helps bridge gaps between policy and practice. It also bridges gaps between local and global actors, and between governments and citizens. ULIA will underpin this global community by providing a shared framework for comparison, peer learning and joint progress tracking. It will act as a common language across regions, enabling municipalities to learn from each other. This will help advancing a coherent global movement for inclusive local governance.

At **VNG International**, we are committed to facilitating this transformation. Our mission is to strengthen local governments worldwide as essential actors in achieving the SDGs. We draw on decades of experience in the Netherlands and international partnerships such as We Are Able!. This allows us to continue refining and expanding the LIA as a practical, adaptable framework for inclusion. Our role is to connect, train, and accompany municipalities as they institutionalise inclusive practices. By fostering peer learning and locally owned solutions, we help make inclusion a living reality, that is sustained through systems, capacity, and collaboration.

As we look to the future, our vision is clear: to expand the LIA into a **global service and learning platform** for inclusive governance. By connecting municipalities across continents, we aim to build a shared movement. In this movement, inclusion is not an aspiration but a standard feature of governance, for and with everyone.

Annex 1. A walk through the 11 steps

1. Put the theme on the agenda: create sense of urgency towards internal and external partners.

Inclusion begins with visibility. The first step is to bring inclusion to the forefront of local discourse both within municipal structures and across the community.



- **Raise awareness** among staff and elected officials through symbolic and participatory actions (e.g., awareness events on the International Day of Persons with disabilities).
- Engage internal municipal champions and external allies early on to create **shared ownership**.
- **Involve political leaders** such as mayors, councillors, and commissioners to signal high-level commitment.
- **Form a broad working group** with a focus across the six life domains to ensure that inclusion is crosscutting from the start.

Outcome: Inclusion becomes recognised as a shared responsibility and political priority, so instead of a marginal issue or temporary project.

Commitment to inclusion (Burundi)

Local authorities publicly committed to inclusion by allocating 10% of their communal budget to disability initiatives and formally recognising OPDs as legitimate partners.

2. Engage experts with lived experience and operate according to the principle “Nothing about us without us” in every step of the process



Persons with disabilities are experts in identifying barriers and designing inclusive solutions, based on their lived experience.

- **Establish a panel or advisory group** of experts with lived experience representing diverse disabilities, ages, and backgrounds.
- Ensure both **institutional and individual representation** so that different perspectives are heard.
- Provide **training and professional development opportunities** for these experts so they can confidently engage in policy discussions.
- **Involve them at every stage**, from planning to evaluation, to operationalise the principle “Nothing about us without us”

Outcome: Decision-making processes are informed by lived experience, ensuring that inclusion policies reflect real needs, rather than assumptions.

Disability Mainstreaming Committees (Ethiopia & South Sudan)

In South Sudan the Disability Mainstreaming Committees have a seat in the discussions “below the mango tree” where local authorities and public institutions discuss pending challenges and how to budget to solve them

Disability Mainstreaming Committees (DMCs) trained over 2,000 government staff and OPD members in Ethiopia, creating a strong pool of local expertise within government structures.

Make sure you’re not only involving the “usual suspects” Call for participation via media (Ridderkerk)

Residents of Ridderkerk are invited through the media to join the Inclusion Panel. This Inclusion Panel consists of a diverse group of participants (including residents, care professionals, and civil servants) who jointly develop the Local Inclusion Agenda. The panel provides feedback on existing plans and contributes suggestions for improvement in a constructive way; it focuses on cooperation and co-creation.

3. Build partnerships: involve social partners and local businesses in plans



Inclusion requires a collective effort.

- **Build partnerships** with civil society, private sector, and social institutions, aligning their capacities and resources.
- Encourage **joint ownership of the LIA** through participatory planning sessions and shared commitments.
- Use **policy dialogue and advocacy to strengthen the enabling environment** and to align local inclusion goals with national frameworks.
- Promote **Social Return on Investment (SROI) commitments**, encouraging businesses and institutions to contribute to an inclusive society.
- **Highlight frontrunners** by, for example, organising a competition for the most accessible and inclusive stakeholders, institutions or businesses.

Outcome: Local inclusion becomes a shared agenda across public, private, and civic sectors.

Working with Partners - DRC

Partnership efforts helped 23 OPDs gain official provincial recognition. This enabled them to access financial resources, collaborate with INGOs and advocate effectively for disability rights.

Competition for the most accessible entrepreneurs (e.g., Utrecht and The Hague)

Among other municipalities, Utrecht, The Hague, and Westerveld organize local award ceremonies and/or competitions for the most accessible entrepreneurs or initiatives.

4. Assess the local context: map out what you are already doing and decide what more you can achieve



Understanding where you stand is key to knowing where to go.

- Conduct a **baseline assessment** of existing inclusion initiatives and policies.
- **Map** current activities, strengths, and gaps, with input from both municipal staff and OPDs.
- **Facilitate working sessions** with local partners and experts to define a shared vision and measurable ambitions.
- Use **participatory tools** such as stakeholder mapping, focus groups, or rapid appraisals to ground the process in evidence.

Outcome: A clear picture of the current state of inclusion, existing resources, and agreed priorities for improvement.

Setting a Local Course – Uganda

Ugandan districts used the LIA to design a five-year disability inclusion framework, which is now fully integrated into local government budgets.

5. Apply focus: set priorities and guarantee realistic expectations



Inclusion is comprehensive, but resources are not infinite.

- **Identify bottlenecks and opportunities** through participatory analysis.
- **Define priority** areas based on urgency, feasibility, and potential impact.
- **Translate priorities** into a realistic, phased action plan that can be monitored and adapted.
- **Ensure transparency** about what can be achieved immediately and what requires longer-term planning.

Outcome: Realistic goals and manageable actions build credibility and sustain momentum for inclusion.

Determine shared priorities (based on barriers and obligations)

Inventory of bottlenecks and opportunities (Doetinchem)
The Municipality of Doetinchem has organised several meetings with residents with disabilities and chronic illnesses, as well as interest groups, to identify bottlenecks. In addition, good practices, solutions, and tips were also shared.

Easy success for life-improvements (Burundi)

Municipalities identified and implemented immediate improvements. For example: constructing access ramps, prioritising persons with disabilities in service delivery, and transferring temporary land plots to OPDs for cultivation.

6. Opt for an integrated approach: combine policy and initiatives in different domains



Inclusion is not a separate policy; it must be embedded across all sectors.

- **Integrate inclusion within existing plans**, budgets, and sectoral policies (education, health, infrastructure, employment, etc.).
- Ensure that **each of the six life domains is considered** in the LIA and that cross-cutting coordination mechanisms are in place.
- **Encourage regional collaboration** between local governments to share resources and learning.
- **Promote interdepartmental/intermunicipal cooperation** to prevent duplication and fragmentation.

Outcome: Inclusion becomes a structural part of governance systems, instead of a standalone activity.

Always include inclusion in planning processes: UN Convention paragraph in decision-making (Berkelland, Dordrecht)

The municipalities of Berkelland and Dordrecht have included a fixed 'UN Convention' paragraph in the format of council and executive (B&W) policy notes.

Integrated monitoring tool (Almere)

Local governments adopted disability-sensitive monitoring tools and integrated inclusion into public service programs, from small business initiatives to social safety nets.

The success story in Breda, the Netherlands: to ensure input and integration in different domains

The municipality of Breda has made internal agreements on integrating inclusion into various actions and activities. Reviewing public spaces is included in the program “Wonen met gemak” (Living with ease). This also applies to the areas of mobility, traffic, and transport. Agreements have also been made to actively involve experts with lived experience at the start of the next pilot of the Environmental Act. The new events’ policy will address accessibility, while the sports policy framework focuses on athletes with disabilities and accessible sports facilities. The accessibility of (neighbourhood) activities will be discussed at the Theme Tables and Neighbourhood Platforms.

7. Ensure inclusive communication: inform people on time and invest in positive energy



Transparent and inclusive communication is key to participation.

- **Develop a communication plan** that explains what the municipality is doing on inclusion, using clear, accessible language.
- **Share success stories** and personal testimonies to build positive energy and inspire others.
- **Use multiple channels** (social media, radio, community meetings) to reach diverse audiences, including those with limited access to information.
- **Provide regular updates** to maintain trust and accountability.

Outcome: Residents and partners stay informed, motivated, and engaged throughout the process.

Ensure clear and accessible language: Accessible version of the LIA

Several municipalities make sure to produce an accessible version of the LIA written in more understandable language.

Radio shows for advocacy (Sudan)

Through We Are Able's awareness campaigns, OPD leaders used radio programmes, workshops and community outreach to expand disability rights awareness across Gedarf State

8. Establish clear governance: agreements on structure, coordination, processes and resources



For inclusion to last, it must be institutionally anchored.

- **Establish clear roles, responsibilities**, and coordination mechanisms within the local government.
- **Allocate human and financial resources** to manage and monitor LIA implementation.
- **Invest in capacity building** of local officials and service providers on inclusion, accessibility, and participation.
- **Work towards institutionalisation**, ensuring that inclusion is integrated into annual plans, reporting systems, and performance frameworks.

Outcome: Inclusion is embedded in institutional processes rather than dependent on individual champions.

Coordinating civil servant (Tiel)

To ensure proper integration of accessibility within the municipal organisation, the Municipality of Tiel has appointed an officer responsible for keeping the topic of accessibility active, maintaining, and enforcing it.

Work with a clear consultation structure - Steering group (Lelystad)

The Municipality of Lelystad works with a steering group that meets at least four times per year. Every six months, the chair provides a report, and if necessary, the steering group issues additional assignments.

9. Implement actions: start with what can already be achieved and work towards what still must be done



Momentum grows from action.

- **Start with feasible, visible initiatives** that demonstrate commitment and yield quick wins.
- **Encourage community-led projects** and civic initiatives that promote inclusion in daily life.
- **Document and celebrate** progress to keep motivation high.
- **Use lessons** from these early actions to adjust and **scale up**.

Outcome: Early successes build trust and demonstrate that change is possible, inspiring wider engagement.

Concrete actions in practice (Burundi)

OPDs and municipalities implemented a range of concrete initiatives. These included micro-projects like maize cultivation, community solidarity chains, support for vocational training, and inclusion in cooperatives.

10. Monitor progress and adapt

Inclusion is a journey, not a one-off project.



- Establish **mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation**, including periodic reviews and community feedback sessions.
- Incorporate inclusion goals into **multi-annual plans and budgets** to ensure sustainability.
- **Reflect** on progress, capture lessons, and adapt strategies accordingly.
- Recognise and celebrate progress to reinforce commitment.

Outcome: Continuous learning and adaptation make inclusion a permanent part of local governance.

Evaluate progress - Monitoring social impact (Breda)

The Municipality of Breda uses the Social Impact Monitor instrument to measure the social impact of activities through a participatory approach. In six steps, both intended and realised impact (including interim effects) are examined. This results in advice for possible next steps and future activities.

Embed efforts in multi-year policy- Social policy (Berkelland, the Netherlands)

The municipality of Berkelland has included policy principles for inclusive policy in several areas within the Social Domain Policy Framework. The Local Inclusion Agenda Action Plan provides a more concrete elaboration of these principles.

11. Lead by example: work along inclusive principles and show what you can do



Leadership is the most powerful message.

- **Demonstrate inclusion through municipal practices:** accessible buildings, inclusive employment policies, and accessible communication.
- Ensure that the local government's own facilities and services meet **accessibility standards**.
- Publicly **share your own learning journey**, including challenges, to encourage peer local governments.
- Recognise that being inclusive internally strengthens credibility externally.

Outcome: The local government becomes a role model, showing that inclusive governance is both possible and beneficial.

Ensure accessible municipal buildings and information

Accessible town hall (Maastricht)

The Municipality of Maastricht improves the accessibility of its town hall, including through the installation of automatic sliding doors.

Quiet service desk (Almere)

The Municipality of Almere has set up a service desk in the town hall that offers a quiet space for people with non-congenital brain injuries (NAH), mild intellectual disabilities, people from mental health services, or other vulnerable groups. They can take their time to handle matters in peace.

Be an inclusive employer - Diversity policy (Utrecht)

Through the project Diversity, the Municipality of Utrecht works on diversity and inclusion within its municipal HR policy. This also includes opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities or long-term mental health conditions. Funded by the Labour Market and Training Fund (A+O fund), the municipality runs a targeted internal training project for managers. This project promotes diversity using a broad definition of the term.

These 11 steps are not just a checklist but **a cycle of change**. Together they guide local authorities, OPDs, and civil society in co-creating communities where everyone belongs and contributes.



Annex 2. The Local Inclusion Agenda Action Card

The Local Inclusion Agenda becomes real when ideas turn into concrete actions that people can see and experience. The **LIA Action Cards** are practical tools that help municipalities and their partners translate each step of the roadmap into daily practice. They make inclusion visible linking issues to solutions, responsibilities, and measurable outcomes. Each entry in the card captures a small, achievable action co-created with citizens and Organizations of Persons with Disabilities. It serves as a living record of progress. By using these cards, local teams can plan collaboratively, track implementation, and celebrate results. This ensures that inclusion moves from commitment to action, one step at a time. The Action Cards not only support implementation but also function as a simple monitoring and learning framework, allowing teams to track results, reflect on challenges, and adjust plans collaboratively.

Domain / Theme	Issue Identified	Planned Action	Responsible Stakeholder	Budget (est.)	Timeline	Progress Measure
Public Space & Facilities	Limited accessibility of municipal buildings	Conduct joint accessibility audit with OPDs and create 1-year improvement plan	Urban Planning Dept. & OPD Panel	€5,000	Q1–Q2	% of public buildings meeting accessibility standards
Mobility & Transport	Inaccessible public transport stops	Install ramps, tactile paving, and visual signage at 10 key bus stops	Public Works & Transport Dept.	€15,000	Q2–Q4	# of stops upgraded; user satisfaction surveys with PWD commuters
Education & Lifelong Learning	Children with disabilities excluded from community schools	Partner with school board to pilot inclusive classrooms and train teachers	Education Dept. & School Board	€8,000	School Year	# of teachers trained; enrolment of children with disabilities
Employment & Livelihood	Low representation of persons with disabilities in municipal workforce	Introduce inclusive hiring policy and internship program for Persons with Disabilities.	HR Dept.	€3,000	6 months	# of PWDs employed; policy adopted in HR manual
Information & Communication	Public information not accessible to people with visual or hearing impairments	Redesign municipal website for accessibility, and produce sign-language videos	Communication Dept. & IT Office	€6,000	Q3–Q4	Accessibility score; # of accessible videos published

Domain / Theme	Issue Identified	Planned Action	Responsible Stakeholder	Budget (est.)	Timeline	Progress Measure
Participation & Decision-Making	OPDs not regularly engaged in planning	Formalise an Inclusion Advisory Panel with quarterly meetings and co-creation workshops	Social Affairs Dept.	€2,500	Q1–Q4	# of meetings held; % of LIA actions co-designed with OPDs
Housing & Urban Planning	New housing projects ignore accessibility	Amend local building codes to include universal design standards	Urban Development Dept.	Within resources	12 months	Code revised; # of building permits complying with standards
Community Awareness & Social Inclusion	Stigma and low awareness about disability inclusion	Run awareness campaign with OPDs, for example on International Day of Persons with Disabilities	OPD Coalition & Municipal Comms Team	€4,000	December	# of events held; community perception surveys
Climate & Resilience (Cross-cutting)	Emergency plans not inclusive of persons with disabilities	Develop inclusive disaster response plan; map PWD households for early warnings	Disaster Management Office	€10,000	9 months	Plan approved; # of PWDs included in response registry
Institutional Capacity & Governance	Staff lack skills to implement inclusion	Conduct training for municipal staff on inclusive governance and the LIA methodology	HR Dept. & VNG/THA	€5,000	Every 6 months	# of staff trained; pre/post-training assessments



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