

ACTIVATE is an Erasmus+ funded project that will be managed between six partner organisations - **ACTIVATE** - which stands for '**Autistic Community through Advocacy, Learning and Empowerment**' - will develop a tailor-made curriculum designed specifically for an autistic advocacy school for autistic youth, equipping them with the knowledge and skills to become effective self-advocates.

The six partnering entities are from four European countries, Portugal, Belgium, Malta and the Czech Republic. Led by Malta's **Directorate for Disability Issues (DDI)** with the Ministry for Inclusion and the Voluntary Sector as project leaders, the various partners will be responsible for the respective work packages, with the **Belgian University KU Leuven (KUL)** responsible for developing a research methodology on autistic youth's learning preferences and the necessary adaptations for inclusive learning processes. Portuguese organization **IMPACTsci** will develop the curriculum framework and learning outcomes in collaboration with all partners. **The European Council of Autistic People (EUCAP)** will manage the stakeholder engagement workshops while Portuguese NGO **Associação Portuguesa Voz Do Autista Portugal (APVA)** will lead the work on digital advocacy. **The Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability in Malta (CRPD)** will be responsible for the overall communication strategy and to coordinate project awareness. The project started in January 2024 and will run for two years.

Autistic youth participating in the project will be given the opportunity to implement their new advocacy skills through stakeholder engagement workshops, including with policymakers and advocacy organisations, targeting improved practices across Europe.

Facilitators will also be trained in the autistic advocacy school curriculum (Train-the-trainer) to ensure the continuation of the project legacy. The project also includes a final conference, to be held in Malta in 2026, and an extensive digital advocacy campaign.

The curriculum for the advocacy school will be developed by the partners themselves, taking into consideration the findings of a research component on autistic youth learning preferences, which also forms part of the project. Other project milestones include an EU Autistic CoP (Community of Practice) for youth and awareness webinars.

Throughout the process, autistic youth will be at the centre of the project, both when devising the frameworks, testing and eventually implementing them, in line with the disability maxim of '**Nothing About Us Without Us**' and ensuring that the insights and needs of the community are at the project's heart.

The motivation behind the project is based on a pressing need to address the marginalized position of autistic youth within advocacy, policy-making and societal participation.

'The Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability is delighted to form part of this innovative project with our Maltese and European partners which will focus on empowering autistic youth to become proactive self-advocates,' said CRPD Commissioner Rhoda Garland.

Sara Rocha, President of the **Associação Portuguesa Voz Do Autista Portugal (APVA)** stated '**ACTIVATE fits with our continuous work of providing space and a platform for the voices of autistic people in**

advocacy and policy, and we look forward to leveraging this project to empower more underrepresented autistic people into political participation.'

Gert-Jan Vanaken, Project Manager on behalf of the **Belgian University KU Leuven (KUL)** stated *'that this project fits very well with research lines on participatory autism research which aims to contribute to autistic emancipation in society and that we are glad to contribute with a variety of partners beyond the walls of the university to fulfill this.'*

Heta Pukki, President of the **European Council of Autistic People (EUCAP)** said: *'ACTIVATE aims to serve very real and urgent needs that we see in the work of our member organizations throughout Europe. We are looking forward to putting the results to use on a wide scale, beyond the end of the project, for many years to come, encouraging young autistic voices and creating more opportunities for them to be heard where they can make a difference.'*

Andreia Morgado, **IMPACTsci** Director stated *'that as social enterprise with the unique mission of developing innovative, inclusive educational methodologies and tools specifically designed for neurodivergent learners, which was founded by a neurodivergent woman, is deeply committed to advocating for and supporting individuals with diverse neurotypes in this project.'*

Gregory Ellul, Director DDI also stated that *'the **Directorate for Disability Issues** which forms part of the Ministry for Inclusion and the Voluntary sector is honoured to be the lead in this project. We look forward to meeting and working with autistic youth and hope that the outcomes of this project lead to their active participation in the various fora.'*