

## L'Arche International | COSP19 Statement | June 2026

L'Arche International is a global federation of over 160 communities across 37 countries and five continents. We envision a world where everyone belongs – with dignity, rights, opportunity, and community. L'Arche International submits this statement in contribution to the conversation on Sub-theme 3: From participation to representation: enhancing accessible civic engagement, leadership and advocacy in political and public life.

### Participation must lead to representation

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) affirms the right of persons with disabilities to participate fully and effectively in political and public life.<sup>1</sup> Yet people with intellectual and developmental disabilities still face barriers to meaningfully participate and lead in public conversations and decision-making processes.<sup>2</sup> People with intellectual and developmental disabilities must have access and appropriate supports to help shape the society we live in.

### Building pathways for expression

Expression can take many forms, and advocacy must not be limited to traditional methods of verbal or written communication. **Partnering on creative, inclusive initiatives extends access for more people to communicate, influence, and lead.** Arts-based initiatives – storytelling and advocacy through photography, theatre, music, and other creative forms of engagement can create opportunities for more people to be seen and heard in society. The arts are a powerful vehicle for visibility and can offer insight into personal lived experience, shed light on structures and systems, deliver key messages, and invite understanding and a change of heart and mind.<sup>3</sup> Presenting through creative means at forums such as COSP is one example of accessible civic engagement.

### We must invest in access

Support must prioritize relationships, trusted networks, and resources. Participation grows when people engage together. **Engagement can flourish when communities are built on shared belonging rather than one-directional support.** Likewise, when government and civil society work together, we can extend access through creative community initiatives and leadership development. **As part of this, training and mentorship are also key for increased engagement in civic and public life.**<sup>4</sup>

### Addressing Stigma Through Visibility

Stigma and invisibility continue to prevent many people from being recognized as contributors. **Valuing all forms of participation will promote engagement and leadership development.** Raising awareness of ways society might unintentionally block or discourage engagement is an essential step for true change. The more people share their voice in creative ways, the more we help challenge assumptions about listening, dialogue, and decision-making. When people are seen, heard, and valued in public life through creative avenues, the more advocacy and leadership can be developed. **Representation matters not only because people have rights, but because society benefits from the contributions, creativity, and perspectives of every person.**

### We Must Prioritize Belonging and Shared Participation

Community and human connection are essential foundations for great leadership and social transformation. In a time when global reports warn of growing loneliness and social isolation, ensuring inclusion is more important than ever.<sup>5</sup> We must work together to ensure no person is left behind, a world where every voice is heard and everyone belongs.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations. (2006). Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Article 29. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-persons-disabilities>

<sup>2</sup> United Nations. (2018). United Nations Flagship Report on Disability and Development. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/publication-disability-sdgs.html>

<sup>3</sup> UNESCO. (2006). Road Map for Arts Education. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/>

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (2021). Disability and Development Report. <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/disability>

<sup>5</sup> World Health Organization. (2025). From Loneliness to Social Connection: Charting a Path to Healthier Societies. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/978240112360>