

DARE Practical Guide for Inclusion

The **DARE Practical Guide for Inclusion**

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Foreword

Welcome to the DARE Practical Guide for Inclusion!

This publication is the result of the two-year strategic partnership DARE: DisAble the barRiErs funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union. The aim is to design, develop and share innovative practices and experiences of inclusion within the context of international youth exchanges. We, the authors, represent a consortium of five partner organisations from Italy, Greece, Poland and Germany. To expand on our unique and varied approaches to international youth work, we believe it necessary to explore crucial aspects of inclusion in the planning and implementing of international mobilities.

Through our active involvement in the many aspects of international youth work, we are convinced that everyone deserves a fair share of opportunities in life. Unfortunately, many young people are disadvantaged by the lack of inclusive facilities and strategies, and are unable to participate equally in social life. Our aim in the DARE project is to change this by promoting inclusion in international youth work. Through this partnership we are working to empower more disabled and impaired young people to get involved and participate. Additionally, we would like to share our experiences with other youth organisations and youth workers in order to foster more inclusive projects. The Dare Practical Guide for Inclusion is one of the project's many outputs and particularly addresses those who organise, implement and coordinate international youth mobilities.

We have a broad perspective on inclusion and are convinced that no one, regardless of perceived abilities, should be excluded from these processes. Our primary target group in the DARE project are young people with visual, hearing and physical impairments. The perspectives and insights that we share are thoroughly adaptable and should convey a diversity-oriented attitude.

In the five chapters of this guide, we share information and practical aspects of accessible, inclusive activities, which we believe can support and empower facilitators and youth workers during the implementation. Although, in this guide, we focus on international youth exchanges, we believe these insights will contribute to a more expansive mindset of inclusion throughout society.

Thank you for your interest in our publication. Please acknowledge, that the information introduced in the DARE Practical Guide for Inclusion is by no means complete and will continue to expand with every new group.

Enjoy reading and promoting inclusive activities!



Language and terminology used in this publication

Facilitator

This guide is addressed to youth organisations, youth workers, project managers and all those who want to bring more inclusive structures into youth work. In this publication, we use the term "facilitator" which is widely used in non-formal education. Being in the role of a facilitator means to both moderate a process and take care that everyone is involved. Facilitators guide the participants in learning and development and assist them in achieving common goals. (Schools for Future Youth, 2018).

Inclusion

The term inclusion used in this publication, refers to an environment where all people, regardless of their attributes or abilities, actively participate in daily life. With inclusion, there should be no barriers or inhibitions. Diversity should be perceived as the norm.

In this publication we focus primarily on the engagement of disabled youth who participate in international inclusive youth exchanges. We do, however, attempt to address participants who, though not disabled, experience other forms of discrimination. Intersectionality, i.e. the overlapping of multiple types of discrimination toward one individual, is taken into account throughout the text. Having said that, the authors cannot claim this publication to be free of all discrimination.

PwVHPI

This acronym stands for People with visual, hearing and physical impairments. Although the authors maintain consideration for all people, young PwVHPIs are the primary target group of this guide.

Language

It is well known that language is a vital and powerful tool that shapes our reality and the way we think. The use of sensitive and non-discriminatory language is of great importance to the authors.

In the context of inclusion, the people-first language (PFL) is often preferred. It is a type of linguistic prescription which puts a person before their diagnosis and therefore recognizes them as a "person with a disability" or a "person with autism".

However, there are those who argue that their disability is not inside or with them, but shaped by society or the environment. With this argument

they prefer identity-first language (IFL) and use the term "disabled person" or "autistic person".

In this view, it is clear to us that people are disabled due to external factors like the lack of accessible environments. In the scope of this publication we use the identity-first language most often.

(more: [see Chapter 1](#)).

Gender-inclusive language

Another consideration in our chosen language is the appropriate use of gender forms. By using gender-inclusive wording, we aim to avoid gender stereotypes and discrimination against any particular sex, social gender or gender identity. In this publication, any reference to gender is made with the gender asterisk, as in "she*he". This format suggests that the word/label is non-binary and will appeal to persons of any gender identity.

Special needs

Although this wording is often used to refer to people with impairments, we avoid it in the language we use. Though the needs of disabled people are individual and specific regarding their disability, there is nothing special about them.

Accessibility

We minimize the use of the description "barrier-free", as we do not believe, that absolute barrier-free environments can exist. What might be barrier-free for one person can, at the same time, pose a challenge or even exclude another person.

For this reason, accessibility must be achieved on an individual level. The authors are aware of this fact and therefore prefer the term "accessible".

International Mobilities

Within the Erasmus+ programme, international youth exchanges, trainings, volunteer ships, etc., are considered as "international mobilities". In this publication, we discuss mobilities, and also projects or international activities. These terms can be understood synonymously.

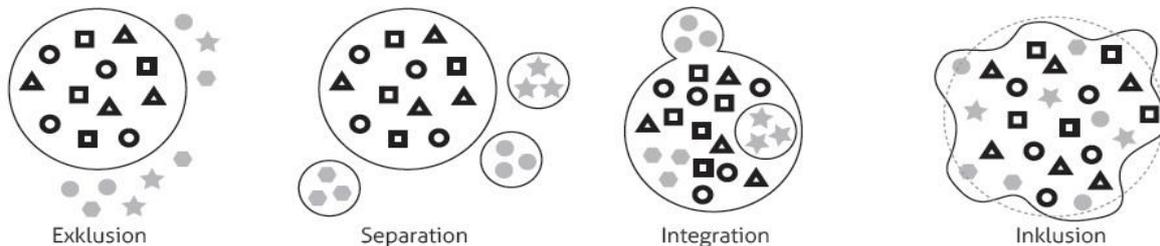
Fundamentals of inclusive international youth exchanges

Understanding the concept of inclusion

To implement the idea of inclusion and to carry out inclusive international activities, it is essential to create a shared understanding of the term.

When talking about inclusion, the concept is often discussed in the context of disability. Historically this is correct, as the idea of inclusion was coined in the 1970s by a citizens' initiative in the USA which demanded full and equal participation in social life for disabled people. It was not until 1994 that UNESCO established the Salamanca Declaration and later in 2008 that the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities pushed the European inclusion debate forward. Questions around equal participation in society and education thus became relevant, and inclusion acquired the status of a human right. This is where the broad understanding of inclusion is rooted. It is not limited exclusively to disabled people but includes all people as equal members of society (UNESCO, 2014).

The significant distinction to other social and pedagogical concepts can be seen in the following graphic which presents various pedagogical and structural perspectives (Kreisau-Initiative e. V., 2014).



The difference between Exclusion, Separation, Integration, Inclusion (Kreisau-Initiative e. V., 2014)

Exclusion, a concept that was prevalent in politics, society and education until well into the 20th century, thus represents the antithesis of inclusion. People who did not correspond to the accepted social norm were the responsibility of their families not the society. From a pedagogical point of view, they were considered to be uneducable.

With the system of separation, an educable personality was recognised. An attempt was made to educate those who did not conform to the norm to become useful members of society. Several school and special education systems were established to this aim. Thanks to this development, people with differing educational needs were given access to target group-oriented education and the right to receive individual support.

At the same time, the social division between the "gifted" and the "less gifted" remained and learning within homogeneous groups was preferred.

An honest look at today's existing social and educational structures reveals that separation has remained the dominant system.

In the 1970s the debate on integration emerged, followed by the debate on inclusion that opened up with the Salamanca Declaration in the 1990s. The idea of integration is to integrate people into existing systems. While this enables the involvement those previously excluded from society, it also requires them to adapt to existing majority structures.

Often, integration and inclusion are used synonymously, but the underlying concepts differ significantly. Inclusion no longer has structures that are considered "normal". Rather, it proposes that systems and conditions be designed in such a way that each person can contribute with her*his individual qualities without having to make adjustments. The focus here is on the recognition of diversity as the "norm" and the acceptance of existing differences as added value. Disabilities and impairments are seen as social constructs, the effects of which must be overcome.

As a new paradigm, inclusion presupposes as self-evident that the participation of all people in social life is of equal value. Thus the underlying motive is more far-reaching and is not limited to people with disabilities. Other types of disadvantage and discrimination are considered, as well as, those assigned to the so-called majority society.

We realize that inclusion is an ideal image of society and in its true definition may never be fully achieved. Nevertheless, it is important to reach toward this goal as everyone stands to benefit. Key to this approach are efforts to break down not only physical but also mental barriers. Classifications of difference such as "with and without disability", "with and without migration background", "young and old" must be brought to awareness and reflected upon. Learning and experiencing together can thus shift perspective and create powerful change and commitment toward inclusion.

Non-formal education

Exchange, learning and experiencing together, are essential goals of international youth work. Young people from various countries and contexts come together to learn about each other and to learn with and from each other. International youth meetings often take place in non-formal educational settings.

Non-formal education refers to any programme for personal and social education of young people planned outside the school curriculum, which serves to improve individual skills and competences (Council of Europe, 2020).

These programs make use of specific methods and approaches that enable educational processes through experiential, creative and enjoyable activities. Non-formal education, as practised in international youth work, follows certain basic principles (Council of Europe, 2020). These programs must be:

- voluntary
- accessible to everyone (ideally)
- an organised process with educational objectives
- participatory and learner-centred
- diversity-orientated
- focused on learning life skills and preparing for active citizenship
- balanced between individual and group learning objectives within a communal environment.
- holistic and process-oriented
- based on experience and action
- designed around the needs of the participants.

Non-formal education processes focus on the personal and social development of young people. By creating attractive offers that are oriented toward both to socially relevant issues and the interests of young people, these programmes can help participants acquire crucial key competences through the process of learning together such as: improved self-confidence, self-efficacy and recognition of their individual talents and strengths. In addition, such offerings, which are geared towards participatory decision-making processes, can specifically promote an enhanced commitment to social responsibility.

An important requirement of non-formal educational is to enable and encourage young people to deal with their own living conditions as well as with the social conditions around them. They are encouraged to critically question their surroundings and to take personal responsibility. Inclusive and international youth encounters, in particular, can foster an acceptance of diversity as reflected in the many faces, opinions, world views and life plans of its participants.

Considering the basic principles and demands of inclusion, these values coincide to a large degree with the requirements for non-formal education.

Above all, non-formal education claims to be remain open for everyone. Another important underlying principle of non-formal education is its orientation towards diversity. Focus is placed towards the individual with her*his unchangeable (gender, impairment, etc.) and changeable (social status, language, education, etc.) characteristics. In international youth work, the diversity among participants is an essential resource for educational processes. The pedagogy of diversity aims to enable equal rights and opportunities while maintaining individual differences. The framework in which non-formal education takes place creates an optimal space for shared learning and experiential processes that enable participants to break down barriers, develop a self-image of diversity and see diversity as an opportunity for growth.



Inclusion in international youth work

As already mentioned, the idea of inclusion represents a social and pedagogical ideal, which, in theory, appears perfect. In practical implementation, however, it becomes clear that there are challenges and difficulties. Although international youth exchange as part of non-formal education aims to provide access for all, statistics show an apparent under-representation of disadvantaged and disabled young people in these programmes. With the DARE project and this guide we are working to change this situation. International youth work offers an excellent opportunity to experiment with and reflect on inclusive concepts and methods, including the temporary, non-formal framework. The protected space in which such meetings take place allows for mistakes and failures and, through a participatory approach, enables for common learning processes for all actors involved, which can then be further developed and transferred to other formal and educational environments.

An essential aspect to the success of these programmes is proper pedagogical support. To create an atmosphere of trust and to positive productive group dynamics during the encounters, qualified facilitators and youth workers are needed who have both the necessary knowledge and training, as well as an open and accepting attitude.

Within the framework of inclusive international education, diverse needs and interests must be taken into account while planning and implementing activities. Facilitators and support staff must maintain a willingness to continuously apply and reflect on a variety of adequate methodological approaches.

In particular, however, they must possess the courage to implement inclusion. We would like to encourage this process through the insights and information outlined in the DARE Practical Guide for Inclusion. We wish you an enjoyable experience.

Chapter 1 It's easier than you think!

This chapter focuses on practical dimensions of inclusion: What do I, as a facilitator, need to know about young disabled people?

According to several surveys, there is still a lot of misunderstanding and stereotypes about disabled people regarding their abilities, the assistance that they need or how active/productive they are. 57% of Europeans admit to not knowing much about the different types of disabilities, while 44% of respondents think that "other people" do not feel at ease in the presence of disabled people. Additionally, youth workers and facilitators often believe that they don't have the necessary knowledge and competences to work with disabled youth. Why is the situation like this? People are usually afraid of saying the wrong thing and consequently opt to say nothing at all. Others sometimes avoid interacting with disabled people worried that if they say something "wrong", they will be seen as prejudiced. Our aim in this chapter is to contribute to youth workers' and facilitators' confidence by increasing their awareness and knowledge around disabilities and most importantly to dismantle the awkwardness around disabled people by stating the obvious. It is easier than you think to work with disabled youth.

The main topics broached in this chapter are the following:

- The social model and human rights model of disability
- People's-first language
- Disability etiquette and how facilitators can address disabled youth and their needs

The Social Model and Human Rights Model of Disability

Let's begin by clarifying the term disability. Disability is an umbrella term; a complex phenomenon that reflects the interaction between features of a person's body and features of the society in which she*he lives.

Overcoming the difficulties faced by disabled people requires interventions to remove environmental and social barriers. For most of the 20th century, disability was medically defined as the result of a physical condition within an individual (Disability Advocacy Resource Unit (DARU), 2020). The medical model of disability represents disability as a 'problem' that belongs to the disabled individual. It is not presented as a condition that concerns anyone other than the individual affected. For example, if a student using a wheelchair is unable to access a building because of some steps, the medical model would suggest that this is because of the wheelchair, rather than the steps (University of Leicester, 2020).

In recent years policy has shifted away from the medical model of disability and towards a human rights and social models of disability.

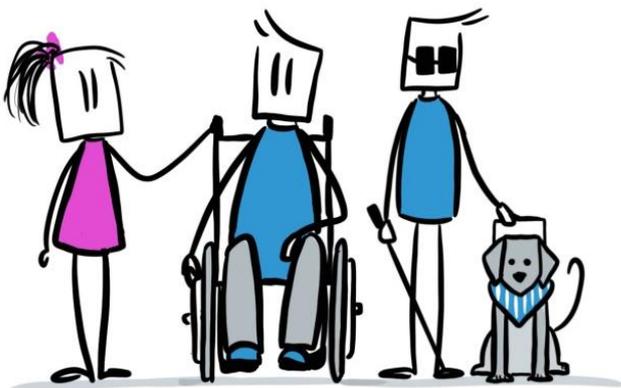
Medically focused solutions have given way to more interactive approaches that recognise that people are disabled by environmental factors and limitations. The human rights model, as the name suggests, is based on basic human rights principles (World Health Organization, 2011).

It recognizes that:

- Disability is a natural part of human diversity that must be respected and supported in all its forms
- Disabled People have the same rights as everyone else in society
- Impairments must not be used as an excuse to deny or restrict people's rights

According to the Preamble of the United Nations Convention of Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) a disability is "an evolving concept". The document stresses that "disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal/environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others". Defining disability as an interaction means that "disability" is not an attribute of the person. Progress on improving social participation can be made by addressing and reducing the barriers which hinder disabled persons in their day to day lives.

The Convention celebrates human diversity and human dignity. Its primary message is that disabled persons are entitled to the full spectrum of human rights and fundamental freedom without discrimination. This is reflected in the Convention's preamble and throughout its articles as they establish the obligation of society to promote positive perceptions and greater social awareness towards disabled persons. It also challenges customs and behaviours based on stereotypes, prejudice, harmful practices and stigmas relating to disabled persons. In establishing a mechanism for complaints, the Convention's Optional Protocol ensures that disabled persons have an equal right to redress for violations of the rights enshrined in the Convention.



Importantly, the Convention and its Optional Protocol challenge previous perceptions of disability—as a medical problem or a generator of pity or charitable approaches—and establish an empowering human rights-based approach of disability.

As a facilitator, it is important to comprehend that a disabled person may be regarded as a person with a disability in one society or setting, but not in another, depending on the environment and surroundings. Disability is not something that resides in the individual as a result of some impairment. Disability resides in society, not in the person. Some examples below may help you understand this better:

- A person in a wheelchair may have difficulties being gainfully participating in a youth exchange not because of her condition but because there might be environmental barriers such as inaccessible buses or staircases in the venue where the exchange will take place, and which obstruct her*his access.
- A visually impaired young person wants to read the latest best-selling book and chat about it with their sighted friends. Under the medical model, there are very few medical solutions, but a social model solution ensures that full-text audio-recordings are available when the book is first published. This means that visually impaired young people can join in cultural activities on an equal basis with everyone else (Disability Nottinghamshire, 2020).

Consequently, it is undeniable that the perception and reality of disability also depend on the technologies, assistance and services available, as well as on cultural consideration.

On an EU level, the European Union in its treaties and its anti-discrimination legislation has shown its commitment to protecting Europeans against discrimination; but not all Europeans are protected equally. Despite the ratification of the CRPD by the EU and all of its Member States, disabled people still lack comprehensive protection against discrimination in Europe. Where protection is provided in law, enforcement is lagging behind. In April 2018, the CRPD Committee, in its General Comment No. 7 on equality and non-discrimination promoted the human rights model of disability and inclusive equality as one way among others to recognize the dignity of human beings and their intersectionality to ensure fairness and combat stigma, prejudices and violence.

People's/Identity-first language

Do the words used to describe you have an impact on your life? You bet! Contrary to the age-old "sticks and stones" lesson some of us learned as children, words do matter as language creates reality!

Throughout history, people who have conditions we call "impairments" or "disabilities" have been subjected to devaluation, marginalization, prejudice, and discrimination. One powerful way to dehumanize someone is through language, by using words or labels to identify a person/group as "less-than", as "the other", "not like us", "not normal" and so on. Once a person/group has been categorized this way, it makes it easier to justify prejudice and discrimination. Language is a powerful tool as it shapes our attitudes and our attitudes shape our language. Furthermore, both our attitudes and language have a significant impact on our actions!

Disability is doubtlessly a sensitive topic. As we describe in the introduction of this chapter, the fear of saying the wrong thing prevents people from saying anything at all and discourages them from having meaningful conversations about disability. Since 1988, a linguistic movement has taken place introducing the people's-first language, which places the person before the disability. The notion behind this concept, which was introduced by disabled individuals who claimed "we are not our disabilities", was to eliminate old and hurtful descriptions and demonstrate good manners and respect (Snow, 2006). On the other hand, the term "disabled person" (identity-first language), preferred by many, suggests that disability does not lie inside a disabled person, but rather that the person is disabled by society. Identity-first language is founded upon the idea of the social model of disability, which focuses on the inaccessibility within society that actually disables people and renders them unable to function (McColl, 2020). Some communities strongly prefer people-first language, e.g. people with intellectual disabilities usually prefer people-first language; as is apparent in the numerous advocacy groups since the 1970's that are named People First and which are operated by people with intellectual disabilities. On the other hand, the Autistic and Deaf communities both strongly prefer identity-first language for reasons outlined above, and from a sense of cultural and disability pride (Ryan, 2019).

Please keep in mind that these are generalizations and should not be taken as strict rules. In every community or in any individual case, there will always be exceptions. When in doubt, ask a person how they like to be addressed and avoid all assumptions beforehand.

In general, society and the media often support one of two extremely polarizing views on disabled people. They are viewed as either remarkable or heroic or victims and as pitiful (Singh, 2018). As a facilitator, you should avoid these two contrasts, both victimization and heroism, and make sure that your group understands that people's disabilities are an essential aspect of their lives, personal qualities, and very much a part of who they are. In other words, disability becomes a familiar attribute diversity. In essence, its presence doesn't make them particularly heroic, just as it doesn't mean that their lives are a constant struggle, either (Kim, 2019).

In conclusion, it is essential to keep in mind that as a facilitator, people listen to you. Therefore, you have the power to impact your group. It is vital to use sensitive and correct language, as you are setting an example that can influence the behaviour and tone of your group. That's why it is beneficial to be aware of the approach people's-first language (PFL) and identity-first language (IFL). It is most important to be mindful of the individuals in the group and how they wish to be addressed.

The Basics of Disability Etiquette

Having addressed the PFL and IFL approaches, it is time to get more practical. So what's the disability etiquette anyway? Disability etiquette is a set of guidelines dealing specifically with how to address a disabled person? (Heriot-Watt University Edinburgh, 2020). There is no consensus on when this phrase first came into use, although it most likely grew out of the Disability Rights Movement that began in the early 1970s. All in all, basic disability etiquette involves treating disabled people with respect (National Disability Navigator Resource Collaborative, 2020). Below we summarize some tips, which you might find useful as a facilitator, on how to respectfully interact with disabled people.

Ask before you help

Just because someone has a disability, don't assume she*he needs help. If the setting is accessible, disabled people can usually get around without trouble. Offer assistance only if the person appears to need it. A person with a disability will often communicate when she*he needs support. And if she*he does want support, ask what you can do before you act.

Be sensitive about physical contact

People with disabilities depend on specific body parts; e.g. their arms for balance. Using physical contact, even if your intention is to assist, could knock them off balance. Avoid patting a person on the head or touching her*his wheelchair, scooter or cane unasked. Disabled people consider their equipment part of their personal space.

Think before you speak

Always speak directly to the person with a disability, not to her*his companion, assistant or sign language interpreter. Making small talk with a person who has a disability is great, as long as you speak to her*him as you would to anyone else. Be sensitive and respect her*his privacy. While many disabled people are comfortable to speak openly about their disabilities, you should still practice sensitive awareness as many are too accustomed to being defined by their disability. This may occur in the beginning of the programme as people begin getting to know each other. A simple "I don't feel comfortable sharing that" by the person with a disability can set the tone if it is not something that she*he is willing to share.

Don't make assumptions

Disabled People are the best judge of what they can or cannot do. Don't decide for them based on your experiences and assumptions. As a facilitator, you can, of course, be part of the decision-making process by listing the available options or offer accessible activities. In the end, every individual should decide by her*himself.

Having these general tips in mind, we decided to list some additional suggestions regarding young people with Visual, Hearing, Physical disabilities, the primary target group of the DARE project.

People who use wheelchairs or other mobility devices

People who use wheelchairs have varying disabilities and a range of abilities. Some can use their arms and hands. Some can get out of their wheelchairs and even walk for short distances. An important thing to have in mind is that people who use wheelchairs are individuals, not equipment. Don't lean over someone who uses a wheelchair to shake another person's hand or ask a wheelchair user to hold coats. Setting your drink on the desktop attached to someone's wheelchair is a definite no-no/no-go.

- Don't push or touch a person's wheelchair; it's part of her*his personal space. If you help someone down a curb without waiting for instructions, you may dump her*him out of the chair. You may detach the chair's parts if you lift it by the handles or the footrest.
- Keep the ramps and wheelchair-accessible doors to your building unlocked and unblocked. Displays should not be in front of entrances, wastebaskets should not be in the middle of aisles and boxes should not be stored on ramps. Also, accessible restrooms should remain accessible and not be used as extra storage rooms, as is often the case nowadays.

- Be aware of how far a person is able to reach. Place as many items as possible within their grasp and make sure that there is a clear path to reach workshop materials such as: flipcharts, tables, food and all things needed for the activities etc.
- When talking to a person using a wheelchair, grab your own chair and sit at the person's level. If that's not possible, stand at a slight distance, so that she*he isn't straining her*his neck to make eye contact with you.
- If your building has different routes through it, be sure that signs direct people to the accessible routes around the facility. People who use canes or crutches also need to know the easiest way to get around a location and stairs may be easier for them than a ramp. Ensure that all staff, volunteers and facilitators are informed about the accessible avenues, elevators and support equipment around the site and are able to direct others as necessary. Before the beginning of a project, make sure that there are signs to help orientate participants find everything. Explain these locations at the beginning.
- Some people have limited use of their hands, wrists or arms. Be prepared to offer assistance with reaching, grasping or lifting objects, opening doors and display cases, and operating vending machines and other equipment. Remember, do it upon request! (Disability Etiquette, 2020).



And what about travelling?

While travelling with a wheelchair and/or other devices, you should plan your trip accordingly in order to reduce any potential barrier. Make sure that you inform the airline in advance about a wheelchair user or other mobility devices that need to be transported. Every airport provides an assistance service that will escort you and will provide the necessary support in each situation.

Make sure to contact the airline ahead of time to learn about the details of this specific service. If you have a connecting flight within the EU, you should plan to allow 1.5 hours between flights.

In addition, make sure to contact train and bus services of your destination country and ask for their guidelines on how to book an assistance service.

People who are blind or partially sighted

People who are blind or partially sighted know how to orient themselves and get around on the street. They are competent to travel without assistance, though they may make use of a cane or a guide dog. A person may have a visual disability that is not obvious. Be prepared to offer assistance, when asked, e.g. in reading (Disability Etiquette, 2020):

- Identify yourself before you make physical contact with a person who is blind. Tell her*him your name and your role, e.g. facilitator, translator, participant etc. And be sure to introduce her*him to others who are in the group, so that she*he is not excluded.
- If you have blind participants, it can be useful to offer a tour through the facility to support orientation in the venue.
- If you have changed something in one area; e.g rearranged the furniture or removed the chairs in the seminar room, make sure to inform the blind participants about these changes.
- People who are blind may need their arms for balance, so offer your arm if guidance is required. (It is, however, often appropriate to guide a blind person's hand to a bannister or the back of a chair to help direct her*him to a stairway or a seat.)
- If the person has a guide dog, walk on the side opposite the dog. As you are walking, describe the setting, noting any obstacles, such as stairs ('up' or 'down') or a dangerous crack in the sidewalk. Other hazards include revolving doors, half-opened filing cabinets or doors, and objects protruding from the wall at head level such as hanging plants or lamps. If you are going to give a warning, be specific. Hollering "Look out!" does not tell the person if she*he should stop, run, duck or jump.
- If you are giving directions, give specific, non-visual information. Rather than say, "Go to your right when you reach the next door," which assumes the person knows where the next door is, you can say, "Walk forward to the end of this aisle and make a full right." Non-visual directions and cue are also very important when explaining meeting points. A simple statement like "We meet here

outside the seminar room by the trees" is not helpful. Choose places that people already know or tell them explicitly how to get to the meeting point.

- If you need to leave a person who is blind, inform her*him that you are leaving and ask if she*he needs anything before you go.
- Don't touch the person's cane or guide dog. The dog is working and needs to concentrate. The cane is part of the individual's personal space. If the person puts the cane down, don't move it. Let her*him know if it's in the way.
- During meals, it can be helpful to let a blind person know, how the food on the plate is arranged according to a clock orientation (12 o'clock is furthest from them, 6 o'clock is nearest). Take care when ordering the food, the kitchen knows that there shouldn't be anything on the plate that is not edible. Some participants might ask you to cut their food. The best option for this request is to have the kitchen prepare this in advance.
- It's okay to use idiomatic expressions when talking to disabled people. For example, saying, "It was good to see you," and "See you later," to a person who is blind is entirely acceptable. Blind people use these kinds of expressions themselves.



People who are deaf or have hearing impairments

Many people who are deaf communicate with sign language and consider themselves to be members of a cultural and linguistic minority group. They refer to themselves as Deaf with a capital "D," and may not like the term "hearing impaired." Others may not object to the term, but in general, it is safest to refer to people who have hearing loss but who communicate in spoken language as "hard of hearing" and to people with profound hearing losses as Deaf or deaf people.

As a facilitator, you should be aware that sign languages are entirely distinct from verbal languages in that they are very intuitive. Just as spoken languages; sign languages vary greatly between countries and

ethnic groups. Though there is International Sign (IS), an international sign language, not necessarily everyone knows it. Some deaf people can lip-read, but this can't be assumed either.

People who have hearing loss mostly continue to communicate through verbal language. They may also have limited hearing abilities and often rely on amplification and/or seeing the speaker's lips to communicate effectively.

There is a range of communication preferences and styles among people with hearing impairments that cannot be explained in this short section. It is helpful to note that the majority of people who developed some degree of hearing loss as adults do not communicate with sign language. They typically use verbal language and may be candidates for writing and assistive listening devices to help improve communication. People with cochlear implants, like some people with hearing loss, will usually state what works best for them.

- When the exchange of information is complex (e.g., explaining a task or a group discussion), the most effective way to communicate with a native signer is through a qualified sign language interpreter. For simple interactions and tasks (e.g., explaining the next step or describing where an object is) visualizing information or writing a personal note is usually effective.
- Follow the person's cues to find out if she*he prefers using sign language, gesturing, writing or speaking. If you have trouble understanding a person who is deaf or hard of hearing, let her*him* know.
- When a sign language interpreter is involved, look directly at the person who is deaf, and maintain eye contact to be polite. Speak directly to the person ("What would you like?"), rather than to the interpreter ('Ask her what she'd like.').
- Persons who are deaf should be included in all decisions that affect them, just as anyone else would be. Do not make decisions for them.
- Before speaking to a person who is deaf or has a hearing loss, make sure that you get her*his attention. Depending on the situation, you can extend your arm and wave your hand, tap on the table, stamp on the ground or flicker the lights. Try to avoid touching or shoulder tapping as this may startle a person who is not expecting it. As the person might not expect you, she*he might get frightened.

- For sentences that a person doesn't understand, rephrase rather than repeat. You can also support communication using visuals such as pictures, paintings and sketches.
- When talking, face the person. A quiet, well-lit room is most conducive to effective communication. This is especially important if you speak to people with hearing devices. Rooms with loud acoustics and/or a lot of noise are stressful since the hearing device cannot filter all of the sounds. Focusing becomes very difficult then. Also, if you are in front of the light source (e.g., a window) with your back to it, please note that the glare may obscure your face and make it difficult for lip reading.
- Speak clearly. Most people who have a hearing loss count on watching people's lips as they speak to help them understand. Avoid chewing gum, smoking or obscuring your mouth with your hand while speaking.
- There is no need to shout. If the person uses a hearing aid, it will be calibrated to normal voice levels; your shouting will only distort the words.

People with hidden disabilities

Another essential thing to keep in mind is that not all disabilities are visible. A participant may make a request or act in a way that seems strange to you. That request or behaviour may be disability-related. For example, you may give someone simple verbal guidelines for an activity, but they may still ask for written instructions as well. She*he may have a learning disability that makes written communication easier for her*him. Or, a participant may ask to sit, rather than stand for an activity. This person may be fatigued from a condition, such as cancer, or may be feeling the effects of medication. Even though these disabilities are hidden, they are real. Please respect the participants' needs and requests.

It really is simpler than you think!

Overall, it is essential as a facilitator, to think of participants who have disabilities as individuals and interact with them as you would with any other participant. As we already said, having a disability doesn't make someone a hero, a saint, a victim, a burden or a soldier. Be positive, respectful and sensitive, and be willing to create an inclusive environment through planning. Ask participants about their needs and of course be ready to celebrate your "mistakes" and see them as learning experiences!



Chapter 2 Around, over and beyond the barriers

The World Health Organization defines barriers as "factors in a person's environment that, through their absence or presence, limit functioning and create disability" (World Health Organization, 2001). Barriers have a more significant impact on disabled people because they can prevent them from being independent or participating in social life.

However, it doesn't have to be this way. Being conscious of barriers and of ways to deal with them can reduce many obstacles and limitations. Through collaboration and mutual effort, we can help societies become more inclusive.

People with reduced mobility often encounter physical barriers that prevent them from moving around independently, participating freely in activities of their choice or having access to some services. People with visual or hearing impairments will almost certainly face some kind of communication barrier, both in accessing and sharing information. Public or private transportation can represent a barrier for physically disabled people. Disabled people are also facing attitudinal and social barriers. Sometimes, just knowing that they cannot go to a place because they will encounter a mobility or communication barrier, or worse, face other kinds of discrimination based on their disability, is enough to convince them not to go or engage. This attitude contributes to the social isolation of disabled people. They are less likely to have a job or to complete high school, often due to discrimination and bullying, in addition to a lack of accessibility.

Erasmus+ vs Participation Barriers

The EU Youth Strategy (European Commission, 2019), the framework for EU youth policy cooperation for 2019-2027, focuses on three essential tasks:

- **ENGAGE:** Young people must be active citizens to ensure a meaningful civic, economic, social, cultural and political impact on society; the EU protects their right to participate on every level and protects the diversity of their voices.

- **CONNECT:** Connection is essential in order for solidarity to be at the centre of the future of the European Union. Connection is encouraged through multiple types of cross-border mobilities, all of which boost formal and non-formal learning. The European Union is committed to eliminating barriers and making mobility experiences more accessible for people with special needs.
- **EMPOWER:** With the word "empowerment", we refer to the process of gaining freedom and power to do what you want or to control what happens to you. To do so, the European Union invites its member states to implement policies to recognise and improve youth work.

Participating in an exchange programme is challenging for most young people; they leave their familiar environment, their communities and countries. During international mobility projects, they face new situations, cultures, languages and peer groups. For disabled participants, this adventure can be especially challenging.

On an individual level, disabled youth can often feel less encouraged to participate in Erasmus+ mobilities; their past experiences (or lack thereof) influence their motivation to participate in such programmes. Often they deal with a lower level of self-esteem or self-determination that prevents them from staying motivated. The risk of encountering inadequate structures, decreased participation possibilities, or worse, more substantial forms of discrimination, can be a good reason not to participate.

Even when the participants are motivated, they often encounter a seemingly insurmountable obstacle; namely, a general lack of access to information. Information is can be incomplete, inaccessible, unavailable or not given in a language that they understand. As a consequence, it can be difficult to know if the place that will host them is barrier-free, or if it will be able to provide them with all the support they need. This means that, very often, they must begin planning well before other participants.

On a social level, barriers are often built by their families: a person's social environment can often determine whether they take part in an activity or not. If their families and/or friends show support and actively include them in researching and organising their trip, then, disabled young people will be more likely to develop an interest in cross border mobility. On the other hand, if families and/or friends are unsupportive or fearful of sending them abroad, disabled youth will less inclined to take part in such programmes.

Involving facilitators and youth workers in discussions with the families of disabled youth can help them understand the importance and intrinsic value of having their sons and daughters experience cross-border mobility.



A study realised by the European Commission on the impact of mobility programmes found that young people who study or participate in mobilities abroad can strengthen key transversal skills which may be useful in their personal lives. By starting an intercultural dialogue and getting to know people from all over Europe, disabled youth can overcome fears and learn more about topics such as inclusion, equality, the environment, etc.

Other barriers that disabled people may encounter in their exchange programmes are circumstantial ones that lie beyond their control.

For people with mobility impairments these can include:

- Lack of adequate transportation (including proper assistance in airports or train/bus stations and city public transport);
- Lack of accessible structures;
- Lack of home or host coordinators trained to specifically address their needs.

For people with visual impairments these can include:

- Lack of information in braille or accessible websites;
- Lack of trained assistants to help them navigate a new environment;
- Lack of audio orientation services;
- Problems with public transportation;

- Difficulties getting materials adapted to their needs (for example, computers with screen reading software, texts not being available in e-formats);
- Lack of home or host coordinators trained to specifically address their needs.

For people with hearing impairments these can include:

- Lack of sign language interpreters who know International Sign (IS) or the needed national sign languages;
- Lack of home or host coordinators trained to specifically address their needs.

These facts help us understand why, though more young people are deciding to participate in exchange programmes abroad, the number of disabled participants is increasing at a slower pace.

Some Best Practice for Tackling the Barriers

The total number of higher education students with disabilities in Erasmus+ exchange programmes (both studies and traineeships) in 2009-2010 were 257 (0.12% of the total number of overall participants). Between 2014 and 2016, this number has been oscillating between 323 and 412, so around 0.13% - 0.17% (MappED!, 2018).

To overcome personal and social barriers, *Volontarimini* – a volunteer centre in Rimini – has been organising specialised courses for the families of PwVHPI who have individual needs and who wish to take part in an exchange programme and/or other volunteering experiences abroad. The aim is to prepare the families for their sons' or daughters' experience abroad. *Volontarimini*, considered a pioneer in Italy, has been offering these courses for over ten years and has recently begun collaborating with volunteer centers throughout Italy and Europe (Superabile magazine, 2018).

Aware that disabled participants still struggle to participate in Erasmus+ exchange programmes, the European Union guarantees additional funding for participants with physical, mental or health-related impairments. This additional grant is based on the actual costs faced by participants and can help cover: accessible accommodation (preferably also close to the host organisation's headquarter), travel assistance, additional medical attention, individual assistants, communication support and other services. The request for this Special Needs Support Grant, as it is called within the E+ programmes, must be made through and with the support of the student's sending organisation. This grant is a fundamental step for inclusion at EU-level.

It's therefore essential to have a clear idea on all the costs a young disabled person might encounter travelling (e.g. housing, local transport, and assisting technology).

Extra funding for participants with disabilities may also be provided at a local or national level. For example, the DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) can cover, upon request, up to 10,000 Euro for additional costs to programmes that engage disabled people. (DAAD, 2019).

The [European Youth Portal](#), powered by EuroDesk, offers information about youth exchanges in Europe. Available in 28 languages, it highlights organisations and institutions that offer academic experiences and volunteer/work opportunities around the world. The portal allows PwVHPI to search for organisations who are equipped to host disabled participants and can offer additional support.

The Erasmus+ programme has funded several projects regarding inclusivity for higher education students, such as Inclusive Campus Life; a three-year project, which aims to make campus life more inclusive for disabled people. It also co-founded a European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2020), whose plan is to collaborate with member countries' Ministries of Education to improve their educational policies and make education more inclusive for everyone. Through the agency, participants in Erasmus+ programmes can find in-depth information about access to higher formal and non-formal education programmes for disabled people, including exchange partners listed by member country.

The Erasmus Student Network has created a division called ExchangeAbility in order to improve its inclusivity and has developed the website [MappED!](#). This platform informs disabled people on how accessible university buildings are for people with visual, hearing or mobile impairments. It covers several aspects of accessibility, such as the presence of ramps, elevators or accessible desks, visual or audio orientation inside the buildings, the presence of maps in braille, etc.

There are other platforms available that provide similar services. [WheelMap](#) is an interactive map designed for people with mobility impairments; it helps with finding wheelchair accessible places. Anyone can contribute to the map by adding new locations and indicating if a facility is completely, partially or not accessible for wheelchairs. It also provides information about the accessibility of toilets, which can be marked separately from the accessibility of the location. Interested users can search for a specific location or browse the map for accessible places

(marked in green), partially accessible places (marked in orange, and/or non-accessible places (marked in red).

[Be My Eyes](#), a mobile app which connects blind and low-vision people with sighted volunteers uses a live video call to assist them with finding a lost object, reading labels or getting familiar with a new place. The app, with over 2 million registered volunteers, can offer additional support in a youth exchange, for example, by allowing visually impaired youth to explore a new place and environment on their own, and to read materials not produced in braille. It can also prove useful when visually impaired youth need to travel alone on part of their journey, for instance, from their homes to the airport where they will meet other members of the youth group.

The European Blind Union is a non-profit organisation, founded in 1984; it is the only organisation representing the interests of blind and partially-sighted people in Europe. The EBU has developed a brochure aimed at youth workers and blind/partially sighted youth to promote the Erasmus+ Programme and to encourage them to participate in international exchange projects. The booklet also includes tools and tips on how to prepare for the program in order to experience a smooth and successful stay abroad. Additionally, the guide provides guidance for every phase of the exchange experience and details crucial questions to be asked to facilitators, home or host coordinators (Comenius University in Bratislava, 2018).

Young PwVHPI Testimonials

What prevents young PwVHPI from taking part in youth mobility projects (short term and long term)?

Alessandro Abbate, former Erasmus+ student and former president of the European Deaf Student Union, presented his reflections regarding student mobility during the International Day of People with Disabilities meeting, which took place in Brussels in 2017. He explained:

"I have contacted many universities amongst LUISS University's Erasmus partners. Four had a sign language interpreter, but only one had an interpreter who knew the International Sign language – Gothenburg University in Sweden. I ended up studying there for 6 months, which were incredible, thanks to the help provided by both my home and host universities. Deaf people often do not participate in mobility programmes because it's challenging to find adequate services – this causes discouragement and isolation amongst deaf students".

Alessandro's testimonial (and [transcript](#)) can be found on YouTube.

Alessia Mereu, a blind physiotherapy student at the University of Florence, has taken part in a mobility programme as part of the Vip-Tech-Job project, co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme. VTJ aims to empower visually impaired youth in finding a job by using social media and preparing them for job interviews via online and offline training courses. During its two-year implementation, VTJ created a web app where blind and partially sighted people can search job opportunities and use their training platform to brush up the soft skills needed for finding a suitable job. Alessia sums up (her) experience with VTJ:

"I took part in 2 mobility events: one in Liège, Belgium, and one in Granada, Spain. The reason why I decided to participate are mainly two: on the one hand, I think they are an excellent opportunity for linguistic, emotional and cultural enrichment; on the other hand, I felt like I wanted to give my contribution to the blind community by reviewing and piloting the app and the online course developed by Erasmus+ co-financed project 'Vip-Tech-Job', to make it as good and as accessible as possible so that I could also improve my condition for the future when I need to search for a job. I didn't encounter many particular difficulties, either before or during the mobility: my family and the project coordinators supported me and were always ready to help in case I had any doubts. I only had some problems trying to understand English during our meetings: I have an intermediate knowledge of English but, thankfully, other participants and project managers helped me if I had any problem comprehending it. I would definitely recommend taking part in an exchange programme: first of all, I returned home enriched from a personal and professional point of view. Mobility experiences are a great way to know yourself and other people a lot better. I learnt new things about myself, and I will treasure these memories forever. And if you like travelling, exploring new places and meeting new people, like I do, even better! "

Diana Silva, a 21-year-old student from Guimarães, Portugal, is currently completing a five-month Erasmus mobility in Salamanca, Spain. Diana has been a wheelchair user for 7 years after a spinal cord injury. She explains:

"I was motivated to do this mobility mainly to learn a new language and to make new friends. Another very important aspect for me was the independence aspect: I wanted to feel like I could do everything on my own. As you can imagine, organising this mobility wasn't the easiest thing ever. Apart from the university application process and registration, I received very little support from the university regarding language. I had to study and practice with my family and friends, at home, which kind of made it fun, I have to admit, but also slower. I arrived in Salamanca without a room or an apartment, because my host university did not offer

a housing support service. But I didn't let that stop me from enjoying my first week in Salamanca: I decided to stay in a hotel while I looked for a room and I found one – believe it or not – on social networks! Of course, getting a wheelchair-accessible apartment is not easy, I ended up visiting a lot of buildings that didn't even have a lift or had it, but it was so old and crampy that the wheelchair couldn't fit inside of it. However, I feel good here. I always wanted to live this experience, and surely I recommend it to anyone. Don't let any apparent difficulty take you down or discourage you: an experience like this is amazing. It's positive, it's unique. It's for life! ”



Wrap-up Words

Working as a facilitator or youth worker, it is essential to understand that no environment is completely free of barriers. You should also be aware that when working with a group of participants who have diverse disabilities, adapting your activities to one participant's need could simultaneously create barriers for another.

What to do in a situation like this? First, don't panic. Second, it is vital to communicate with your participants to get a better understanding of their barriers. Ask them what would be comfortable for them and then mutually search for creative solutions.

Remember, you are a leader and an educator; your aim is for your participants to experience something new, to take additional steps and participate in unfamiliar activities; all while learning about their interests and most importantly, themselves.

Inclusive environments require creativity and communication (see [Chapter 3](#)). It is also essential that when working with disabled participants, you remain oriented towards finding solutions. Whereas some circumstances are external and cannot be changed, facilitators and youth workers should

motivate young disabled participants to focus on the aspects that they can influence and to find solutions for existing barriers. This practice puts young participants in active roles. Apart from enabling them to join mobilities abroad, it also helps them assume active positions in other areas of their lives, and without a doubt helps them to develop positive self-esteem and readiness for action when confronted with problems.

Inclusive environments are possible, from within them everyone benefits. We invite you to take the challenge and start working towards inclusion! Communicate, involve more people, plan ahead and search for solutions rather than obstacles. Stay positive and you will be on the right path.

Chapter 3 Practical tips and methods on how to design inclusive and quality activities

Be a Bridge Builder!

This chapter focuses on the very practical dimensions of inclusion: What do I, as a facilitator, need to know for planning and implementing activities?

The challenge here is not to merely transfer some valuable practices from projects that were or are implemented for PwVHPI, but to also develop innovative ideas for inclusive activities and solutions. To do this, we must adapt methods and approaches from non-formal education to specific needs and inclusive standards and we must ensure accessibility.

The main questions that will be answered in this chapter are the following:

- Within what framework can inclusion be realised? What is a barrier-free/accessible learning environment, and how can we create it?
- How can language and communication be adapted so that everyone can participate equally within an inclusive group setting?
- Which personal and professional competences, i.e. hard and soft skills and attitudes, are required to design inclusive activities?
- Which methods and approaches can facilitate us in promoting inclusion and in designing inclusive activities?

Inclusive Framework

According to UNNATI (2004), a "barrier-free environment is a space that allows free and safe movement, function and access for all, regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation or condition. Space or a set of services that can be accessed by all, without obstacles, with dignity and with as much independence as possible. [...] There is a popular belief that a ramp and an elevator/lift is all that is needed to make a space barrier-free. But a barrier-free goes far beyond just a ramp and has many other necessary aspects. These range from door and passage widths to flooring surfaces, from counter heights to door handles and railings, from signage and auditory signals to tactile guides."

A barrier-free environment involves four (4) different aspects: (a) accessibility, (b) usability, (c) comprehensibility, and (d) reliability. *Accessibility* refers to the (con)structural and technical conditions and facilities; in other words, built conditions like ramps and tactile guidance systems that serve to guide visually impaired people through a building or an area. The environment consists of helpful components such as signs, (floor) indicators, handrails, and special entrance mats that help to prevent accidents. *Usability* refers to the means of technical assistance

provided, such as a screen reader; a software application that enables people with severe visual impairments to use a computer.

Comprehensibility means the mode of communication through sign language, plain or Easy-to-Read Language and *reliability* means to provide a trustworthy environment and to stay consistent with what is promised.

In other words, the design of an inclusive environment where activities are taking place, should ensure safety, respect the differences in people, create easy functionality and should be clear and easy to understand. That means that all the activities provided should be easily accessed by all, without any obstacle and that all the participants should feel and be as independent as possible. For more practical examples, see the checklist provided below.

A publication of the [Senate Department for Urban Development and Housing](#) of Berlin, (2018), entitled: Barrier-Free Planning and Construction in Berlin. Principles and Examples provides three categories of anthropometric principles for designing inclusive environments, which are:

- **Motor function** (Requirements of the motor variety): when designing barrier-free environments, e.g. the seminar room where activities are implemented, specific consideration should be taken with the movement potential and action radii of the participants, e.g. wheelchair users. All people should be able to move and in general act freely within their personal situation, allowing the facilitator to implement a wide range of activities, e.g. like those that need space for movement.
- **Sensory function** (Requirements of the sensory variety): humans perceive the environment and process information using their senses. Compensating for restrictions or lack requires at least two senses simultaneously translate the necessary information, according to the multiple or two senses principle (Wikipedia, 2020).
 - For participants with visual impairments, the way they view the world may vary. The distinction depends not only on their sight capabilities, but also on external conditions such as natural and artificial light, as well as shadows, colours, shapes and the structures of surfaces. Light density contrast and colour contrast can be used to support people with visual impairments. Bright colours are generally the easiest to see because of their ability to reflect light. Solid, bright colours, such as red, orange, and yellow, are usually more visible than pastels. For people with colour blindness, it is hard to distinguish between certain colours, mostly between red and green. So, the selection of colours can be

another factor to consider. Furthermore, tactile maps, figurative representations, floor indicators in guidance systems and graphic characters could be included in the room design to make it more accessible.

- For participants with hearing impairments, especially hearing aid users, background noises and echo effects can cause discomfort. Therefore, good acoustics are essential. Facilitators must remember to speak clearly, slowly and steadily and repeat and re-phrase if necessary. A straight eye-contact is essential, as well as the support of visual information such as infographics, pictures or a particular writing format that is deemed beneficial. It is crucial that the facilitator and sign language translator (if needed) are very visible and well-lit.
- **Cognition** (Requirements of the cognitive variety): in general, the inclusive environment should be clear, easily grasped and meaningful. Harmony and physical structures are the keys. Nowadays, information technology plays a significant role in designing barrier-free seminar rooms.

Before designing the environment - indoors or outdoors - where the activities will take place, it is essential to assess and clarify the individual needs of all participants. It might be helpful to develop a registration form that includes questions pertaining to personal information, e.g. questions about the type of assistance needed, food preferences and dietary restrictions, etc. It is also very important to include a space for comments where participants can elaborate on their specific needs and concerns. Before implementing the activities, a face-to-face meeting between the facilitator and the participants can lead to a better exploration of the participants' needs, the target group's needs, and to more suitable schedules, agendas and customized activities. Furthermore, such a meeting could enable people to express themselves openly regarding individual requirements or concerns, and can result in establishing personal connections between the organiser, facilitators and the participants, that will ensure the smooth and successful implementation of any activity.

The following checklist sums up all the points mentioned above and can be a helpful overview for the facilitator to provide barrier-free learning environments, activities and mobilities. This list is not exhaustive as there are no "magical recipes" for designing inclusive settings since a whole barrier-free state cannot always be achieved. This is only a starting point than can be developed further depending on the participants' needs. Integrating parts of this list is a good starting point!

CHECKLIST

Physical impairments

- wide pathways
- ground-level entrances for all rooms (private and shared rooms, sanitary facilities) or reachable through ramps and lifts
- less or low stairways (stairs until 10 cm are manageable without assistance)
- flexible furnishings (f.i. adjustable tables)
- sufficient duration of the breaks to reach places

Visual impairments

- good lighting of rooms and places
- tactile guidance systems
- focus on verbalization of information
- material and texts in bigger prints or in braille or as digital format
- plan enough time in the beginning for participants to get used to the place and orientation

Hearing impairments

- visibility of speakers (for lip-readers) and sign language translators
- for direction: usage of clear pictograms or easy language
- writing things down rather than relying on spoken language
- limitation of written language (especially when dealing with foreign languages): increased use of pictures and visual language
- calm learning environment with minimal background noise

Furthermore, all points regarding space design for groups without impairments also apply here. Keep in mind that space is considered an 'educator' that can foster learning processes. In this regard, friendly welcome posters with texts and pictures create a positive atmosphere. Positioning the chairs according to the working mode facilitates the learning process. Chair circles are popular as they create free spaces and foster equality among the group members.

They also ensure that everyone is visible, a precondition for effective verbal and non-verbal communication (Kreisau-Initiative e. V. 2017, pp. 52-53).



Barrier-free/accessible social setting

The physical setting is one part of inclusive environments. Another, equally important aspect, is the social setting in which activities take place. Taking into consideration the social setting is of great importance, especially when we cooperate and communicate with people who have various impairments. Group moderation is the keyword for designing barrier-free/accessible social settings.

Moderation means to work with a group, encourage its members' involvement and facilitate the progress towards a common goal. It is all about promoting and supporting constructive group behaviour. Group dynamics - hierarchy formation, role formation, conflicts, etc. - can sometimes be more intensive in heterogenic groups, which makes the moderator a significant role model. In this respect, the moderator should be aware of the many functions of his*her role. The group moderator takes the needs and diversity of participants into consideration and constructively reflects on them in discussions and in group work. Part of this has to do with mediating between divergent opinions or managing conflicts. This also means to respect and use different forms of communication to reduce communication barriers. Furthermore, the moderator should encourage the active participation of all participants and empower them by promoting creativity and free self-expression.

Some practical tips in the form of a checklist, regarding inclusive moderation are:

- Plan ahead but stay flexible: In every group, unexpected situations may come up. For dealing with them effectively, flexibility and agility are key. Allow yourself and the others to make mistakes. Mistakes are human and unavoidable. Give yourself permission to

screw-up. See your mistakes as creative attempts to learn and turn them into stories of wisdom and fun to establish an error-friendly atmosphere. Offer yourself and to the participants more opportunities to learn by reducing the negative impact of undesired outcomes.

- Give the group what it needs: In groups involving PwVHPI, it is more than necessary to customize the whole process based on group/individual needs, to ensure a pleasant experience for everyone. Observe the group and their signals and react to them. As a facilitator, you have your own perception and biases. Try to avoid making assumptions and perform frequent assessments and evaluations while implementing the activities/mobilities in order to uncover unexpressed or unspoken needs.
- Use complementary means of communication: Combine multiple forms of communication to make all information accessible to everyone! You can use visualization and verbal or written language. You can also add physical gestures to compliment verbal communication.
- Be aware of the right pace: The programme, individual activities and methods should take place at a slower pace if needed by the group.

Language and Communication

Language is important. Language shapes the way we make sense of the world: it frames how we see and experience the world. In this regard, reality is created through language.

In international mobilities, language and communication play a crucial role: it is the primary vehicle for accessibility and therefore has a significant impact on the success of mobility projects. By using sensitive, non-discriminatory language and communication, respect and integrity are expressed, both of which is essential if diversity is to be used as a learning opportunity. You can check some language guidelines regarding the non-discriminatory language in the following link: [Non-discriminatory language](#).

To enable the participation of diverse target groups, it is crucial to reduce communication barriers as much as possible. This can happen by using barrier-free communication (Kreisau-Initiative e. V., p.14, 2017). Accessible language includes multiple forms of communication such as braille, plain language and other adapted text depictions, including those involving language mediators and translators. Only by combining these different forms, is it possible to make information accessible to everyone.

Three good-practices for barrier-free communication are:

Language Mediation

Within an inclusive international group, you cannot expect the participants speak a common language. To ensure active participation and full access to all information, language mediators are crucial. They must be knowledgeable of the target group and translate/mediate information into their respective language, specifically using "plain" language that the group will understand.

Plain Language

Several concepts aim at reducing language complexity to make it easier for everyone to have access to information. For example, for people with hearing impairments, lip reading is much more effective when spoken language is less complex. For people with strong hearing impairments and learning difficulties, reading can also be challenging. Plain language is focused on clear and precise language that is easily understood by a broad audience; not merely directed to PwVHPI, but also towards those with learning disabilities and non-native speakers of a particular language. It avoids wordy, convoluted language and [jargon](#). An example that shows how to use plain language follows:

Original text: High-quality learning environments are a necessary precondition for facilitation and enhancement of the ongoing learning process.

Plain language: People need good educational institutions if they are to learn properly.

Plain language does not follow strict formalities and is therefore more consistent with verbal communication. In contrast, Easy-to-Read (ETR) (Inclusion Europe, 2011) follows very clear rules about the characteristics of written language as it was specifically designed to meet the needs of people with cognitive and learning impairments (Vollenwyder et al., 2018).

Some good practices based on both plain language and Easy-to-Read, that can support inclusive activities are:

- Avoid difficult overly technical or foreign terms.
- Give examples to support the comprehension of the information.
- Avoid abbreviations or explain what they stand for
- Use consistent wording throughout.
- Avoid idioms, metaphors, jokes or types of humour that are specific to a particular language.

- Keep your sentences short and provide one message per sentence.
- Use active language rather than passive language.
- Use positive language



Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)

Augmentative and Alternative Communication involves multiple modes of aided and unaided forms of communication such as national and international sign languages, braille and communication with electronic tools. Examples of unaided modes include the use of gestures, body language, facial expressions, and sign language. Aided modes involve using pen and paper, pointing to letters, words, or pictures on a board and selecting letters or pictures on a computer screen to verbalize or "speak" sentences. (Kreisau-Initiative e. V., 2017, pp. 35-37). The general idea is to strengthen and complement speech (augmentative) while providing a substitute means of communication (alternative).

Depending on the target group, AAC can be adapted to the context of the activities. In addition to having national sign language translators for deaf people, facilitators should also use receptive modes of communication that provide a direct experience of the environment, through touch, movement, smell, taste and/or sound. These methods will complement a well-formed (simplified and repetitive) language model. An example of AAC is to present a daily programme by using symbols and pictures or to introduce a gesture with a sound if a break is needed instead of giving only a verbal message.

Competences

When designing, implementing and evaluating activities, facilitators play an essential role as they are responsible for creating the framework in which inclusion takes place. For that reason, they should develop an inclusive mindset by integrating various soft and hard skills. This inclusive mindset derives from the willingness to overcome roadblocks and setbacks and to see the creative potential in constraints.

UNESCO, UNICEF and the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (Applied Educational Systems, 2020), outline the specific skills, abilities and learning dispositions required for success in a rapidly changing digital world (as outlined by educators, business leaders, academics and governmental agencies). Embedded in these guides is a primary focus on inclusive learning environments.

The following list combines the common skills laid out by these organizations with the aforementioned critical skills of facilitators. Some key elements of project implementation are:

- **Project Management:** Every mobility is a project. According to the Project Management Institute (2017), a project is a temporary endeavour undertaken to create a unique product or service. PMI defines Project Management as the application of knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques to project activities to meet the project requirements. When designing an inclusive activity/mobility, a facilitator must develop a roadmap of the project; a clear plan of the purpose, goals and scope of the mobility, the steps needed for its successful implementation, the schedule, budget, and also the projected risks and criteria for its success. Additionally, she*he must develop lesson plans that clearly describe the activities; notating the methods used, materials needed and the duration of each.

Certainly, its not easy for a facilitator to become a skilful project manager in one day. A proactive approach to learning along with continued education and training are extremely important. A particularly useful tool in creating such a roadmap is the lesson plan template, [Canvas](#). Furthermore, the Council of European Union provides, for free, the: „[T-KIT 3: Project Management](#)“ for trainers and youth workers that manage projects. This resource should not be seen as a recipe on 'how to run a project' but rather as a proposed framework with a 'step-by-step' approach to project management, complete with tips for successful monitoring.

LESSON PLAN CANVAS		Workshop Title:																	
Purpose Why this workshop is implemented? Please refer to the problem that exists and the workshop will provide a solution, the target-group and the desired change to be accomplished	Target Group What is the profile of the participants?	Group Size How many people can be involved?	Trainer Who is going to deliver the training?																
		Workshop Duration What is the duration of this workshop- Days and hours per day and in total?	Location Where the workshop will take place?																
Learning Outcomes What are the expected learning outcomes? Please refer to them at the following levels: Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes/Behavior. What knowledge the participants are going to acquire? What skills they will be able to apply in certain processes, procedures? How their behavior is going to change for the better?		Preparation What do you need before the workshop? Do participants need preliminary knowledge? What kind of material do you need to provide them or/and do they need to study and/or to prepare?																	
		Budget How much the training will be cost?																	
		Training Material Indicate what kind of training materials are going to be given to the participants. E.g. handouts, workbook, additional resources for further reading.																	
Lesson Plan <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Topics and Sub-topics/Learning Activities/Presentations</th> <th>Duration/ (minutes)</th> <th>Training Methods (Presentation, Plenary Session, Discussion, Questions & Answers, Team Activities- Assignments, Brainstorming or other Ideation Methods, Feedback, Self-assessment Tests, Video Watching, Design Thinking Method etc.)</th> <th>Materials/ Equipment Required (Pens, Paper, Ball, Ribbon, Projector, Powerpoint Presentation, Flipchart and Markers, Sign-in sheet, Boombox to play music, Beamer, Laptop and Screen, handouts, activity sheet etc.)</th> <th>Topics and Sub-topics/Learning Activities/Presentations</th> <th>Duration/ (minutes)</th> <th>Training Methods (Presentation, Plenary Session, Discussion, Questions & Answers, Team Activities- Assignments, Brainstorming or other Ideation Methods, Feedback, Self-assessment Tests, Video Watching, Design Thinking Method etc.)</th> <th>Materials/ Equipment Required (Pens, Paper, Ball, Ribbon, Projector, Powerpoint Presentation, Flipchart and Markers, Sign-in sheet, Boombox to play music, Beamer, Laptop and Screen, handouts, activity sheet etc.)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>(Energizers Activities Presentations Evaluation)</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>				Topics and Sub-topics/Learning Activities/Presentations	Duration/ (minutes)	Training Methods (Presentation, Plenary Session, Discussion, Questions & Answers, Team Activities- Assignments, Brainstorming or other Ideation Methods, Feedback, Self-assessment Tests, Video Watching, Design Thinking Method etc.)	Materials/ Equipment Required (Pens, Paper, Ball, Ribbon, Projector, Powerpoint Presentation, Flipchart and Markers, Sign-in sheet, Boombox to play music, Beamer, Laptop and Screen, handouts, activity sheet etc.)	Topics and Sub-topics/Learning Activities/Presentations	Duration/ (minutes)	Training Methods (Presentation, Plenary Session, Discussion, Questions & Answers, Team Activities- Assignments, Brainstorming or other Ideation Methods, Feedback, Self-assessment Tests, Video Watching, Design Thinking Method etc.)	Materials/ Equipment Required (Pens, Paper, Ball, Ribbon, Projector, Powerpoint Presentation, Flipchart and Markers, Sign-in sheet, Boombox to play music, Beamer, Laptop and Screen, handouts, activity sheet etc.)	(Energizers Activities Presentations Evaluation)							
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Canvas Lesson Plan. [Graphic source](#)

- Time Management:** Time management is a skill that is closely related to project management. Time management is the management of the time spent and progress made while designing and implementing inclusive activities/mobilities. A facilitator has to make sure that all the participants are enjoying the activity without being exhausted by its duration. She*he also has to distinguish between essential and urgent aspects of a mobility project while selecting and prioritizing activities. A very useful tool for effective time management is the [Eisenhower Matrix](#).
- Communication skills:** Communication skills form the backbone of success for any mobility project. As stated in the "Language and Mediation" section of this chapter, a facilitator, who possesses good communication skills can transfer her*his knowledge, ideas and core messages effectively. She*he can motivate, inspire, receive and give constructive feedback, understand and adapt to different cultures and diversity and above all deeply connect those around her*him. Elements that enhance communication include: active listening, negotiations, written, verbal and non-verbal communication, "reading" the body language, storytelling, and idea pitching.

- **Emotional Intelligence (EQ):** Emotional Intelligence is a competence that enables human beings to understand and effectively manage their emotions as well as the emotions of others; to live in harmony with themselves and with their fellow human beings. Emotional Intelligence refers to using emotion and thought together – it's about balance. Emotional Intelligence is comprised of five dimensions, or skills, which are: (1) **Self-awareness:** This concerns the ability to understand how we feel; to acknowledge our mood and thoughts about a particular situation. It's about recognizing an emotion as it happens, knowing what creates our emotional response and how we are affected by it. (2) **Self-regulation:** This concerns accepting what we feel and having control over our emotions and behaviour. It's about taking responsibility for one's own performance; being flexible and open to new ideas and change. (3) **Self-motivation:** This concerns the ability to motivate ourselves to chase our dreams and fulfill our purpose. It's about being willing to improve ourselves or to meet a standard of excellence by committing to clearly stated goals, being positive and optimistic, demonstrating grit, by seeing the opportunities behind any problem and by being flexible. (4) **Empathy:** This concerns the ability to understand the emotions of others; to put ourselves in someone else's shoes. It's about sensing what others need in order to progress or overcome a difficult situations; in essence, discerning the feelings, needs and wants of others, "reading" a group's power relationships and leveraging diversity. (5) **Social skills:** This concerns the ability to develop good relationships with others and live in harmony with them. It's about managing others' feelings, communicating effectively using explicit messages, inspiring and motivating others, building strong bonds and teams, managing changes, negotiating and resolving conflicts, and collaborating successfully. An excellent resource for understanding what makes diversity work and how to extend it into inclusivity is [The Emotional Intelligence and Diversity Institute](#). The organization provides a [set of questions](#) that facilitators can ask themselves in order to tap into their EQ during moments of ambiguity. The following questions can help develop long-term intercultural and inclusive literacy skills:
 - What else could a particular behaviour mean?
 - What might be the reasons for the person's behaviour?
 - How might it feel to be in that person's situation?
 - When have I been in a similar situation and felt that way?

- **Agility:** Agility refers to being flexible and acting/adapting quickly to changes. A facilitator of inclusive activities/mobilities must be agile and adapt to the learning process of the participants. She*he must address any challenging situations or conflicts that arise. Additionally, an agile facilitator demonstrates what is called cognitive agility (Ross et al., 2018); the capacity to easily move back and forth between flexibility and focus, thus enabling dynamic decision-making and enhancing Emotional Intelligence and personal communication skills.
- **Creativity:** Wikipedia (2020) defines creativity as a phenomenon whereby something new and somehow valuable is formed, while the Business Dictionary (2020) indicates that creativity is a mental characteristic that allows a person to think outside the box, resulting in innovative approaches to a particular task. A facilitator designing inclusive activities by using various methods such as reverse engineering (described in the following chapter) must be creative. She*he must be able to integrate a variety of methods and best practices to produce innovative results. Furthermore, creativity is closely related to curiosity, openness to experimentation, self-motivation, risk-taking and is the basis for creating an error-friendly environment.
- **Collaboration:** An inclusive design mindset is fundamentally participatory. Inclusivity is co-created. It can't be simply pre-designed or pre-prescribed by an expert. That's why collaboration is a vital skill for a facilitator. By practising collaboration, a facilitator is more aware of how to address a problem, pitch solutions and decide the best course of action. It is also through collaboration that she*he can more deeply connect with such a diverse group and maintain respect for all of the participants in a mobility project.
- **Critical thinking:** Critical thinking (The Balance Careers, 2019) refers to the ability to analyse information objectively and make a reasoned judgment. When designing inclusive environments it is essential that facilitators adapt their programmes and methods to the feedback and evaluation received and to modify practices after trial and error. Furthermore, critical thinking enhances language and presentation skills, promotes creativity, and is crucial for self-reflection/self-assessment.
- **Self-assessment:** Self-assessment can help a facilitator to know the extent of his*her abilities and to improve upon them without the need for an external performance appraisal. She*he can use questions such as "What are my strengths?", "What are my

weaknesses?”, “What are the obstacles?” etc., to understand herself* himself more deeply and to proceed with her* his personal development.

Methods for Designing Inclusive Activities of High Quality

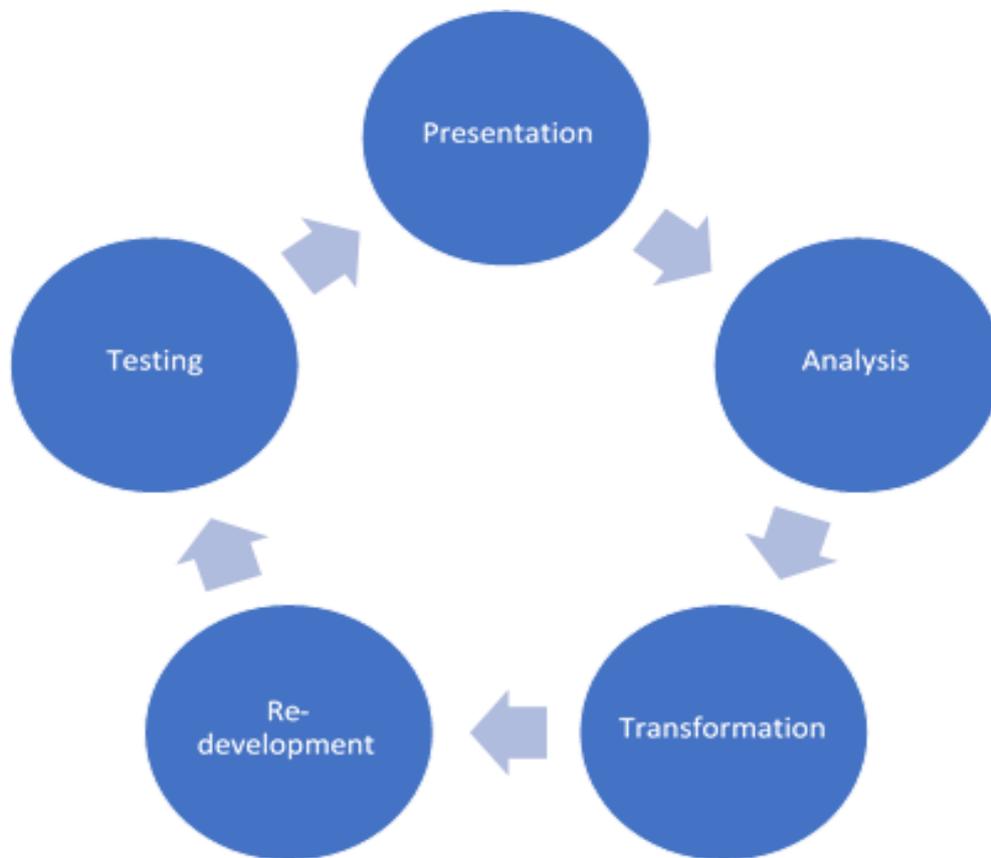
It is very important for a facilitator to design effective inclusive activities and learning experiences in a broad sense. It's of great importance to be able to adapt already known methods and activities to the needs of the participants.

Some activities are easily adaptable to the skills of diversified target groups, while others are not. This is why the facilitator must first ask “What is the aim of the activity? What do I want to achieve?” This question is essential while choosing and adapting activities, as different variations could lead to the same result: e.g. a getting-to-know-each-other activity that involves movement can be adjusted for groups that include people with physical impairments by replacing the moving body part with small actions like making a sound.

Reverse engineering

The process of Reverse Engineering was adapted as an approach to the design of inclusive methods and activities by [Eike Totter](#), a sociologist and trainer, who is associated with [IJAB](#) (International Youth Service of the Federal Republic of Germany). This process can be beneficial to adapt activities to individual needs. Reverse engineering is a process that involves disassembling a finished product in order to rebuild it or improve its functions. In the context of inclusive method design a process can be examined by dividing its methods into individual components. By discussing who might be excluded from the activities when participation is not possible or comfortable, barriers are identified. This can be circumvented by adjusting the components of the method according to the needs of the group.

The process of reverse engineering can be described using a five-steps circular process ([IJAB, 2017, p. 44](#)):



The process of reverse engineering

1. Presentation

Start with experiencing or picturing the activity that will be adapted. What is a typical and realistic course of action? How does it work? It can be very beneficial to first try the activity with a group to get a good understanding of this specific procedures.

2. Analysis

After being aware of the functionality of the activity, identify moments or elements that can form barriers of participation. Who could be excluded from the activity and why? Who could feel uncomfortable, and why? Such elements could range from physical activities, such as jumping and walking to situations that can enforce personal barriers, like touching etc. The more perspectives on and experiences with a particular activity, the better.

3. Transformation

In this step, the identified barriers are being replaced with alternative and more inclusive elements. What is the function of every individual element, and how can it be adapted to individual needs? At this point, keep in mind the two-senses-principle (if

one sense is not usable, then information can be transported through another one). For example, presenting a picture with a corresponding sound or spoken word can be very helpful. It is also essential to reflect upon the general objective of the activity in order to maintain its essence.

4. Re-development

After replacing or modifying specific elements, the remaining components will be reassembled and harmonised. Does the adapted activity require new materials? Are there different variants of the activity? Do all new elements work together or are they incompatible?

5. Testing

The modified activity should be tested, and the following questions can be helpful when evaluating its effectiveness: Does the activity still have the desired outcome? Can the activity and its elements be transferred to other contexts and other individual needs? What worked well, and what did not?

Reverse engineering is a circular process as it has no fixed endpoint. After the last step, the whole process can start again from the beginning since activities may be adapted to a new group or to a new context.

Example of reverse engineering

Name and Gesture Game in groups with visually impaired people

- 1. Presentation:** A popular name game to learn the names of a new group is the "Name and Gesture Game". In this game, the group sits in a circle, and each person takes a turn saying her*his name and making a corresponding gesture or body movement.
- 2. Analysis:** In groups with visually impaired persons, this game could become obsolete if everyone cannot see the gestures that the group members are making. The core of the game, essentially, is to easily learn the names by having an accompanying visual reminder.
- 3. Transformation:** The important question is if this activity must rely on a visual reminder or if there should be a different action to accompany the name of each group member. One alternative is to additionally use noise or verbal descriptions. Instead of making only a movement, each person could add an adjective to her*his name that describes them, e.g. active Antonio (and thereby imitating running) or happy Hannah (with a big smile on the face).

4. **Re-development:** For this modification, there is no additional material needed. A variation could be to say only the name and the adjective without the movement, so that everyone gets the same information.

5. **Testing:** When testing the adapted name game with a group, the name game still has the desired outcome of getting to know the names and memorising them using a natural reminder.

Practical advice and Good Practices

Professionals and youth workers have been in the practice of modifying activities for some time. For example, during a concept and methodology workshop in June 2015 organized by IJAB, participants developed the following table to share suggestions and good practices.

Though the table (IJAB, Sprachanimation, p.27) is not exhaustive, it can be used to understand how to transform activities with the reverse engineering technique.

Original method	Possible alternative	Notes
Switching seats (for instance, chairs in a circle)	Switching between places and seats Switching to a place marked on the floor	Better for wheelchair users, worse for participants with impaired mobility Less danger of injury due to chairs; more jostling
Verbal instructions: "All those who like chocolate ...!" (in English)	Instruction in English plus a picture of a bar of chocolate, plus written and oral translation into other spoken and signed languages	Uses a variety of communication channels and stimuli. A sensible selection is made and offered in sequence to maintain momentum and avoid confusion. Participants will not react at the same time.
Tossing and catching a ball	Tossing and catching a silk scarf across short distances	Easier to coordinate. Participants can overcome fear.
Running or walking fast	Remaining with one's feet on the ground, "walking in syrup"	Eliminates jostling, reduces physical contact

Original method	Possible alternative	Notes
Playing catch or tag	Tucking a silk scarf in one's belt behind one's back and trying to touch it	Avoids physical contact
Holding up playing cards	Holding up colored index cards, grouping neutral terms together, naming them out loud	Appeals to more than one sense, increases visibility
Calling out instructions	Linking instructions to gestures and objects	Appeals to more than one sense
Assign (positive or negative) characteristics to random individuals or groups (e.g., when telling a story)	Perceiving and describing personal characteristics in a positive way, refraining from assigning individuals to a group	Deconstructs stereotypes, minimises shame and blame
Telling a back story or using gestures that contain references to violence, struggles or oppression	Telling a non-violent story	Prevent participants from having to recall negative experiences or associations, hence eliminating mental blocks
Methods involving singing or dancing	Offering various methods of expression, such as humming or swaying one's upper body	Lowers the barrier to physical expression, removes the association between physical expression and pressure to perform
Sitting on someone's lap	Standing front to back in a row or sitting on chairs and massaging each other's backs	Avoids unstable positions. Participants can control the amount of physical contact themselves. Also suitable for wheelchair users.

It is important to keep in mind that there is no entirely inclusive activity, which applies to all groups. With each situation, target group or activity, a new process of adaptation starts.

Additionally, speaking directly to participants that are affected by exclusion, or are assumed to be, is better than making assumptions about the group and individuals. In this regard, reflection and examination are very powerful tools when working with young PwVHPI as they can help them to better express their needs and feelings. Participants can also gain a sense of self-empowerment when they changes are made based on their reflections.

To sum everything up, experiment as much as you can! Integrate as many best practices as possible! Be creative and always keep in mind that the most important consideration for a facilitator when designing an inclusive training environment is to consider the real needs and wants of the participants and enhance the “real” communication between them. This collaborative method is the only way to become an effective “bridge builder”!

Chapter 4 Engage, support, empower

The previous chapters have dealt with the many aspects of successfully implementing inclusive international youth exchanges, including gaining valuable background knowledge on inclusive target groups as well as insights and practical guidance in regards to the methodology. In this chapter, we will take a look behind the scenes of such projects and share actual experiences. The focus here is on the people involved, especially the young participants themselves.

Before going further, it is important to emphasize, that the field of non-formal education follows the concept of lifelong learning. The processes always invite all people to get involved in learning, to reflect and think further. The practical information presented here provides insight into the positive experiences gained in practice. Though not a complete picture, it shows the wealth of possibilities and promotes creative thinking.

This chapter can be summarised in three words: engagement, support, and empowerment.

What is actually behind these big words? This chapter will explore this question. In the context of inclusion, it is important to underline that actions cannot be clearly separated from one another, as they are interrelated. For young people, with or without disabilities, the ability to actively participate and get involved depends on the right support in each situation. Adequate support depends of the participants' active involvement and feedback. Therefore, engagement and support are essential to the empowerment of young people.

Active engagement of young people

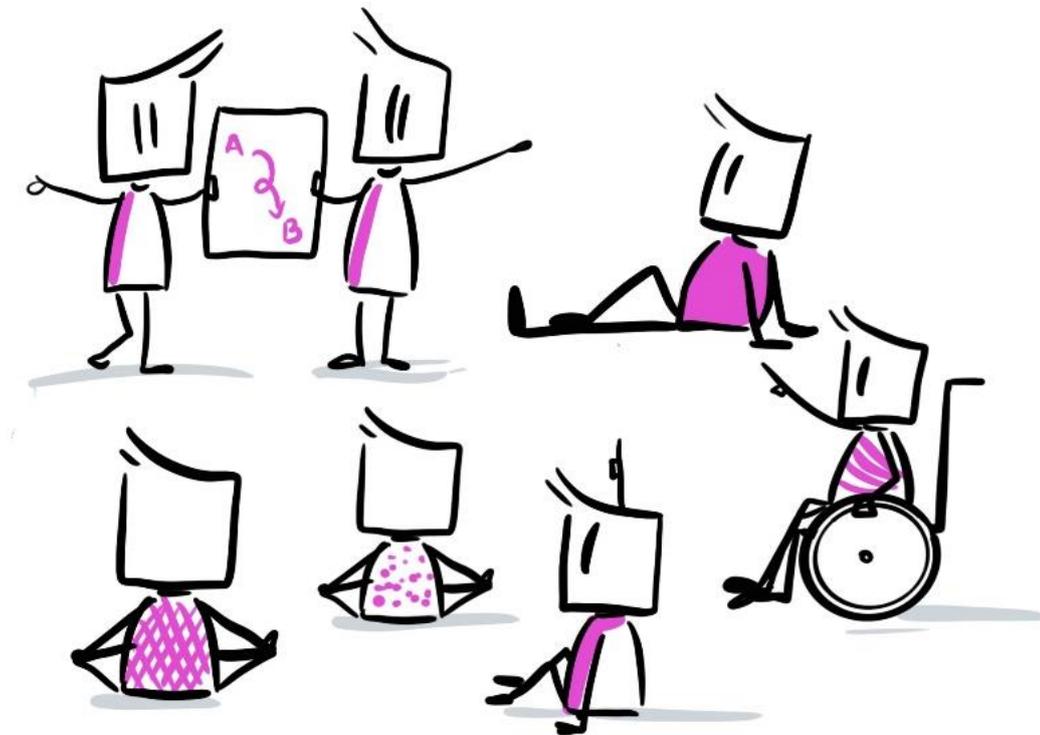
As already outlined in chapter 3, youth engagement, an important objective of the EU Youth Strategy (European Commission, 2019), is the result of young people being involved in responsible, challenging actions to create positive social change. Young people are more than passive recipients of external influences. They are representatives of their own interests and should be treated as equal partners. As citizens of society, they must be actively involved in shaping their environment. Not only are they representatives of their various social groups within the context of inclusive international youth exchanges, but they will also go on to acquire fundamental competencies, skills and self-esteem that will help them contribute to an open appreciative society. A definitive slogan used throughout inclusive international youth work is "Nothing about us without us".

Embedded within youth engagement are various models of youth participation. These models represent the potential partnerships between young people and adults. Three general models of active participation have been distinguished: youth-led, youth-adult partnership, and adult-led (School-based Health Alliance, 2015).

In **youth-led models**, young people are the main leaders of the processes and independently coordinate activities with peers. The activities are based on their ideas and visions. Adults are there to support them when needed. However, it is crucial that young people have proper training and are prepared for this role in advance.

The **youth-adult partnership model** aims to establish young people and adults as equal partners. Young people and adults develop a common agenda without distinguishing between their individual interests. Instead, young people and adults share power and authority to plan, coordinate and implement activities based on defined roles, responsibilities and skills.

In the **adult-led model**, adults develop the core components of the programmes. Young people can be involved in several ways; either exclusively as participants, or guided by adults to gain experience with the decision-making process.



All three models work as a continuum and can be combined to best fit the objective of the youth programme.

Engagement, yes! But how should the young participants be engaged? This is a very central question that youth workers and facilitators should first consider during the planning process. In practice, it often consists of combining various types of participation. Whichever method is preferred, the key to successful and meaningful youth engagement is to involve young people, their ideas and needs, in every step of the process, from preparation to implementation and follow-up.

Planning and preparation

Before we look at young people's involvement in the project, the question arises of how to involve young people in international inclusive projects. It can be particularly challenging to reach youngsters equally within the multiple target groups of an inclusive project. Some groups may feel that they are not being targeted because they are not used to being the beneficiaries of such offers. Others will not be interested in participating right away because they do not see themselves as the primary target group of inclusive projects.

A good strategy is to build **trustful partnerships** with organisations that already have the trust of the targeted youth groups. These can be, e.g. non-governmental organisations, schools and also self-representation organisations. By networking with and involving selected partners, target groups are more easily reached. When possible, using personal contact is a recommended strategy. Experience has shown, time and time again, how much faster young people open up and participate if they are familiar with key persons of the projects beforehand. This could be due to a preparatory visit to the host institution, during which the facilitator presents the idea of the project to interested young people. Preparation can also be conducted by the partner organizations in the participants' home location. It is vital then that all partners agree on common goals, values and ideas. Involving peers who have already taken part in such meetings is particularly valuable. The more experienced disabled young people can share their experiences, help reduce fears and give helpful advice.

Preparing young people for a mobility project is an important process as they will be traveling to a foreign place and interacting with new faces and cultures; many of which they have never been in contact with. The process prepares them to deal with unknown situations so that they can develop trust and security within themselves. Within the framework of such processes, the young people involved can express their needs and

wishes and formulate fears. This ensures their needs are included in the preparation process and provide precious information for the target group-oriented preparation of inclusive international projects.

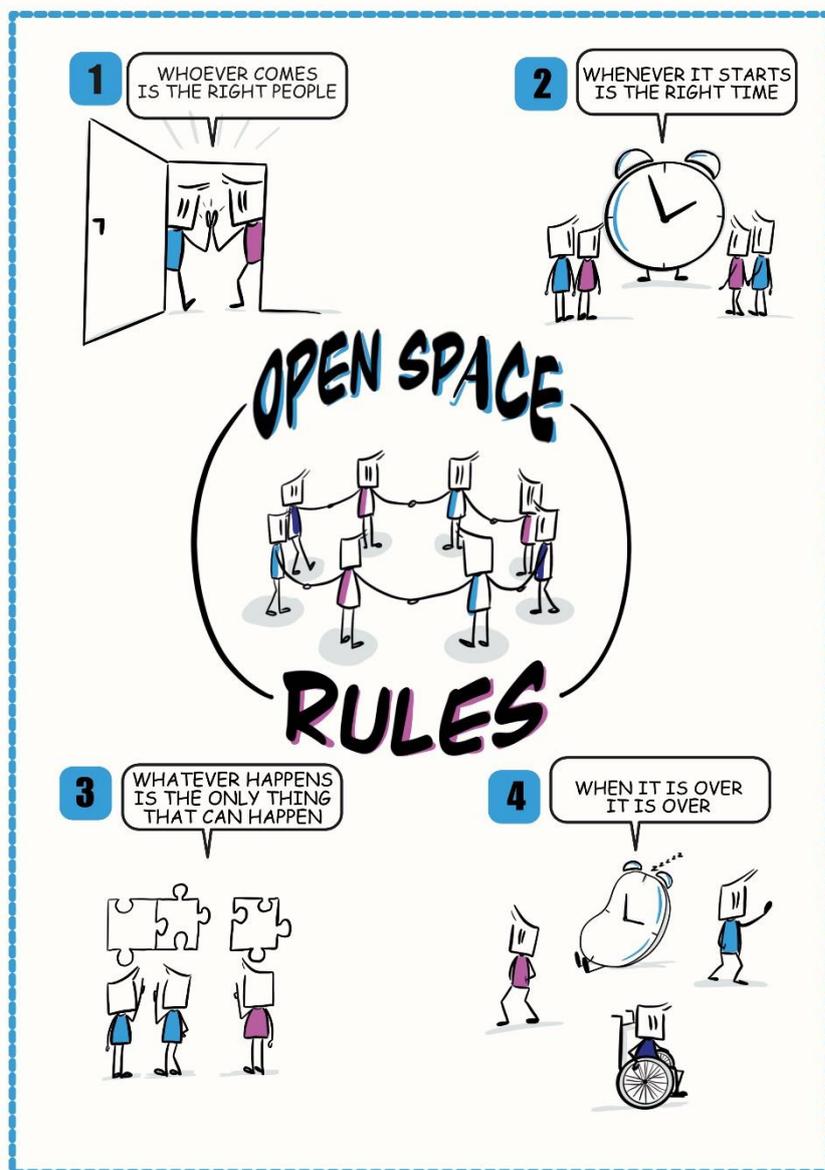
A **face-to-face preparation meeting** of the partners is particularly valuable. The Erasmus+ funding programme enables international partnerships to hold such Advance Planning Visits (APVs) in the project country (Erasmus+ Programme Guide, 2020). In addition to the representatives of the international partner organisations, it is also possible to involve one young person as a representative of each target group. It has proven successful that this person has already been in contact with interested young people before representing them during the preparation process. The organisers can provide questions to help young people collect their ideas and needs.

The preparation process also provides an excellent opportunity to share responsibilities. This applies not only to the cooperation between the partners but also among the young participants, who can gather ideas about where they can contribute and take over responsibility. They can be supported in this collaboration by the partners or group leaders, who will accompany them to the meeting. If young people are not directly involved in the preparation process, a personal letter is a nice alternative. It can invite the participants to directly contribute their ideas to the programme or topic, which they can then exchange with the organisers, e.g. by email. It is important that when such offers exist, the ideas of the young people find their place in the programme. If they are encouraged to get involved and then their contributed ideas are overlooked, this will result in frustration and withdrawal. Experiences of discrimination and exclusion can be reinforced, and the protected space of youth exchange can be affected.

Implementation phase

There are many ways to actively involve young people within a youth exchange. As already mentioned, it is possible to create spaces in which participants can take over specific parts of the programme independently and share special skills and creative ideas with their peers. These ideas should fit within the project context and should be adequately communicated in the preparation phase. There are no limits to the participants' creativity. The project management team must be there to support the participants in their initiatives and to provide the necessary materials and facilities.

A valuable **method** of actively involving young people in the programme is the Open Space technique (Edutopia, 2020), which can be adapted to suit the target group. It is subject to specific [rules](#) (see graphic below) and offers a structure in which participants can provide their workshop ideas and activities.



The rules of Open Space. [Graphic source](#)

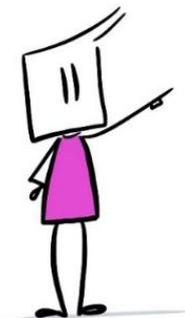
Within the framework of the programme, an "Open Stage" may be planned. Here the participants can present their creative ideas and skills within the framework of an organised show. These presentations can be prepared in advance. Alternatively, the programme can also include time for preparing contributions for the Open Stage. In this way, young people can work together on site participants outside their national groups. Support can be provided by using integration games to identify common interests and similarities and to encourage cooperation.

Whichever methods and approaches are chosen, a participatory programme must offer opportunities for participants to become actively involved. For the facilitators, this means handing over responsibility. Personal contact with the participants, active listening, flexibility, and taking up their ideas are essential strategies to enable real participation. Among the participants, there will always be those who are louder and get actively involved much faster. In particular, when working with marginalized target groups, an important task of facilitators is to get into a dialogue with those who are not used to being heard. When active engagement of everyone is the goal, it is crucial that alternative voices are being heard, explored and are part of decision-making.

An important tool for involving all participants in decision-making and programme design is the regular **reflection and evaluation** of the processes. Reflection rounds can be organised in plenary sessions of all participants. However, since not all participants feel comfortable speaking in large groups, daily or regular reflection rounds in small groups have proven successful. These can be groups based on the partner counties, where participants can communicate in their own language. In mixed groups, language mediators can support communication or alternative creative methods can be used. The moderation of such processes is helpful in this respect. Targeted questions and creative evaluation methods enable the participants to reflect on their experiences during the programme. At different stages of the process, they have the opportunity to express their needs, ideas and also critical perspectives. The moderators then share the essential feedback with the leading team. If the participants' comments are addressed, then the experience will be one that builds trust and empowers, thus motivating them to become more involved.

Follow-up

The dissemination of results and experiences contributes to the sustainability of inclusive projects and helps to promote inclusion. The involvement of participants in the follow-up process is a valuable resource that contributes to empowerment and should be encouraged



By providing a platform for young people to share their experiences, they will feel as though their opinions and perspectives are valued.

This platform can be organised in cooperation with the other partners. Project blogs, postings in social media, information events in the organisations are just some ways in which young people can be involved in the follow-up.

Different levels of support

Active involvement of participants with specific needs can only be achieved when the right conditions and appropriate support mechanisms are provided. The appropriate support mechanisms must be provided for this. The individual needs of the participants should already be identified during the preparation process to prepare the project in the best possible way. How much specific information is needed is a matter for the organisers, but also for the participants and their families. In the end, they decide what information to share. As a facilitator, you have to be aware that families and guardians filter information. Therefore, concrete questions and checklists can help participants prepare and provide the necessary information. Not only is information about participants' needs crucial for the organisers and facilitators, it also supports language mediators and workshop leaders in preparing their activities.

Since no common **language** can be assumed, language mediators and sign language interpreters for deaf participants need to be available. As a result, young people have a voice through which they are actively involved. In addition to language, alternative forms of providing information are helpful. Visualisations provide valuable support since it cannot be assumed that all participants can read well. The sensitive and conscious use of language and communication should be taken into account when implementing inclusive international meetings. Chapter 3 has already addressed various aspects of the language particulars.

Additionally, the publication [Perspective Inclusion](#) (Kreisau-Initiative e.V., 2020) provides a comprehensive overview of the use of language and communication in inclusive international youth work. At this point, it is also important to stress that language mediators in inclusive international youth meetings can be financed by the initiative of [Special Need Support](#) (Erasmus+ Programme Guide, 2020).

When planning inclusive projects, it should be noted that such projects often require a higher level of support. Though inclusive practices can be ensured by the cooperation of various partners, certain inclusive settings sometimes need more personalised support to be able to participate

equally. This must be considered in the process of application and project planning.

Group leaders, accompanying persons and assistance are an important support in inclusive projects. They are trusted reference persons for young people in an unknown situation. It is of great advantage if the young people and accompanying persons know each other prior to the meeting and are jointly involved in the preparation process. The relationship between the participants and the accompanying persons creates stability and orientation. Emotional experiences, frustrations, needs and uncertainties are often absorbed here. The accompanying persons are thus also a channel of communication between participants and the leading team. In terms of the follow-up to inclusive meetings, the shared experiences are a valuable basis for coaching the participants in their reflection and further development. The many impressions and learning experiences are often processed only after the project, because far too much is happening during the project itself. In order to ensure the sustainability of the experiences and the transfer of what has been learned into the everyday life of the participants, group leaders and accompanying persons play a key role.

Another important support type, when available, is **individual assistance**. It is possible to apply for the funding of such service, so that people in need of individual support can travel to projects with assistants. Such aid gives them often more comfort and supports their active participation.

Group leaders, accompanying persons and assistants are all part of the group. It is important to clarify their role. Workshops and project activities, in which participants open up to each other and new experiences, take place in an intimate atmosphere. If an accompanying person who is not especially involved in the activity enters and leaves this intimate space as an observer, it can have a negative effect on the development processes of the group. It, therefore, makes sense to define their role in advance. Since accompanying persons have an important role model function, their active participation in the activities often has a positive effect on the behaviour of the participants. Those who find it especially challenging to open up to new processes can be positively influenced. At the same time, the distinction in hierarchy softens and a more eye-to-eye relationship is fostered. The role of a personal assistant is slightly different. Their function is to support the individual needs of a disabled person explicitly. As a result, they can sometimes be perceived as foreign bodies, which can have both beneficial and adverse effects on group-building processes. Therefore, their role should be clarified in

advance and communicated transparently. Whenever possible, personal assistants should also be invited into group activities.

The **facilitators** and **workshop leaders** involved also have an important support function in inclusive projects. It is their task to design the pedagogical offer in such a way that everyone can participate equally. This means creating diverse methodological and pedagogical offers that enable people with different skills and abilities to actively participate in the learning and experiential processes. They must always have the whole group in mind. In addition to pedagogical skills, facilitators and workshop leaders must also maintain a positive and productive attitude. Their pedagogical offers create a framework in which learning and development can take place. Their leadership enables them to set positive examples of flexibility and empathy. Rather than impose activities on the participants, they should share responsibility and guide them in their process. Non-formal education is always process-oriented. Results can emerge, but are not the main focus. An enjoyable and empowering process is the best result.

In the context of support, the vital topic of **logistics** plays an important role. Only if the general conditions are designed in such a way that all participants feel comfortable, can a trusting atmosphere, in which learning and development are central, be created. This includes the accessibility of facilities, accommodations, a comfortable journey to and from the venue, as well as leisure activities and food. Vegetarian or vegan preferences must be taken into account, as well as certain intolerances or cultural and religion-influenced eating habits. If an excursion is planned, a barrier-free bus may need to be provided. This can also be applied for separately within the framework of the Special Need Support (Erasmus+ Programme Guide, 2020). Many planning aspects have already been discussed in the previous chapters. A comprehensive overview of important criteria can be found in the handbook [Vision:Inclusion An inclusion strategy for international youth work](#) (IJAB, 2017, p. 34).

Regardless of what conditions are necessary, in the context of inclusive programmes, they must not be given a special status but must be regarded as universal. The barrier-free bus or the visualization of the programme are not required for selected individuals but represent the norm for the group. This should always be communicated transparently.

Finally, the pedagogical concept and the **methodological implementation** cannot go unmentioned. They serve in particular ways to support the participants. Integration and getting to know each other activities, which are especially important at the beginning of encounters and help to build an atmosphere of trust, help participants to present

themselves and get to know other participants. These activities have the vital function of breaking the ice and contributing to the development of relationships and a mutual group process. Here, similarities can be discovered, and differences appreciated. Countless websites provide getting to know- and group building activities, such as through [Salto's toolbox](#). It is essential that these methods are adapted to the needs and also the abilities of the individuals and are only used if they fit the group. If activities exclude anyone, this will negatively affect trust-building and group building processes. The [Reverse Engineering](#) described in chapter 3 is a useful tool to adapt methods to the target group and thus support the group in its development.

The approach of [language animation](#), in turn, supports participants in communicating and dealing with language diversity in the context of international meetings (FGYO, 2017). The publication [Language Animation - the inclusive way](#) (IJAB, 2017) analyses this approach from an inclusive perspective and shows examples of method adaptation through Reverse Engineering.

The field of non-formal education has an extensive spectrum of methods and thematic focuses. Specific methods, for example, can support participants in understanding [diversity](#), reflecting on [human rights](#), and/or promoting [sustainable action](#). Due to the variety of participants in inclusive international meetings, the right balance of methods should always be ensured to address the different needs of participants. While some prefer movement, others prefer hands-on or visual approaches and/or discussions. A variety of activities and workshops can be offered to meet different needs and to develop specific skills and abilities. In the international inclusive project [Building Bridges](#), for example, three or four parallel workshops are offered on a single topic and use an array of approaches to prioritize the different senses. For example, participants can choose two workshops from theatre, dance, art and media offerings. Usually, they have the opportunity to sample each offering on their first day so they can choose according to their needs and interests.

As already stressed, it is crucial that the methodological implementation is inclusive, yet also important is the manner in which the methods are used. Using the appropriate method or activity at the right or wrong time can promote or hinder dynamic group processes. [Tuckman's stages of group development](#) are helpful here. The Model presents five stages of group development, which are inevitable and necessary for the participants to grow, face up to challenges, tackle problems, find solutions, plan work, and deliver results.

These phases can be transferred well to the **group dynamic processes** in youth exchanges:

Forming is the phase of arriving, of orientation, of warming up to each other.

Storming stands for the phase in which the group searches for order and the building of trust begins. Opinions are exchanged and conflicts can occur. People search for their roles in the group and negotiations take place.

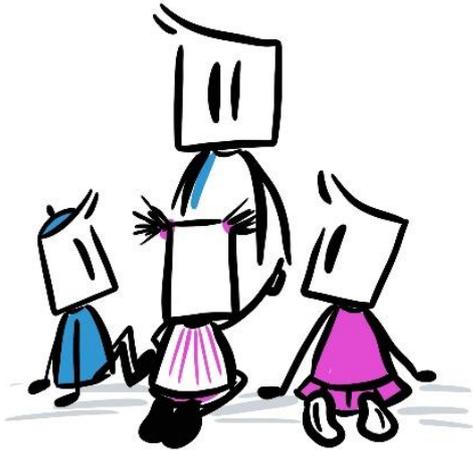
Norming represents the phase of clarification. Differences of opinion and personal conflicts are often resolved. A group feeling and understanding of a common goal develops. The group members learn to respect and/or tolerate one another. Responsibility for the common process is assumed.

Performing is the work phase in which the group works together, learns together and progresses towards their common goals.

Unforming is the farewell phase in which the group slowly dissolves, and the encounter comes to an end through evaluation and farewell rituals.

As a facilitator, it is good to be aware of these phases and to observe the group. If methods appropriate to the group dynamic stages are used, the development processes of the group and its members can be optimally supported. The diagram, [Group-learning process, group development and the choice of methods](#), shows how methods can be used in a targeted manner. It is vital to keep in mind that group dynamic processes are carried out in the context of short-term activities, and with the right use of methods, the first three phases can be completed within the first day and a half. At the same time, conflicts, disturbances and changes in the group structure can set back the group dynamic development, so that the group has to start over from the beginning.

Many processes need to be considered, especially in inclusive groups. Rituals such as daily evaluation and joint meetings in the morning give participants a helpful routine for adjusting to the new context. Visible and recognisable orientation plans and visualised programmes are also useful to support adjusting to the new environment. Diversified work practices, such as individual tasks and phases in smaller and larger groups, foster the development of the participants. By presenting varied challenges, they promote varied competences. Small group work, in particular, can provide an opportunity for those who do not like to express themselves in large groups or have a quieter personality.



Supporting the participants and thus actively involving them at different levels is one of the essential tasks of facilitators of inclusive meetings. Individual contact, questioning and listening, as well as an open and attentive attitude, are important competencies of facilitators. The goal is to involve everyone. This means taking a close look at where support is needed and where the participants themselves can overcome challenges and emerge from the process more empowered.

Empowerment of youth within inclusive international youth exchanges

Empowerment is also a declared goal of the EU Youth Strategy. In this proposal, the European Commission states that youth work must be recognised and improved to enable young people to be in control of their own destinies.

As explained in the introduction, there is a close relation between engagement and empowerment. Real engagement is already an empowering process. As the process unfolds, youth see that their voices, opinions and contributions can make a difference. This applies to all young people.

Inclusive meetings, however, often involve many young people who arrive feeling that they have no voice because they have been denied the ability to contribute to society. For young people who have never been in a position to take part in decision-making, such a process can also be overwhelming. In the protected space of inclusive youth encounters, young people can explore, take responsibility for their own decisions and contribute within their own possibilities and needs.

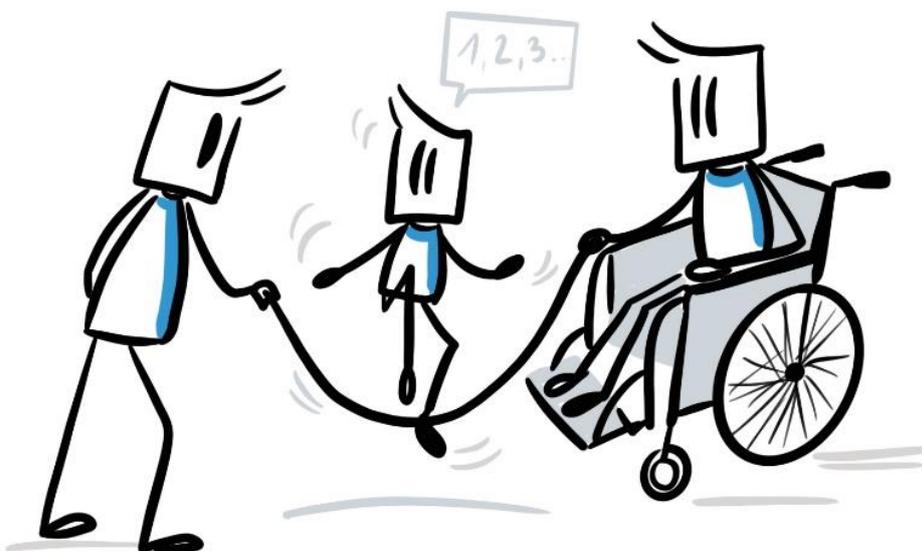
The simple act of connecting with other participants in such meetings can already be empowering. Small successes, such as a conversation with someone from another country, even if only by using hand and foot, can

bring tremendous strength. Having a conversation with a person in a wheelchair can be empowering for both parties; finding the courage to ask what life in a wheelchair is like; to be asked and heard - all these seemingly small gestures and moments can have an incredible effect, which can greatly impact the participants individually as well as their environment.

As a facilitator, it is important to think big. It is not the deficits, but the discovered and perhaps still undiscovered abilities and possibilities that need to be made visible and tangible. It will not serve the group to start at a low level due to perceived inabilities. Everyone must be challenged. Different approaches, patience, and if necessary, adapting the activities are the way forward.

"Yes, it was difficult, but I didn't give up and did it" or "I did it, and now I can do the whole thing", such sentences are often heard in inclusive youth meetings. This is pure empowerment!

The feeling of belonging is also a very strong feeling, especially for those who often encounter exclusion and discrimination in daily life. Facilitators are important role models here. They present themselves to the group, moderate the processes and are seen and heard by everyone. The way they deal with each participant and the language they use are all perceived behaviours that will most probably be copied. By being aware of these details, an appreciative and open group culture can be promoted. The feeling of belonging can also be strengthened by a diverse set of pedagogical and methodological approaches. Group tasks, where different strengths and abilities are needed, can bring different people into focus at times and can lead to appreciation and increased self-confidence.



The engagement, support and empowerment of young people should therefore always be a primary objective of educational activities. International youth meetings can create a protected and generous space where inclusive action can be explored, and where young people can learn that they have the power to change conditions. In a favourable environment, mistakes can be made and corrected through joint reflection and dialogue without harming people. This also applies to facilitators and all other actors involved in such meetings. Learning from and with each other is the key to an empowering process.

Chapter 5 **A for accessibility: practical information on accessibility of websites and documents**

The importance of information accessibility

Accessibility of information is crucial for people with certain disabilities but also for those that develop products and services who don't want to exclude anybody from using them. When the websites and documents are designed and coded properly, more people can use them. Currently, many tools and websites pose accessibility barriers and thus are not easy or even impossible for some people to use. However, if organisations wish to create high-quality information, their documents and websites should be designed with everyone in mind.

Making information accessible for all - web accessibility

"The power of the Web is in its universality. Access by everyone, regardless of disability, is an essential aspect."

(Tim Berners-Lee, W3C Director and inventor of the World Wide Web)

Web accessibility is a term that is used to describe a general practice that ensures all possible barriers are removed. This includes both, people with disabilities and also people with learning difficulties, limited technical possibilities or other limitations. Accessible websites should allow users to perceive, understand, navigate, interact or contribute to it. To improve accessibility, auditory, cognitive, neurological, physical, verbal and visual factors need to be taken into consideration while designing websites.

For accessible web design, developers should follow the specific standards explained in the next section. There are several basic rules that should be kept in mind by anyone who designs websites, online tools or simply publishes any information online:

- Use good contrasts – sufficient contrast between elements on the screen is crucial for good visibility. This doesn't only concern foreground and background colours, text, and other elements like icons, buttons, and links. They must be clearly recognisable, be of appropriate size and therefore easy to see. Their design should follow simple structure with no ambiguity of which action should be taken after clicking on the element. For example, the home button in navigation is usually indicated by the word "Home" and an icon representing a home shape.
- Enable customizable text – this means that the text can be changed by users as far as font, colours and spacing is concerned. This function is crucial for people with low vision and dyslexia. Relevant technical solutions can be found as built-in functionality of the web browser, or as an additional functionality of the website. An example of additional functionality on the website can be found on the [DARE](#)

[Project website](#), where the plugin provided by [Userway](#) allows the user to change the contrast and the size of the text to enable keyboard navigation and much more.

- Use large links, buttons and controls - these should be large enough for people with reduced dexterity to use. The current design rules indicate three base sizes for buttons and controls at a level of 42, 60 and 72 pixels depending on their priority.
- Ensure clear layout and design – this means clear headings, navigation and consistent styling. Clarity of layout and design is very important for people with cognitive disabilities.
- Publish understandable content – texts shouldn't contain long sentences, complex language, jargon or acronyms. They are difficult for everyone but illegible for people with cognitive and learning disabilities ([see Chapter 3](#)).
- Implement notifications and feedback – the messages displayed should be simple and clear. For example, an error message shouldn't present the error number, it should also explain what the problem is. Websites and online tools need to be predictable and understandable. This is crucial for people with cognitive and learning disabilities.
- Implement voice recognition – this requires particular coding and has language limitations but once implemented, can be a huge help for people with visual disabilities.
- Implement text-to-speech – similar to the voice recognition, text-to-speech requires specific coding. It can be used for various activities and support people with visual disabilities and dyslexia.
- Ensure keyboard compatibility – websites should be operable by a keyboard; particularly important for persons that cannot use a mouse due to physical restrictions.
- Use captions when making videos – some videos can be understood without captions or sound, but the majority of them can't. Captions make any video accessible, especially for people with hearing impairments.



Overview of standards: WCAG, ATAG, UAAG

The above mentioned good practices are derived from international standards on web accessibility in order to guide developers in building accessible websites. International web standards define what is needed for accessibility.

One of the de-facto standards for web accessibility is WCAG. WCAG stands for Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. As the name suggests, it is the set of guidelines that, when followed, can make web content more accessible. The [current version of WCAG is 2.1](#) was released on 5th of June 2018.

This standard was prepared by WAI (Web Accessibility Initiative), a part of W3C (World Wide Web Consortium) that was brought to life in 1997 to improve accessibility of the Web for people with disabilities. The current version, WCAG 2.1, is composed of 4 rules, 13 guidelines and 78 success criteria.

The 4 rules, following the official documentation, are as follows:

- **Perceivable:** Information and user interface components must be presentable to users in ways they can perceive.
- **Operable:** User interface components and navigation must be operable.
- **Understandable:** Information and the operation of user interface must be understandable.
- **Robust:** Content must be robust enough that it can be interpreted by a wide variety of user agents, including assistive technologies.

To better understand how the guidelines are prepared, some example guidelines that might help in preparing accessible websites and documents are as follows:

Guideline 1.4 Distinguishable

Make it easier for users to see and hear content, including separating foreground from background.

It is essential to mention that all of the WCAG's guidelines are not technology-specific. This means that adoption and compliance with the guidelines should be followed by respective content creators.

Each of the guidelines is accessed on so-called "Levels of Conformity". They are as follows: Level A (lowest conformity), Level AA (moderate conformity) and Level AAA (the highest conformity with the guideline).

Guideline 1.4 Distinguishable has 13 different success criteria and can be used to understand the levels of conformity. The full list is available online. For the purpose of this publication, only some criteria will be briefly described.

For example, **Success Criterion 1.4.1 Use of Colour** (A) states:

Colour is not used as the only visual means of conveying information, indicating an action, prompting a response, or distinguishing a visual element.

In other words, websites conforming to this success criterion should use more visual means of conveying information apart from only colour. If the website is considered to be compliant on an A level, it should meet all the A success criteria.

To reach the higher level of conformity, the website should also satisfy other success criteria such as the AA level **Success Criterion 1.4.4 Resize text** (*Except for captions and images of text, text can be resized without assistive technology and up to 200 per cent without loss of content or functionality*) or the AAA level **Success Criterion 1.4.9 Images of Text** (*Images of text are only used for pure decoration or where a particular presentation of the text is essential to the information being conveyed*).

WCAG has been widely adopted by legislative levels in many countries. A few examples are presented below.

- **European Union** requires all public sector bodies having websites and/or mobile applications to be compliant with WCAG guidelines at least on AA level.
- **The United States**, through "Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act", uses 17 success criteria of WCAG standard, in addition to providing other success criteria in its national guidelines.
- **Australia**, through the "Disability Discrimination Act" decided that all government websites should meet WCAG criteria.

Accessible documents

The concept of accessible publishing focuses on preparing all types of documents in a way that can be understood by assistive technologies or/and by people with disabilities. Some of the WCAG standards can also be followed, taking into consideration the differences between web technologies and the documents. There is not an equally popular standard for documents as WCAG is for websites, yet various organisations take initiative to share the same guidelines.

One example can be the "[Document accessibility standards 1.0](#)", prepared by the California Department of Rehabilitation (DOR).

These standards apply to Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint and PDF documents and are based on the requirements from Section 508 of the federal Rehabilitation Act and also on WCAG standards.

This document provides a list of guidelines that should be respected while creating an accessible document. As with other standards on accessibility, this list should be perceived as indications and therefore subject to slight modifications if needed.

Standard 1. Plain Language

The document should use plain language that is easy to understand by the reader ([see Chapter 3](#)).

Standard 2. Font Style and Size

The use of a standard font of Arial size 14 is encouraged for all documents.

Note: Even though Arial is the most popular font, others such as Calibri, Century Gothic, Helvetica, Tahoma and Verdana can also be used. It is important to choose the right font, as some may cause reading difficulties. For example, fonts such as Times New Roman are considered decorative (with the use of so-called "serifs") and therefore can lead to eyes and brain distraction making it challenging to get the shape of the letters right without effort.

Standard 3. Text Alignment

The text can be aligned to either the left or right margin (reference WCAG 1.4.8).

Note: This requirement originates from the fact that the text that is justified can cause so-called "rivers of white"; empty spaces that span across a few lines. Too much white cause difficulties in reading or even make it impossible. What is more, if the text is justified, uneven spaces can result in difficulties distinguishing word boundaries.

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Rivers of white. Example by Petr Kadlec. [Graphic source](#)

Standard 4. Colour – Contrast Ratio

The use of black text over a white background is advised whenever possible. For other combinations, the ratio of at least 4.5:1 for font sizes up to 17 should be maintained and at least 3:1 for a font size of 18 and above (reference WCAG 1.4.3).

Note: For some people (with low vision) it is difficult to read the text if it does not contrast well with its background. The ratio ranges from 1:1 to 21:1; 21:1 being black text on a white background (or opposite). It is calculated taking into account the relative luminance of the lightest colour in comparison with the darkest colour.

Standard 5. Colour – Using colour to convey information

The colour should not be used as the only way to convey information, and it should be distinguished by a visual element or symbol (reference WCAG 1.4.1).

Note: If the colour is the only element, the message may not be understood by people who have difficulties perceiving colours. For example, if there is a chart that has two sets of data, instead of using one blue rectangle and one red rectangle to denote the data points, one of the series can use circles or triangles additionally to different colours.

Standard 6. Alternative Text for Non-Text/Visual Items

It is expected that elements such as images, tables, graphs etc. are accompanied by text that describes the content. The text should not be more than 180 characters (reference WCAG 1.1.1).

Note: Most software used to prepare documents give the ability to provide the alternative text for each picture. For example, Microsoft Word suggests adding the description and its content in one or two sentences to make it clear for blind people.



Example for alternative text description in Microsoft Word

Standard 7. Wrapping Style for Non-Text/Visual Items

All the elements should be wrapped in line with text (reference WCAG 1.3.2).

Note: It is expected that the content of a document follows the meaningful order. It is especially important as it pertains to the column-based layout. The content should flow from the top to the bottom of the column and then from the top of the next column. If there are any visual elements in the content, their place should, therefore, be correct and meaningful as well. To avoid any misunderstanding, the wrapping should be in line with the text, making it clear which part the accompanying visual item belongs to.

Standard 8. Headings

The documents should use a predefined heading style (reference WCAG 1.3.1).

Standard 9. Hyperlink Text

The hyperlinks should be self-explanatory, and phrases such as "click here" should not be used (reference WCAG 2.4.4 and WCAG 2.4.9).

Note: Usually, well-perceived hyperlinks are part of the sentence, and the purpose of each link is easily understood without having to follow it. One good example is: "More information about current activities can be found on [DARE PROJECT WEBSITE]", where the text [DARE PROJECT WEBSITE] is a direct hyperlink to the website.

Standard 10. Lists

Lists should be created using only the default styles (reference WCAG 1.3.1).

Note: To make the content more accessible and easily read by assistive technologies, the lists should be created using the styles available in the style editor. They should not be created manually by tabs or spaces.

Standard 11. Table of Contents

The table of contents should only be created using the default styles (reference WCAG 2.4.5).



Default lists in Microsoft Word document

Standard 12. Multimedia

Embedded and hyperlinked multimedia must be captioned, and the controls should be accessible. For audio files, a transcript is required (reference WCAG 1.2.2, 1.2.3, 1.2.4 and 1.2.5).

Note: To assist those with visual or hearing impairments, all media must be equipped with a transcript that contains a text-based explanation of what is presented in video or audio-based material. It can be featured below the media object, or as part of it (written or audio transcription placed over a video, along with other information such as background music).

Standard 13. Logical Reading Order

The content must be organised in consistent and correct reading order (reference WCAG 1.3.2).

Note: The logical reading order implies that the way content is structured follows a natural progression and can be easily tracked as if it would be if spoken. The readers should be able to navigate easily through the text without losing orientation.

Standard 14. Page Numbering

For easy navigation, each page number of a document should correspond to the page numbers in the document's menu or software toolbar. (reference WCAG 1.3.1).

Note: Inconsistent page numbering is a common mistake. If, for example, a PDF file is opened and the page number shown inside the document as "10", then "10" should also be the page number in the PDF application reader. The same applies to a Word document. Maintaining consistency is essential for documents to be easily understood and accessible.

Standard 15. Tables – Header Row

All tables should have a header row for tabular data presentation (reference WCAG 1.3.1).

Note: Whenever there is a need to present a set of data, it is usually best to use a table. To enable assistive technologies in understanding the table correctly, the first row should be a header explaining the purpose and content of each column.

Standard 16. Tables – Layout

The layout of the tables should be simple, without merged/split cells (reference WCAG 1.3.1).

Note: A clean table layout is preferred over tables that contain merged or split cells. While this could be visually more attractive, assistive technologies such as screen readers can face difficulties in defining which cell corresponds to which category of data.

Standard 17. Abbreviations and Acronyms

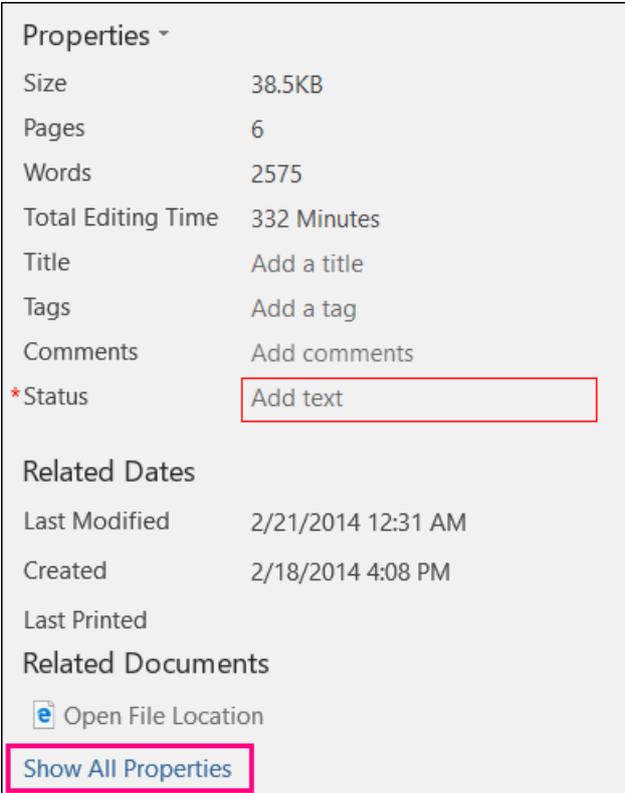
When first presenting of an abbreviation or an acronym, an explanation should be provided (reference WCAG 3.1.4).

Standard 18. Document Title

Each document should have a descriptive title. The title should be notated in its "properties" (reference WCAG 2.4.2).

Note: Each editor that prepares an accessible document provides means to add additional information about the whole document. For example, Microsoft Word contains a function for using tags and comments to elaborate on a document's contents. This function can be found by clicking File > Info, then locating the "Properties" tab. Microsoft Word has a special Properties panel available by clicking File -> Info.

Apart from the General Standards, DOR has also provided more detailed requirements for specific documents such as Microsoft PowerPoint, Microsoft Excel and PDF documents.



Properties of a document in Microsoft Word. [Graphic source](#)

Additionally, at the end of the DOR's guidelines, there is a [Minimum Checklist](#) provided, that when followed, will help in creating accessible documents.

It is important to mention that most of today's document creation software has built-in functions to assess and improve a document's accessibility.

Newer versions of Microsoft Office applications have the "Check Accessibility" icon on the "Review" tab. For older versions, it is available by clicking File -> Info, then selecting the option "Check for Issues".

The "Accessibility Checker" will inspect the document and report errors and warnings to be verified before finalising the document.

Tools supporting augmentative and alternative communication (AAC)

[AAC](#) is an extensive set of methods and tools, aimed at supplementing and/or replacing speech and writing by people with impairments. A general definition of AAC aid is – any device, electronic or not, used to transmit or receive messages. Modern AAC devices began to emerge after 1980 with the rapid progress of technologies like speech synthesis and microcomputers in general.

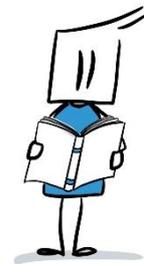
Today, high tech AAC devices enable users to communicate using digital or synthesised speech outputs. Devices may be dedicated and purpose-built or use specialized software. In fact, most modern operating systems include some form of text-to-speech software, verbal dictation and commands, all of which greatly help users with various impairments (Kreisau-Initiative, 2017)

One very well-known AAC user, physicist Stephen Hawking, successfully used a speech generation device by operating it with only his cheeks muscles.

This chapter provides only an overview of the existing standards for making websites and documents more accessible. The catalogue of suggested approaches is by no means complete, but is instead a set of guidelines which can be expanded upon. It is worth it to mention that much of the advice included in the accessibility standards are very easy implement. Therefore, even a minimal effort will result in better accessibility of websites and documents.

Though some of the guidelines may sound technical, it is vital to highlight the fact that the vast majority of them can be applied with built-in software solutions, such as in word processors.

While the technical jargon might sometimes sound complicated, devoting the time to understanding and applying these steps will lead to a more accessible world where information can flow without any barriers.



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What does inclusion in the context of international youth work mean? What do youth workers and facilitators need to know, to plan and implement inclusive international youth exchanges?

The DARE Practical Guide for Inclusion shares practical advice, ideas and insights to equip youth workers, trainers, facilitators and educators with the necessary knowledge and to encourage them to get active in inclusive youth work.

DISABLE THE BARRIERS

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