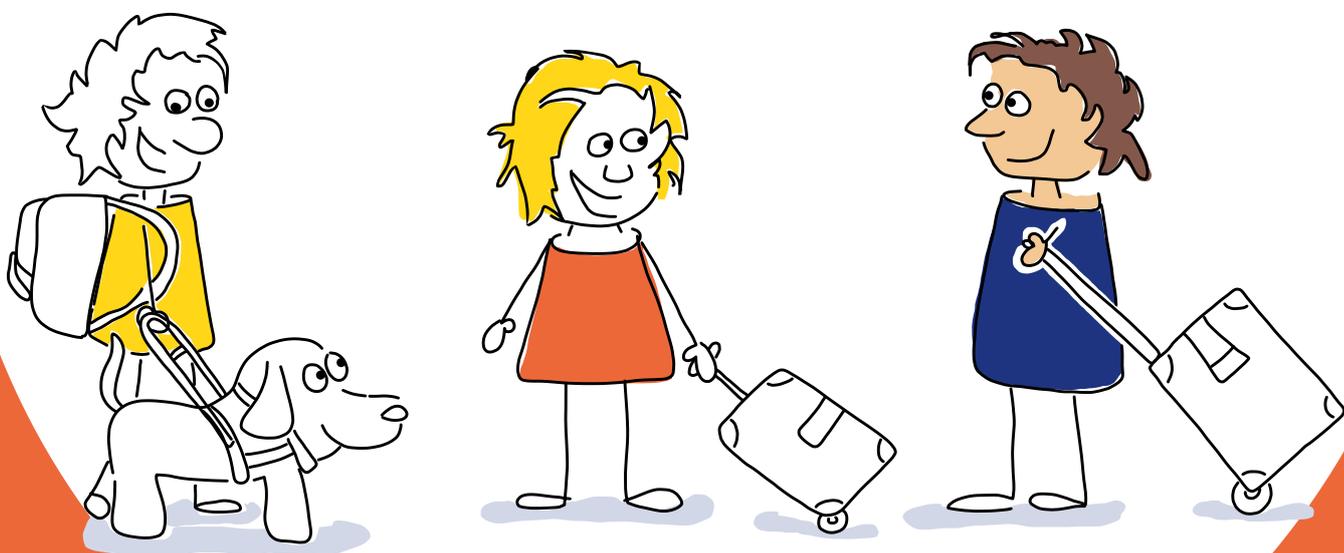


ENGAGE IN INCLUSION!

Guide on disability-inclusive

European youth projects



Strategic
Partnership
for Inclusion

Erasmus+
Enriching lives, opening minds.



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Author: Elżbieta Kosek

With the contribution of

Güler Koca | Inclusion and Minority Rights Expert

Karina Chupina | Trainer and Expert on Disability, Youth and Diversity & Inclusion

Lauri Heikkinen | European Voluntary Service alumnus

and the members of the "Health & Diverse abilities" strand of the Strategic Partnership for Inclusion

Coordination:

Hanna Schüßler (JUGEND für Europa) and Tony Geudens (SALTO Inclusion & Diversity)

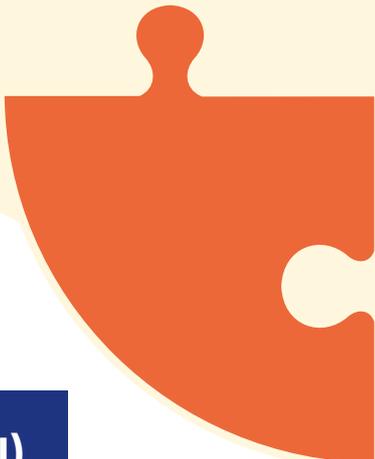
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The Strategic Partnership for Inclusion (SPI)

This guide on disability-inclusive European youth projects was created on behalf of the Health & Diverse abilities strand of the **Strategic Partnership for Inclusion (SPI)**, a multi-annual strategic cooperation involving 26 National Agencies (NAs) for the European programmes Erasmus+ Youth and European Solidarity Corps, co-ordinated by the **SALTO Inclusion & Diversity Resource Centre**.

The main aim of the SPI is to encourage the participation of young people with fewer opportunities in Erasmus+ Youth and the European Solidarity Corps Programmes.

To achieve this, the SPI:

- reaches out to organisations active in relevant fields to encourage and support the engagement of more organisations;
- develops and offers training and networking opportunities to organisations from relevant fields and supports transnational partnership building;
- facilitates better knowledge transfer and best practice sharing to improve the quality of inclusive youth projects within the Erasmus+ Youth and the European Solidarity Corps programmes;
- raises awareness of the needs and potential of the target groups;
- promotes Erasmus+ Youth and the European Solidarity Corps as tools for inclusion and capacity building.



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Introduction

Inclusion and Diversity within Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps

Inclusion was already one of the priorities in the previous generation of the EU youth programmes. However, the new Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Programmes 2021-2027 have become even more inclusive. Dedicated financial support for inclusion, new formats, simplified application processes, as well as training and networking opportunities for organisations and youth workers, increase the programmes accessibility for grass-root organisations, as well as a significant number of young people who face more obstacles to participating in international projects than their peers.

The  **Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Inclusion and Diversity Strategy** (in SALTO-YOUTH, 2021) supports and strengthens the inclusion and diversity dimension in the new programme generation 2021-2027. It highlights that European youth work should promote diversity and create equitable access opportunities for everyone by addressing the barriers and variety of obstacles that keep many young people from participating in international youth projects. The understanding of the programmes is that inclusive activities should target all young people and to achieve this, special emphasis should be placed on reaching young people with fewer opportunities.

What's in here for you?

This guide is a tool for organisations and youth workers who implement European projects but have little or no experience in planning disability-inclusive youth projects. It tackles key aspects of inclusive youth projects and provides solutions instead of only pointing out challenges. The goal is to support youth workers strengthen and develop their skills for inclusive and diversity-sensitive youth work and provide them with the knowledge needed for working with young people with disabilities and health conditions.

You'll find a concise overview of practical tips for the preparation, implementation and follow-up of inclusive short-term activities in Erasmus+ Youth and the European Solidarity Corps. The focus is mainly on **youth exchanges and youth participation activities in Erasmus+ Youth and volunteering teams in the European Solidarity Corps**. Nonetheless, all the advice can, of course, be adapted and transferred to short- or even longer-term volunteering projects, or other inclusive youth activities.

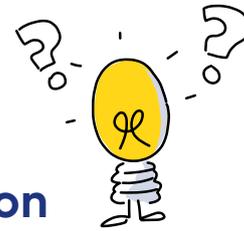
It is indisputable that youth work, whether regional, national or international, should be accessible to all and leave no one behind. **Mainstreaming inclusion as a self-evident aspect of European youth work is essential for all of us and a strong argument for becoming engaged.**

Understandably, implementing inclusive activities might initially seem like a big challenge but they greatly benefit the young people, as well as the youth workers and organisations. Incorporating the perspectives of a broader diversity of people will give you a deeper and broader understanding of young people's needs and interests. Your activities can be tailored accordingly, which will improve the quality of your youth projects and make them more diverse and accessible. And your projects will have an even more significant impact on European society.

With this guide we want to invite you to reflect on the inclusivity of your youth projects. And we want to give you the confidence to give disability-inclusiveness a try. **Even small, deliberate changes in your approaches and actions can make your activities accessible for new target groups.** This guide addresses many situations, processes and perspectives relevant to inclusive international youth work in order to show the overall picture. Not everything will be relevant for your specific project.

We hope this guide on disability-inclusive European youth projects can inspire and motivate you to step towards inclusive and diversity-sensitive youth projects because it is a rewarding experience for all!





Understanding the concept of inclusion

One thing is certain; Inclusion affects each of us personally, as we have the joint responsibility of creating a more diverse, inclusive, equitable world, where no one is left behind. There are many benefits for all of us when needs are addressed. For example, introducing simple or easy-to-read language makes information more accessible to a greater number of people. The willingness of society to change and to achieve a paradigm shift together is fundamental to the idea of inclusion. However, the implementation of inclusion requires a common understanding of the term and its philosophy.

Social Inclusion

Social inclusion means **improving participation for all** in society through enhancing opportunities, equal access to resources, having a voice and respect for everybody's rights. It requires the distribution of opportunities and resources in a way that minimises disadvantage and marginalisation. This implies that institutions, structures, and measures, such as learning opportunities, should be designed to welcome the diversity of life's situations and identities.

In an inclusive environment there are no longer structures that are considered as "normal", and no one has to change to "fit in". Instead, the structures and framing conditions are **constantly and proactively adapted** (by all people involved!) **to the needs and requirements of each person**, so that everybody can contribute with their own individual qualities. Social inclusion means a **change in attitude to**

recognising **diversity as the "norm"**, and existing differences, challenging as they might be, as enrichment and a source of opportunity and learning in all areas of social life.

In European youth work and non-formal education, inclusion is understood as a broad practice which ensures that people with fewer opportunities than their peers have equal access to the structures and programmes offered. Therefore, European youth projects should be designed using an inclusive and diversity-sensitive approach.

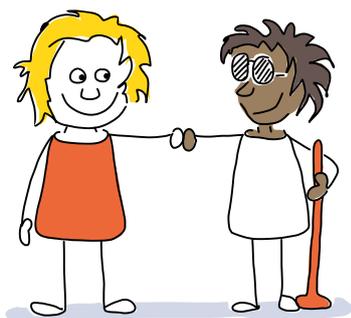
Disability Inclusion

Even though inclusion in some countries is often associated with people with disabilities, the idea of social inclusion is not just limited to them. Disability inclusion, as a significant part of social inclusion, focuses on **securing the rights and participation of persons with disabilities**. In this context, it should be borne in mind that people with disabilities are not a homogeneous group and have different identities in terms of gender, social origin, ethnicity etc. Moreover, there are underrepresented groups amongst them, e. g. people with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities, deaf-blindness or with multiple disabilities.

Disability inclusion is about creating the same participation opportunities for people with disabilities as for their peers without disabilities. It also involves ensuring that appropriate policies and practices are in place to support them.

The key to developing more inclusion in youth projects lies in **changing attitudes and actions**. In addition, **access barriers need to be identified and eliminated** through specific measures, equipment and services.

In all areas, we should aim at adapting to the diverse needs and backgrounds of individuals instead of expecting individuals to adapt to existing structures. This also applies to youth work and project structures. Therefore, active involvement, communication and exchanging perspectives with people with disabilities and their representative organisations in everything we do is crucial.



It is important to remember that **inclusion is a two-way street**. While most societies still have much to learn about how to become more inclusive, underrepresented groups need to be proactively engaged in dialogue in order to be heard and contribute. Learning and experiencing together can thus shift perspectives and prompt powerful change and commitment to inclusion.

Disability

Although there is the tendency to think of people with disabilities as a separate group of people with “special needs”, disability is part of human diversity and as common as other aspects of identity, all of them connected to individual needs and qualities.

“The term “special needs” should no longer be used in relation to disability. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has no mention of “special needs”. “Special needs” accentuates ableism, segregation and hierarchies. In an inclusive society, the needs of people with disabilities shouldn’t be considered as “special”. It is better to talk about “accessibility needs”.

**Karina Chupina,
Trainer & Consultant,
Expert on Disability, Youth,
Diversity & Inclusion**

To understand disability from a human rights perspective, it is essential to distinguish between an impairment and a disability. An impairment is a permanent or long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory dysfunction. Disability is understood as “[...] **results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers** that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others” (UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Preamble (5), 2006).

In other words, **that people with impairments are disabled by the barriers they encounter** and that the environment we create can impact the level of their disability. Progress can be made by eliminating barriers, promoting positive attitudes, supporting full participation and non-discrimination (Chupina, K., 2012, in Council of Europe: Disability and Disablism).

Inclusion – a human right

Inclusion is a human right. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognises the right to equality in education and participation of people with disabilities. Conversely, this means that young people with disabilities have the right to participate in international youth projects.

People with disabilities are considered the largest minority in the world. According to the 🗨️ **#WeThe15** movement, there are 1.2 billion people with disabilities in the world representing 15% of the global population (International Paralympic Committee, N/A). Among them are approximately 200 million young people with disabilities (Chupina, K., 2012, in Council of the Europe: Youth and disabilities). With this number in mind, it is justifiable to ask yourself **how many young people with disabilities are participants in your youth project?**

Target groups of inclusive youth projects

Inclusive projects within Erasmus+ Youth and the European Solidarity Corps have a wide range of formats and can involve diverse target groups. They offer young people the opportunity to experience something different, meet peers from other countries, and acquire new social and intercultural competencies. Additionally, they are a source of new perspectives, inspiration and motivation to become more active in life.

In the guide on disability-inclusive European youth projects we focus primarily on the involvement **of young people with disabilities and chronic health conditions** but promote **mixed-ability group projects as genuinely inclusive activities**. Mixed-ability projects are activities that target young people with different backgrounds, abilities and disabilities. The inclusive “mixed-ability” approach recognises that all young people have different needs and may need individual support at some point to fully participate.

There are many **benefits for the participants of mixed-ability youth projects:**

- provide positive experiences of working, playing and simply being together;
- support breaking down barriers and taking on challenges;
- offer young people with and without disabilities the opportunity to interact with each other in a safe environment and to build positive and respectful relationships;
- foster a sense of belonging to a wider community and develop the feeling of citizenship;
- enable young people to contribute actively to all programme activities, gain confidence in their skills and learn that their voices count;
- open up opportunities for the young people to discuss and exchange views on topics important to them;

- improve important skills and competencies (communication, teamwork, creativity etc.);
- provide the opportunity to young people without a disability to interact with persons with a disability and develop a positive and respectful relationship with them;

- provide all people involved with the opportunity to acquire new perspectives and gain a deeper understanding of diverse, real-life situations, which might subsequently motivate them to engage in advocacy work.

(cp. SALTO-YOUTH; 2006, pp. 29)

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Explore the topic in ➤ **Benefits and obstacles to inclusive projects** for young people, partner organisations and communities (SALTO-YOUTH, 2014, pp. 47) or ➤ **Why should a young person volunteer?** (SALTO-YOUTH, 2020, p.16).





Checklist on disability-inclusion



This checklist is an overview of the various topics in the guide. It follows the order of the content. When planning your inclusive youth project, you can use the checklist as

a way of making sure you have considered all important aspects, though not all of them will necessarily apply to your specific project.

Understanding the concept of inclusion	Yes	No	Page
I have an understanding of the concept and the benefits of (disability-) inclusive and diversity-sensitive projects in the European youth programmes.			pp. 8
Planning and preparing inclusive youth projects	Yes	No	Page
I have considered who is missing from my projects and identified potential participants.			pp. 15
I have identified participation barriers to my youth projects.			pp. 16
I have developed ideas on how to reduce these participation barriers.			p. 17
I have engaged young people with disabilities as self-representatives in the development and design of the project, so they can develop ownership of the project and take on responsibilities.			pp. 17
I have an understanding of the potential needs and expectations of young people with regard to my projects.			p. 27
I have involved the young people's environment (family, community), as well as organisations made up of or working with young people with disabilities (self-representing associations etc.), to identify needs and encourage the participation of young people with disabilities. (Recommendation)			p. 22
I have established international cross-sectoral partnerships which have access to various target groups in their respective countries.			p. 18
The partners involved have agreed a basis for cooperation in our inclusive youth project.			p. 18
I/we have applied for the funding available for inclusion in the Erasmus + Youth/the European Solidarity Corps application to cover the young people's needs (inclusion lump sums and real cost funding, preparatory visit).			pp. 55
I/we organised a preparatory meeting involving partners and young people with disabilities. (Recommendation)			p. 21
The team is up to the challenge of implementing inclusive projects and I/we have offered guidance and additional training opportunities to team members and the people involved.			pp. 19

Reaching out to young people with disabilities and health conditions	Yes	No	Page
Our communication materials are accessible and appealing to young people with disabilities.			p. 23
The application process is designed in an accessible way.			pp. 23
The application process supports the needs assessment of young people in the inclusive youth project.			pp. 23
The recruitment process is organised in a transparent and flexible way.			pp. 23
Preparing young people and assessing their needs	Yes	No	Page
Young people know who the important contact persons are and how they can reach them.			
I/we have prepared and implemented preparation activities for the young people according to their needs.			pp. 25
What to consider when planning logistics	Yes	No	Page
I/we have considered various travel options and have chosen the best options for the young person/group of participants.			pp. 28
The venue meets the accessibility needs of the participants.			pp. 29
I/we have checked and prepared the facilities (incl. leisure time areas) with regard to accessibility and made necessary adjustments.			p. 32
I/we ensured that dietary needs and preferences are available.			p. 33
The accommodation and bathroom facilities meet the accessibility needs of the young people.			p. 31
Accessible transportation between the project location and accommodation is available, if needed, and enough time is planned for the transfers.			p. 31
Accessible information is available on the practicalities young people need to consider when travelling and during the project.			pp. 33
Creating an inclusive environment for learning	Yes	No	Page
I/we prepared the physical environment according to young people's need, so everybody feels welcome and encouraged to participate.			p. 36
I/we considered all important aspects and elements in creating a welcoming, appreciative and safe psychological environment.			p. 36
I/we have considered the young people's needs, expectations and barriers and put adequate support systems into place.			pp. 37
I/we have explored disability-inclusive attitudes and behaviours, as well as ways of preventing discrimination and exclusive behaviour.			p. 39

Language and communication in inclusive youth projects	Yes	No	Page
Support systems (e.g. translators) are in place in respect of the young people's needs.			p. 40
I/we have planned activities to boost and encourage inclusive communication among the participants			pp. 41
Accessible working materials and written information have been prepared.			pp. 40
Inclusive design of the learning process	Yes	No	Page
The programme and all activities are carefully planned in consideration of the target group's needs and expectation (e.g. slower pace, more rest periods etc.)			pp. 43
All activities are planned according to the principles of non-formal and inclusive education.			pp. 43
The methods, approaches and activities are adapted and designed to be accessible for all young people.			pp. 46
Risk assessment	Yes	No	Page
The risk assessment plan is developed together with the partners, the team and the young people, and all relevant people are briefed regarding responsibilities and safety procedures.			pp. 49
I/we know the safety procedures and arrangements for the location.			p. 51
An accessible emergency contact list has been prepared and shared with the relevant people.			p. 51
Young people know whom to contact in an emergency or crisis.			p. 49
Regular evaluation and reflection meetings with my team are planned to identify challenging situations and discuss solutions.			p. 51
Follow-up	Yes	No	Page
I/we planned a broad evaluation process with all relevant stakeholders to document learning experiences and observations from the project for long-term quality development and capacity building.			pp. 52
A dissemination strategy has been developed to share the projects results and mainstream inclusion and diversity. (Recommended)			pp. 53
Structures are in place to support and guide young people after the youth project.			p. 54
All partners ensured that young people know whom to contact should they need support or guidance processing their experiences after the project.			p. 54





Planning and preparing inclusive youth projects



Before we begin: It is important to bear in mind that **inclusion is a process**, not a fixed state. Whether youth exchange or volunteering activity, **inclusion is a choice that you make at every step in your project** (Chupina, K., 2020, in IJAB (ed.), p. 15). This mainly takes some goodwill, flexibility, ongoing reflection and adjustments of the framework and programme content. And you do not need to do it all at once. Even small changes to your project design, like more breaks or the visualisation of written content, can have a big impact on the accessibility and inclusiveness of your project.



Who is out there? Identify potential participants

Designing genuinely inclusive and diversity-sensitive projects requires careful planning and preparation. One of the important first steps is to identify and reach out to new target groups. This is **an ongoing process** in inclusive and diversity-sensitive youth work. It is about recognising and understanding who is missing or not considered and why. In this context it is good to know that around **70% of disabilities are invisible** (Invisible Disabilities® Association, N/A), ranging from bipolar disorder to chronic pain to mental illness to diabetes, which makes them easier to overlook.

REFLECTION

Have a closer look at the communities and organisations around you. Talk to people active in the field of inclusion or working with people with disabilities. Ask yourself:

“Who is missing from my projects?”

Can you identify (groups of) young persons whom you haven't considered as possible participants in your youth projects? Why are they missing? What prevents them from participating?

Inclusive youth projects offer a variety of benefits and important learning opportunities to young people with disabilities (SALTO-YOUTH, 2014, p. 47). Shouldn't this encourage young people with disabilities to claim their right to participate? And shouldn't youth organisations acknowledge this fact and naturally involve young people with disabilities in their activities?

Unfortunately, this is not the case. Many youth organisations do not perceive young people with disabilities as a potential target group for various reasons. This could be due to a lack of awareness, assumptions that some groups are not able to participate, concerns regarding additional costs and workload etc. As a result, there is little communication about such participation opportunities, which leads to young people with disabilities not even knowing about these options.

This is a great starting point to become more inclusive and to reach new participants. Use this guide to explore small adjustments you can make to your youth

project to become more accessible and inclusive. Communicate this in the right places and new and previously unreached young persons will find their way into your projects.



More see chapter [↘ Reaching out to young people with disabilities and health conditions](#) (p. 22).

Barriers to participation

To make your project more accessible for new target groups you need to explore the reasons why they are missing in the first place. All of us face obstacles at one time or another. But for young people with disabilities and health conditions such barriers can be more prevalent and **exclude them from participating** in all areas of life.

These barriers can include the following:

- on the part of young people with disabilities- lack of knowledge about the project opportunities, low self-esteem or self-confidence, experiences with exclusion and discrimination, insecurities, lack of a voice or visibility, limited access to education, lack of skills, various degrees of visibility of the disabilities;
- on the part of the youth organisations- lack of facilities, lack of skills or knowledge, assumptions about the abilities and skills of young people with disabilities, attitudinal barriers (also as the results of stigmatisation and discrimination), fears of the extra effort and costs.

(cp. Chupina, K., 2020, in IJAB (ed.), p. 25)

To reach and engage new target groups, it is important to **identify such barriers**. Recognising potential barriers and dealing with them in a conscious way can reduce many of them and allow the active participation of young people with disabilities and health conditions on an equal footing. In this context, it is vital to understand **Intersectionality**. It highlights that people's experiences and identities have multidimensional markers and are not limited to just one. The particular characteristics of skin colour, gender, disability, age, sexuality etc. overlap with one another creating multiple levels of social injustice and discrimination. They cannot be tackled in isolation from each other. For instance, women with disabilities, LGBTQI+, refugees or black women may experience discrimination in qualitatively different ways from their male, white and non-disabled counterparts. (Chupina, K., (2020), in IJAB (ed.), p. 12). In order to be fully inclusive in youth work, these overlapping identities and different experiences need to be taken into account to understand the complexity of barriers young people may face.

Watch the TED talk (2016) [↘ The urgency of intersectionality](#) by Kimberlé Crenshaw, who coined the term "intersectionality".



Of course some barriers are deep-rooted, long-lasting and structural. Youth projects cannot single-handedly eliminate problems such as poverty, xenophobia and social exclusion. But they can empower young people, expand their opportunities, offer new experiences and challenges through which they can gain self-confi-

dence. For young people who face discrimination and exclusion daily, sensitive and inclusive youth work, based on respect and dignity, can be an immense source of strength and personal encouragement (Călăfăteanu, A. M., García Lopez, M.A., 2017, in Council of Europe: T-Kit 8, p. 20).



What can you do to reduce the number of participation barriers in your project?

Some solutions are easier to implement, as they simply require the adaptation of methods (↘ p. 46) or a more careful venue selection (↘ p. 29). Other solutions, such as eliminating attitudinal barriers and stigmatisation, are **long-term processes** for you and your teams or **require additional human or financial resources** which need to be considered when writing the project application.

But the first step is simple: **Involve the young people** from the beginning. Listen carefully to understand what they have to say. In such an appreciative atmosphere, creative solutions will arise and often they aren't that difficult to implement.



Need inspiration? Find ideas for reducing the number of participation barriers in the ↘ **Factsheet #4: Barriers to Participation** (National Children's Bureau, 2017).

Erasmus+/European Solidarity Corps programme info: Erasmus+ Youth and the European Solidarity Corps offer financial support to reduce barriers in youth projects. More in chapter Inclusion support in Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps, ↘ p. 55.



Involve the young people

Young people are representatives of their own interests and should be treated as equal partners. In this role they can use their perspectives to help define relevant goals and find solutions, which fit their needs, such as workshop content and common activities. Invest time in talking to the young people about their needs, expectations and fears; about what they crucially need to gain from the project and how they could learn in and through it. It will be a source of enrichment for your activities.

Work with the young people on the inclusive project design and **show them how their ideas will positively influence the project. Be transparent about what is possible.** It can lead to frustration, disengagement and distrust if young people invest time in this process and their ideas are just ignored in the end. And that's what we don't want to achieve.

If you think: “Whoa... that’s a lot of work! Don’t worry. You are not alone. Let it be a joint effort by your international partners and your teams. Maybe you can build partnerships with relevant organisations in your local area, which can further support you.

“I feared I would not fit in, or my issues would be too much. Turns out everyone fits in with everybody and I was able to give a hand to others when needed. My expectations were much surpassed, and I learned so much more about myself and others around me than I thought would be possible”.

Participant of the Inclusive International Dance Festival in Krzyżowa/Poland

Who are your partners?

To carry out an international youth project, you need **partners in other countries**. To make your project inclusive, it is beneficial to look for partners who share this common interest. A good partnership has a strong foundation built on **shared goals, values and trust**. Before deciding on a partnership, get to know potential partners (e.g. through online meetings). Start a process to clarify that you agree on what you want to achieve with your inclusive project. Talk about needs and expectations. The concept and working approaches to inclusion may differ in countries and cultures, so it is crucial to explore the different perspectives and find a common understanding of inclusion when you collaborate to avoid

misunderstandings and conflict at a later stage of the project. It is recommended to draw up a partnership agreement.

When planning and implementing mixed-ability activities, it is valuable advice to enter **into cross-sectoral partnerships** with different partner organisations across a range of professions, youth work, community organisations and disability organisations from each country. They can **naturally reach and involve diverse target groups**, which makes it easier to put together a mixed-ability group. They also bring **specific “know-how”** to the partnership, which will enrich your project.

There are several ways to meet partners. You can use partner finding websites or groups on social media platforms. You can also meet partners at trainings and networking events organised within the framework of Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps or attend youth worker trainings on inclusion and diversity in which representatives from other European organisations participate.

LOOKING FOR PARTNERS?

Use ↘ **Otlas The Partner-Finding Tool** (SALTO-YOUTH, N/A), have a look at the ↘ **European Youth Portal** or the publication ↘ **Use your hands to move ahead 2.0**. (SALTO-YOUTH, 2020, p. 70). Various networking and training activities, as well as youth worker projects, can be found in ↘ **The European Training Calendar** (SALTO-YOUTH, N/A).





REFLECTION

How are you doing so far? Have some ideas already come up that influenced your approach towards more inclusiveness and diversity in youth projects? What should your next steps be?

What about your team?

Facilitators, trainers, workshop leaders, group leaders, language mediators or sign language interpreters, volunteers, representatives of the partner organisations, supervisors, coaches, mentors etc. – depending on the project-, can all be part of your team, working together towards the common goal of successfully implementing an inclusive youth project.

Inclusion is a learning process for all team members involved in the project. Some might already have experience, others might just be starting their journey in inclusive youth work. However, it is vital to **prepare your team** for the challenges and important aspects of inclusive international youth projects: the team needs to understand that **inclusion is not an accessory** and the responsibility of one or two persons during the project's implementation. Everyone should be involved in the whole process, giving them a lot of opportunities to learn and develop.

There are a few things you might consider when preparing your team:

- Talk to all team members about their mindset, core values and ethical youth work principles, accountability, responsibilities in their specific role and the process as a whole. It can

be helpful to draw up an **agreement with the team members** highlighting the crucial values, ethical principles, attitudes, tasks and responsibilities.

The chapter ➤ **Essential skills for youth work practice** (Sapin, K., 2013) introduces the links between the purpose of youth work, the core values and principles for youth work practice and an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of a youth worker.



- The implementation of inclusive youth projects requires a variety of **social and methodological competencies**. Have a clear picture of what you need the project team to be and encourage team members to develop their competence and skills by joining trainings and gaining knowledge about inclusive and diversity-sensitive projects.
- **Attitudinal barriers** can result from uncertainties, a lack of knowledge or a misunderstanding of disability. They can limit the potential of people with disabilities to be independent individuals. Make sure that such attitudes and uncertainties are addressed in your team. Know the people you are involving. Offer guidance and consultation on tackling concerns. One of the worst things that can happen is that a team member recreates discrimination and exclusion structures in an inclusive youth project. **However, with a positive and appreciative attitude, nearly everything is possible.**

➔ The team should have a **basic knowledge of diversity**. They should promote a respectful and appreciative attitude through their behaviour regardless of the participants' social status, gender, nationality, religion, impairment, sexual orientation, etc. They also need to be prepared to actively counteract any kind of discrimination during the project (e.g. verbal or physical violence).

➔ **Mental health conditions** are still taboo. Youth workers should work on the development of professional capacities to understand the social and psychological characteristics of young people with mental health conditions, so that they may react appropriately to situations and support them.

And one more thing. Young people in projects often relate to team members as role models and people they can trust. It is important to practice what you preach. Ideally, our team members **represent the diversity among the participants and in society**. Participants will be more likely to approach a person whom they can identify with and whom they feel can understand their challenges.

tify with and whom they feel can understand their challenges.



REFLECTION

Inclusive projects are need-orientated. One of the main objectives is the young people's need to reduce access barriers. But what do the members of the team need to feel comfortable and able to put all their energy into the process? What do you know about the needs of language mediators, sign language interpreters, note takers or palantypists, mentors etc.?

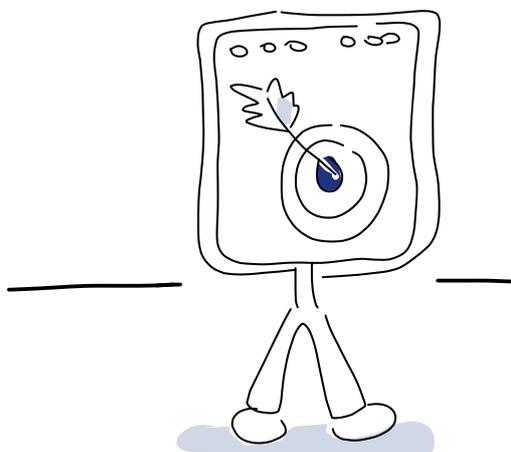
The VISION:INCLUSION ➔ Training modules: How to set up an inclusive international youth project (Chupina, K., Totter, E., 2020; in IJAB (ed.)) is a great tool through which people involved in inclusive youth work can gain a broader knowledge and prepare for working with inclusive and diverse groups.



Prep your project

A preparatory visit is not mandatory. But Erasmus+ Youth and the European Solidarity Corps both offer opportunities to apply for financial support for such visits. It is a great opportunity for partners in Erasmus+ Youth and the European Solidarity Corps to meet, strengthen their relationships and work together in person on **planning and designing the project**.

The good news is that there is also the option of **involving young people with disabilities in the preparatory visit**. This way future volunteers or participants of youth activities can come together and share their opinions on the project design, the location and other aspects of the project. As representatives of the participants, they can take on the responsibility of advocating for youth activities among their peers, which can reduce anxieties and reluctance. It is important that the programme of the preparatory visit is adjusted for the diverse participants. It can be beneficial to offer some sessions to the representatives of the partner organisations and to the young people separately, and later in the process bring the perspectives together.



Here are some ideas for preparatory visits within the context of inclusive youth work:

- get to know the hosting organisation, the location, the volunteers working space or the project (and decide on adjustments in relation to the young people's needs and accessibility);
- design the activity (programme);
- plan travel arrangements (participants on the preparatory visit can explore the specifics while travelling there) and insurance;
- talk about individual needs and support systems (e.g. mentor, supervisors, communication support, safety);
- develop a risk assessment plan;
- develop an inclusive dissemination strategy.
- Where volunteer services are concerned, topics such as the living arrangements, the travel route between the accommodation and the volunteering location, social integration and accessible leisure time activities should be discussed.

Erasmus+/European Solidarity Corps Programme info: You can get funding for Preparatory visits. Find details on preparatory meetings in the programme guides or on ➤ **pp. 57**.





Reaching out to young people with disabilities and health conditions



There is already a lot of advice and ideas, which should help you to start planning an inclusive youth activity. However, inclusive youth projects only work out if you **reach the young people you want to engage**. That's actually the most challenging part. But with the right network of partners and some awareness of your communication strategy, you are sure to succeed. And the more projects you implement, the more **peer ambassadors** there are to support you in reaching out to new people from different target groups.

For many reasons, some groups of young people are harder to reach than others. **Lack of information or low self-esteem** are just two elements that can create barriers deterring young people with disabilities or health conditions even considering their participation in youth projects. A lot of young people are **unaware of their right or of the possibility of participating**. Some might just not believe that there are opportunities out there due to their everyday experiences with exclusive structures. Others might not have enough confidence in their own skills and abilities, and do not even start looking out for such possibilities. Reaching out to them means using communication strategies that directly address young people with disabilities. But making contact is not enough; we need to engage and work with them actively.

Another major barrier can be the **lack of family and community support**. Parents can be overprotective or have little faith in the abilities of their disabled child. Communities might not be used to thinking about people with disabilities as active citizens and thus not be supportive or even discouraging. To reach the youth, consider engaging with their families or communities, listen to their concerns and show them the benefits of such projects (↘ see p. 10). This might not work all the time, but it can be a good way of getting in contact with potential participants. (cp. Chupina, K., 2020, in IJAB (ed.), pp. 25).

Maybe holding a **promotional event** could be helpful? Organise accessible events for young people with and without disabilities in their environment to promote inclusive youth projects. Invite former participants with positive experiences of inclusive youth activities to share good practices. Don't forget to invite the parents of young people without a disability. They might also have concerns or irrational fears regarding their children interacting with peers with disabilities.

REFLECTION

How do you promote and publicise your youth project? Take one of your latest appeals for participants, a recent flyer or your website, and have a closer look.



Adjust your communication material

Your communication material should address all young people you want to reach. **A single sentence that openly invites applications from people with disabilities can make a huge difference, as it opens people's minds to the fact that these opportunities are theirs to pursue, and their participation is welcome.** Use sentences like: "Persons with any kinds of disability/access needs are welcome to apply and take part in the event. Organisers are committed to adapting the programme and environment to make them inclusive and accessible" (Chupina, K., 2020, in IJAB (ed.), p. 26).

Add all **helpful information** regarding the accessibility of the venue or volunteer placement, the availability of translators or sign language translators, general information on support systems, assistance, mentors, coaches; project details (who, when, where, why?), as well as details on the application process and deadlines etc., so interested people get an impression of what they can expect. To reinforce this, include testimonials from former participants. Highlight what young people can take from this experience for themselves and for their community.

The content is as important as the layout. Publicise the accessibility and diversity of the project through the design of materials (flyers, calls, websites). Use plain language. Use pictures where participants with disabilities are part of the group. **When people are represented in pictures, they feel addressed and eager to take a closer look.**



Watch the short video [▶ Reaching more people through inclusive and accessible communications](#) (EFDS, 2015) to explore the possibilities.

Spread the news! In addition to using mainstream online and offline channels, reach out to places where people with disabilities learn, live and work, self-advocacy groups and disability community organisations etc. Invest in trust-building or co-operate with relevant partners who already have a relationship with the young people. **Support and encourage young people to apply.**

Erasmus+/European Solidarity Corps programme info: You can apply for inclusion support to help prepare accessible, promotional materials and activities which target hard-to-reach participants. More on [▶ p. 55](#).



Plan a transparent application and recruitment process

It is good to keep in mind that not everybody can write a long CV or express their needs in clear words. Adjust your **application process**. Everybody will benefit from it. Use checkboxes but also leave space for comments. Tackle all crucial aspects to understanding access requirements.

As some young people, e.g. sign language users or people with **health conditions**, might not identify as people with disabilities, it can be really difficult to get information about them. Some specific questions in the application form can help you at least get an impression.



You'll find ideas and samples of application forms in 3.5. Factsheet: How to prepare more accessible application forms and 3.6 Sample forms for collecting information from participants (Chupina, K, in [IJOB \(ed.\), 2020: Resources: Factsheets, Activities, Checklists. How to set up an inclusive international youth project](#)).

Be **flexible with deadlines** and other aspects of the process and communicate this to lower the stress. Additionally, offer **alternative ways of applying** e.g. by post, paper document, phone, face-to-face.

It is good to decide with your partners and the young people involved in the preparation **how you will choose the applicants**. This could be randomly done or by order of applications. In inclusive youth activities, the diversity of participants should be a vital factor. Clearly, participation in a youth project should never be a reward for good performance (e.g. in school). This would be contrary to everything inclusive non-formal education stands for.

Make the **recruitment process transparent** for applicants; be open about which factors can influence their application and how they will hear of their participation.





Prepare young people and assess their needs



It is vital that young people **prepare for the experience of an inclusive project**, so that they have a good idea what to expect. For some young people with disabilities, such as people with anxiety disorders or autistic persons, having an orientation period and a clear picture of what will happen might quickly erode significant participation barriers. Such a process gives guidance, which some participants need to feel confident and engaged. Moreover, a common preparation process promotes the **development of ownership in the project and a sense of belonging**.

But don't over-prepare either because the moment of entering a new space and just embracing what is happening is a very valuable learning experience.



REFLECTION

First, make a list of what you think could be the benefits to young people in your project(s). Then, talk to young people about what they think could be the benefits of participating in your youth project. Compare the ideas! You might end up with a completely different set of benefits to the ones you had in mind. That can only be an enrichment for your project and outreach.

Make preparation fun

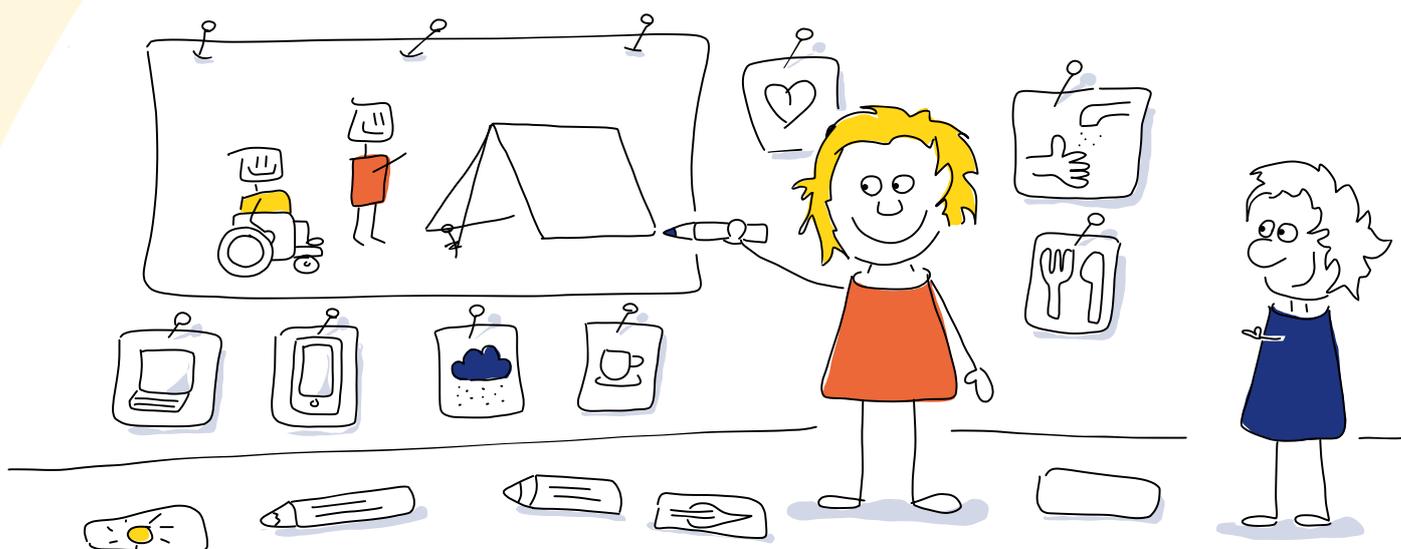
The first step is to decide together on the setting for the preparation process. This can be either a face-to-face or an on-line meeting (here you can involve participants from other countries).

Be aware of virtual barriers. When planning online activities have a look at the website [➤ Hosting accessible online events, meetings and webinars](#) (autistica, N/A), to see how such barriers can be reduced.



Make the preparation fun. Use language games, cook dishes from the partner countries or use methods to familiarise the participants with intercultural aspects, communication and inclusion. Organise an FAQ session.

Work with young people on their **intercultural awareness**, as they will meet people from other countries, with and without disabilities, for the first time in such an intimate environment. Talking about other cultures (not just the national culture) involves understanding their own culture, understanding that there is no right or wrong one and confronting the pictures in our minds (stereotypes). It is a great way to acknowledge that people are different in many ways; not only due to their diverse abilities. It also means understanding the **value of the diversity** of all people as we can learn from each other's perspectives.



A big fear of young people is always language barriers. Use **language games** (↘ p. 41) to show the young people that it isn't that difficult and even **fun to learn some words in the other language**.

Try **non-verbal communication strategies** to show the young people that communication doesn't always need to be verbal, and they can find their own communication strategies. This also prepares them for the fact that in inclusive youth projects, some young people might **use alternative communication methods** like sign language or pictograms. Smartphones can also be useful. Show them how they can use their **smartphones** (if everybody has one!) for translation and communication.

As already mentioned, the young people will meet peers they haven't been in contact with earlier. **Prepare them for the topic of disabilities** in group activities. There can be a lot of **insecurities** in the room. Young people with disabilities who experience discrimination and exclusion in everyday life may worry that this will also happen during the project. Some young

people with disabilities may lack knowledge or **understanding of the needs** of people with impairments different from their own. Young people without disabilities may be afraid that they are doing something wrong or are fearful of the confrontation because of the images of people with disabilities they have in their minds. Think about short activities that the national mixed-ability groups can do together, such as cooking, short trips, and other tasks where they experience new things together, **build trust and confidence** and **slowly adjust to the group setting**. Work with young people on attitudes. Raise awareness of exclusive and discriminatory behaviour.



The activity 1.3 ↘ **Face paint** (Chupina, K., 2020, in IJAB (ed.), p. 9) or activity 1.5 ↘ **Where Do You Stand?** (Chupina, K. 2020, in IJAB (ed.), p. 11) can support participants to reflect on disability and inclusion and develop empathy.

What you should know about needs assessment

Young people are the key beneficiaries of youth projects, so the project design should address their diverse wishes, expectations, concerns and needs. Participants' **access needs are usually the first to require careful attention**, as they influence logistical and organisational preparation (↘ p. 28), as well as programme and activity design (↘ p. 43). But there are **other categories of needs** that differ depending on whom you ask. Enquire of the young people what they **need to feel comfortable** and participate equally. Enable young people in group activities to hear each other. This allows them to understand the perspectives of others and **develop empathy**.

Work together on tailoring ideas for the project **around the needs** of the participants. Involve group leaders, supervisors, mentors in parts of this process. They will be the **first contact person** for participants during the project. This way a trustful relationship can even start being established during preparation.

"I catch something from every person taking part here. It is a brick and I add it to my life wall. This experience is building me... it is building my personality. I am learning to enjoy the small things in life."

Participant without disabilities from Romania in the inclusive project ↘ Building Bridges goes Greece (Kreisau-Initiative, 2018).

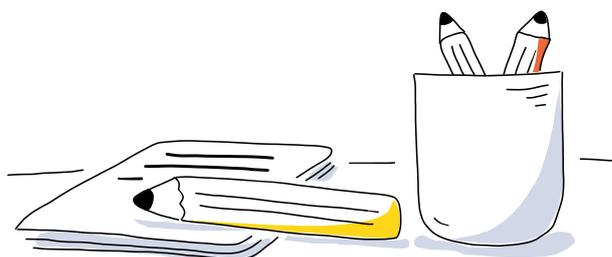
Guiding questions could be:

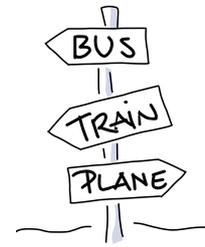
- ↗ What do you need to feel comfortable in the group? With the activities? With the achieved results?
- ↗ What strengths can bring to the group?
- ↗ What situations would you like to avoid? What can we do if it occurs, nonetheless?
- ↗ Which of your experiences may help others?

(cp. Chupina, K., 2020, in IJAB (ed.), p. 19)

The **pathway approach** is a **useful tool** you can use throughout the project. It links the experience in the project directly with a young person's needs and long-term learning objectives. **Offer one-to-one meetings to young people who need more time for this process** and who find it more difficult to access their thoughts and ideas. Support them in this process.

Find out more about the pathway approach here: ↘ **Pathway Approach in volunteering** (SALTO-YOUTH, 2020, pp. 30) and ↘ **The importance of the personal pathway** (SALTO-YOUTH, 2014, pp. 53).





What to consider when planning logistics

Accessibility is a crucial part of inclusion. Make sure you discuss all accessibility needs within the project preparation process, so all people involved know what they have to do. If possible, invite more experienced partners to share best practices. Gather essential information from the young people involved to prepare the logistics according to their needs. In case you don't know who will be attending, it is best to reduce as many excluding factors as possible from the beginning.



The following list spotlights what you can do to ensure inclusiveness and accessibility during your project. Keep in mind that it is not exhaustive. In case you are not sure about certain aspects, ask the people directly what they need- never assume.

Travel arrangements

When travelling with groups you should allow more time. Unexpected things can always happen. Travelling with mixed-ability groups may sometimes need even more time, for instance because different accessibility regulations in different countries might become challenging. Beside this, you need to take care of young people's individual needs during the journey (food, medication, toilet, security, etc.) within external constraints (departure and transit times, assigned seats etc.). That's a lot to balance. But don't worry; with careful planning and preparation, and a positive attitude,

most difficulties can be avoided and you and your group can enjoy the journey together.

Choice of transportation

Travelling by public bus or train

If you decide on travelling by public bus or train with people with physical disabilities, contact the relevant train/bus stations and the train/bus company to get information on the **services they provide to support them**.

Keep in mind that you might need to mention the **need of assistance** at the train/bus stations in advance. Check this before booking to ensure the service is available at the relevant station at the time you need it. Check if accessible toilets are available on the train/bus. Make sure that the group is equipped to **take care of their personal needs** (e.g. food, drinks, medication).

Hiring a bus

Hiring a bus for a group can be a good idea, if the distance to the venue allows it. It is comfortable for the young people as they get in at home and out at the venue. Make sure to plan enough **breaks** to allow participants stretch, eat and to take care of their needs.

If there are wheelchair users in your group, check for **wheelchair accessible buses**. If they are not available, talk to the participant(s) about how to handle the situation. Do not simply decide that you can carry a person onto a bus, as this might impact their comfort and dignity. Make sure the bus storage is big enough for the wheelchair to fit in.

Travelling by plane

Green travel is a priority in the new Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes, so sustainable travelling should be prioritised.



Erasmus+/European Solidarity Corps programme info: You can claim additional financial support within the exceptional costs budget for expensive travel costs when choosing sustainable means of transportation. See the [Erasmus+ Programme Guide](#) or the [European Solidarity Corps Guide](#) for more information.

However, sometimes, flying is the only option due to long journeys or bad connections. If you choose to fly with your group, know that airlines generally provide **individual assistance for persons with disabilities**. Check with the different airlines what they offer and how this will affect your travel. Be aware that **electric wheelchairs** are not allowed in the passenger cabin because of their size. They have to be checked in. You'll find more information on the airline websites.

Check with the departure and arrival airports what services they provide to support persons with disabilities, if needed, or ask specifically about services that members from your group need.

Public transport

Not every location is beside a train or bus station. Keep in mind that the young people might need to get there by public transport, sometimes on their own.

Prepare accessible travel directions for participants and support them or the group leaders with preparing the travel arrangements to make orientation easier. Inform them about the accessibility of connecting transport.

Check the accessibility of local public transport and check relevant stations for visible information on screens for deaf people or (auditive) orientation systems for blind people. Check if assistance is provided and mention the type of assistance needed beforehand.

If no accessible transportation is available or stations are far from the location, you might need to organise alternative transport, e.g. accessible taxis or an accompanying person.

Erasmus+/European Solidarity Corps Programme info: Travel costs are covered by the Programmes. However, additional needs like expensive travel costs, individual travel assistance, communication support and other services can be funded through the Inclusion support, if justified. More on [p. 55](#).



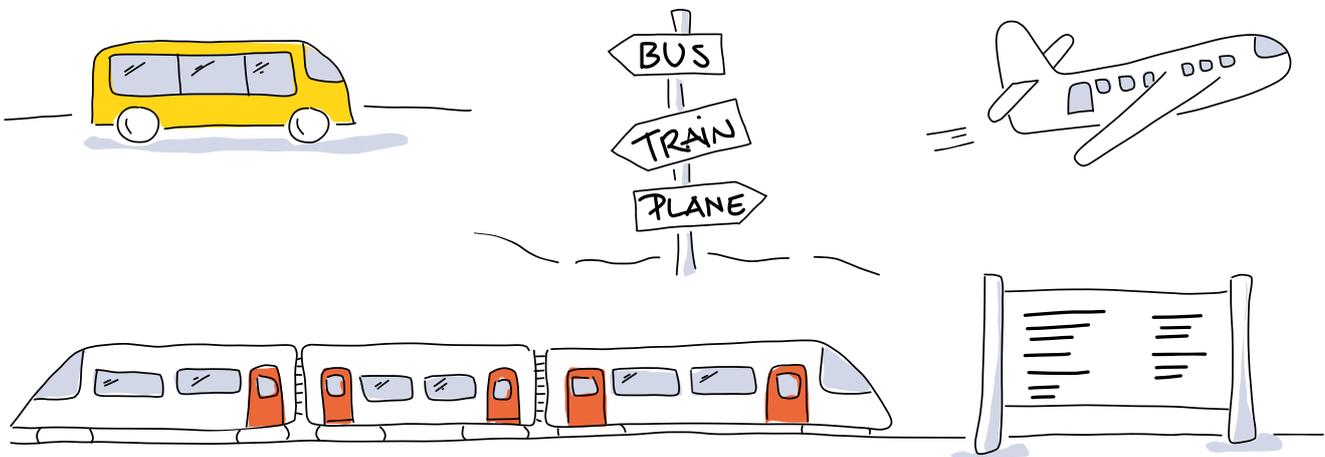
The accessible venue

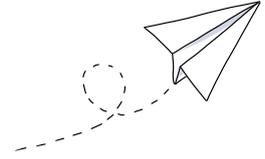
The **venue** influences the atmosphere of every project. To make everyone feel welcome, there are some things to consider when choosing it. Make sure the venue is accessible and **the participants can orientate themselves**. Any division arising from accessibility issues can exclude people and have a negative impact on group dynamics. If, for example, attractive leisure time areas are not accessible for everyone, it might happen that your group divides up and those who cannot access them are left behind. Of course, some obstacles can be overcome together. Nonetheless, if some people always need additional help in finding a room, opening a door or have to use the back entrance to get in, it affects their comfort and the group feeling.

Here is some advice on how you can check the accessibility of the venue:

- Nominate one **entrance** area for all (even if everybody needs to use the back door).
- Keep **doors** open permanently if they are not automatic or prove to be an obstacle.
- If no step-free entrance is available, there have to be **ramps or lifts**. Make sure that lifts work and that there are alternatives if they are out of order. (If there aren't, it might not be the right venue for your project).
- Check the **measurements of the lifts** and inform partners and participants of them. Check if the lift's control buttons are at a height suitable for wheelchair users and if Braille or tactile buttons, and audio floor indication are available, as these might be essential for the participants.

- Try to choose venues where the **main areas are close to each other** or easy to find.
- Organise a **short orientation tour** at the venue, so blind people and other participants can learn to orientate themselves at the venue.
- Guide dogs must be allowed at the venue. If **guide dogs** are present, talk to the owner about what is essential and communicate this to all relevant people. Guide dogs have a job and shouldn't be distracted. It is important to explain this to the group. Moreover, ensure that nobody is afraid of dogs (not in front of the whole group! You might involve group leaders). If they are, include this person and the dog owner to see how this situation can be best handled.
- Implement a **clear and easy-to-understand orientation system** around the venue using signs, colours, symbols or tactile objects (at eye level) and ensure that the routes and directions you choose are accessible for all.





- Check for genuinely accessible **bathrooms** situated close to seminar rooms and the dining area.
- Check **security and fire-escape protocols** to ensure that they are adapted to people with disabilities.

The Volunteer Space

Within the context of volunteering, the **volunteering space** has also to be accessible. Involve the person in the process. A lot of the aspects mentioned in other parts of this checklist also apply to individual volunteer services.

Here are some aspects you should pay attention to when preparing a volunteer space:

- Ensure that **bathrooms** in the location are accessible and adapted to the volunteers' needs.
- Should a desk workspace be needed, provide **adjustable desks and chairs**, so people feel comfortable in their working space.
- Ensure that **break rooms** are accessible for everybody, so volunteers can integrate with the team.
- Ensure a **distraction-free workspace**, if necessary.
- Ensure **flexible or shortened work schedules** and more frequent rest periods.
- Provide **technical aid**, such as screen readers, magnifying devices for screens, talking calculators, amplifiers on phones or whatever is needed.

Accessible accommodation

Sometimes the venue and the accommodation are separated. They should, however, be close together, so people do not need to travel long distances and have some personal space available to them during breaks.

In addition to other aspects mentioned in this chapter, the following advice might be helpful:

- If the accommodation is separate to the venue, arrangements need to be made to **transport the young people** between the location and the accommodation, and sufficient time for this must be built into the schedule.
- Ensure that **accessible bedrooms and bathrooms** meeting the required standards are available. If possible, check the rooms in advance.
- It is always good to **mix the participants** in the rooms, so that they can get to know each other better. Keep in mind that a person with disabilities may not necessarily want to be in a room with their **personal assistants** (but the assistants should be close by). Others, however, may feel more comfortable in a familiar environment with people they know. Clarify this in advance with the participants and group leaders.

Erasmus+/European Solidarity Corps Programme info: You can apply for inclusion support to cover additional costs for accessible accommodation if required [More on ➤ p. 55.](#)



Accessible seminar rooms and leisure time areas

During a group activity, your participants will spend a lot of time in the **seminar room(s) or leisure time areas**. There is no need to mention that these must be equally accessible to all. If using more than one seminar room, it is beneficial when they are close to each other, so there are no long distances to cover, and nobody gets lost.

The following aspects might be important for your seminar room:

- The seminar room should have sufficient circulation capacity for wheelchair users (two standard chairs = space for a wheelchair) but shouldn't be so big that participants need to shout to communicate.
- Make sure the room allows **participants to see** each other as well as the facilitators, translators and sign language translators. People with reduced vision have to be able to see flip charts, presentations etc.
- Check the **acoustics** in the room(s), as echoes or outdoor noise from a loud street may cause problems for some people, e. g. people who are hard of hearing, with psychosocial disabilities.
- Check if **lighting** in the room(s) is adjustable, so you can control the brightness. Good lighting is vital for people who are Deaf or hard of hearing and rely on lip reading or sign language translators. Think also about arrangements and adjustments, in case lighting is reduced during presentations. Be aware that flickering light (also during a party) can cause problems for people with epilepsy.
- Check for windows or at least air conditioning to ventilate the room. **Air quality** is important for comfort and concentration. A stuffy atmosphere can cause problems for people with asthma.
- Check if **multiple types of seats** (with/without backs or armrests) are available, as people might have different needs and preferences to feel comfortable.
- Make sure **everybody knows where everything is**, so they do not need to ask. Make a quick tour through the seminar room, if required. Pay attention to accessibility, because knowing that something is on the shelf doesn't mean that everybody can reach it.
- Leave the environment as unchanged as possible. Inform participants **when you change things** like furniture arrangements, the location of material etc., so everybody knows about it and there is no confusion. This is especially crucial for blind people to orientate themselves, but some people with psychosocial disabilities also feel more comfortable in a stable environment.
- Sometimes, a person needs to be alone for a moment to lie down, come down or to concentrate on a task. Set up a **retreat-corner** (cosily arranged with a sofa or mattress behind a curtain or partition) in the seminar room, so nobody needs to leave the group process entirely but still can find silence. Speak with the group to respect this silent space.

Erasmus+/European Solidarity Corps Programme info: The programmes offer inclusion support to remove physical or communication barriers. Check with your National Agency beforehand. More on [p. 55](#).



The catering

Food is always essential. Good healthy food ensures that young people get energy and feel comfortable during the project. But it is also a social event. When eating together, the people involved get to know each other and build relationships. It is also a good indicator for group integration when you see young people mixing during mealtimes. If they are not, you might consider investing more time in group integration. Obviously, the dining area has to be accessible and has to have enough space for everybody to fit in and move around without obstacles.

What you should pay attention to in respect of catering:

- Ensure that the **tables** are at a suitable height for wheelchair users.
- Ensure that blind people can **orientate themselves** by introducing them to the dining area.
- Ensure a corner (maybe behind partitions) for those who need a **quieter space during mealtimes**.
- Ensure that **guide dogs** can enter the dining area.



- Check with the venue or the catering service if food can be provided for people with **diverse diets** (meat, vegetarian, vegan, food allergies, religious or cultural habits etc.)
- Ensure that **food and the main ingredients are labelled** (food allergies, religious and cultural habits etc.)
- If participants need their **food chopped** up, ask the kitchen if they can do it in advance.
- Ensure there is no **inedible decoration** on the plates, so blind people do not eat them accidentally.
- Check if **straws or cups with handles** are available, in case participants need them.

There is more...

There are some **more practical things** to consider when travelling to an international project. Keep in mind that for some people it can be the first time travelling abroad.

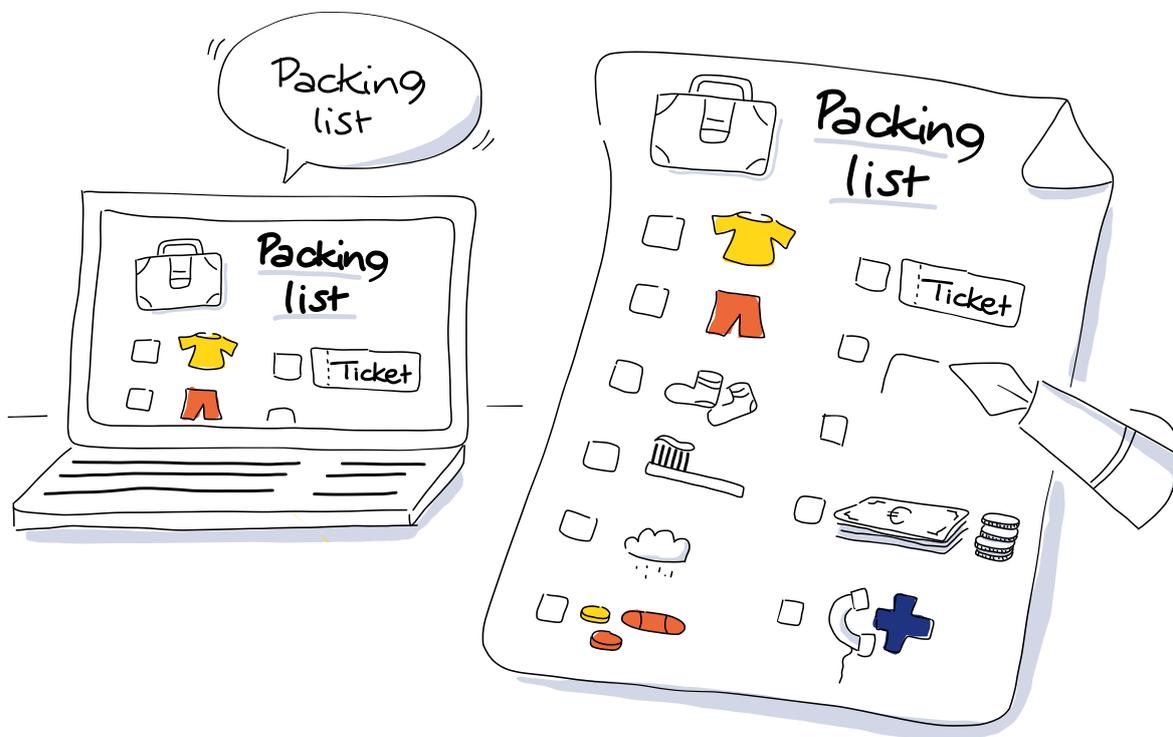
- Ensure participants have the required **travel documents**. If not, support them or their families with the application, as it might be a new process for them.
- In case participants need a **visa** to travel to the venue, organise the visa application process and support participants. An invitation from the receiving organisation might be required.

- Ensure participants have valid **international health insurance recognised by** the destination or organise health insurance for/with the participants.
- Additional **travel insurance** might be advisable.

Erasmus+/European Solidarity Corps Programme info: You can apply for a visa as exceptional costs in your budget (see ➤ p. 55). With respect to insurance, different mechanisms are in place for Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps. Please check the relevant ➤ **Erasmus+ Programme Guide** or the ➤ **European Solidarity Corps Guide**.



- Prepare a **packing list** (accessible online and in paper format). Do not forget to remind people about travel documents, disabled person's card or their student ID tickets, medication or other necessary items.
- Advise young people or their families on how much **pocket money** they should bring. For participants with learning disabilities, some training on how to handle pocket money can be helpful. If travelling to a country with another currency, introduce the participants to online currency converters on their phones and help people with visual impairments prepare to recognise the foreign coins and banknotes.





Creating an inclusive environment for learning

An inclusive learning environment is an accessible space where all participants, in all their diversity, feel welcome, a sense of belonging, protected and encouraged to participate. It is a dynamic environment that requires flexibility, constant reflection and adaptation. Creating such an environment is a great responsibility for those in charge, but also a joint group process, which increases satisfaction, learning, and the full and active engagement of all. To encourage you, the temporary non-formal framework of international youth projects offers an excellent opportunity to implement and reflect on inclusive concepts and methods. The protected space in which such youth projects take place allows for learning from mistakes and failures in an appreciative way and, through a participatory approach, enables learning processes for all actors involved.



So how can you do this? Maybe the examples you gathered in your reflection have shown you that it isn't that difficult **to create such a welcoming and encouraging environment**. The first step is to take people with disabilities and their different access needs seriously and to approach them at eye level. By creating an atmosphere of trust and respect where diversity is appreciated, you encourage people to voice their needs. The effect is a rise in equality, respect and mutual comprehension across the entire group.

Start with the team

The team needs **time to get to know each other** (if they don't), build trust and get an idea of the roles and responsibilities of each person from their own perspective. Plan time for this at the beginning of a project. It's a good idea to plan **regular meetings** starting on the first day (within the dynamic environment of inclusive projects, it's recommended to meet every evening). **Regular reflection** can make difficulties and challenges visible and prevent things from going wrong. And as a team, you have the added opportunity to search for solutions together, so you can react quickly and make the necessary adjustments.



REFLECTION

Looking back on your professional and private life experiences, what would be good examples of an inclusive environment where you felt welcome and comfortable engaging? Have you also experienced situations where you rather felt excluded and frustrated? Focus on the question "Why?" were some conditions favourable and some less so?

Raise awareness among your team members that they are important role models for the young people. **Their behaviour, attitudes and displays of flexibility and empathy influence the group and working atmosphere**. If they reflect positivity and teamwork, one important step has been taken towards a successful inclusive project.

The team needs to be aware of scenarios that can challenge the inclusivity and positive atmosphere in the project and plan strategies (see Risk assessment ↘ p. 49).

REFLECTION

If someone is not enjoying the activities, to which extent is this due to my attitude and how can I (!) change this?



Create a welcoming physical environment

When designing the project, we need to pay attention to the physical and psychological environment. The physical environment is the adaptation of spaces to serve the specific purposes of learning. The accessible physical environment (indoors and outdoors), in which the non-formal activities take place, plays a **key role in creating a welcoming and safe space, and has a positive influence on group dynamics**. The indoor space is usually informal with chairs arranged in a circle to encourage collaboration and the exchange of ideas during the learning activities. Facilitators sit with the group in the circle, so that eye contact is established. "We meet in our room" - the **space is co-designed by all group members** (e.g. posters on the walls) and creates a flexible space that participants can adapt for their needs (e.g. space for wheelchairs, small group work, dancing etc.)

In such a space, a lot of things happen. But sometimes participants need some quiet time or more time for recreation but don't want to be far away from the group, so they can join the process again. Establish **quiet zones** like a comfortable retreat corner close to the seminar room.

Inclusive requirements and accessibility are not an "extra". Inclusion has to be **mainstreamed** at every level of the project. It means that you are not doing things in order to accommodate individual persons – but because this is the inclusive project design. This way nobody has the feeling of missing out on something because of the individual needs of another person, which in effect contributes to a positive and collaborative group atmosphere.

Pay attention to the psychological environment

The psychological environment includes team building and group dynamics, building trust and creating a supportive and safe context in which young people are engaged and motivated to learn. Young people with disabilities might not be used to the fact that others can also learn from them, which may be related to their experiences or self-image. But non-formal learning means that **everyone has something to contribute and everybody learns from everybody**. Communicate and practice this by supporting an open dialogue.



Get to know the six pillars of active and protective dialogue in ↘ **Dialogic spaces - Create an atmosphere of trust and understanding** (Totter, E., 2020, in IJAB (ed.), pp. 38).

Be honest. Show young people that you don't know everything and that you also can make mistakes. If mistakes happen, apologise, correct and learn from them. This way the participants can see that it is ok to make mistakes. **Establish mistakes as opportunities to learn instead of failure.**

Involve **young people as experts in decision-making** (not just on disability-related issues) and solution-finding, so they can experience that their voices count and their ideas have impact. An individual's motivation level is very closely related to the extent to which they feel personally involved and valued.

Try to be **proactive and unconditional**. This way you might even manage to anticipate some needs, like e.g. need for more breaks, need for reflection etc. before they arise, so everyone can feel comfortable.

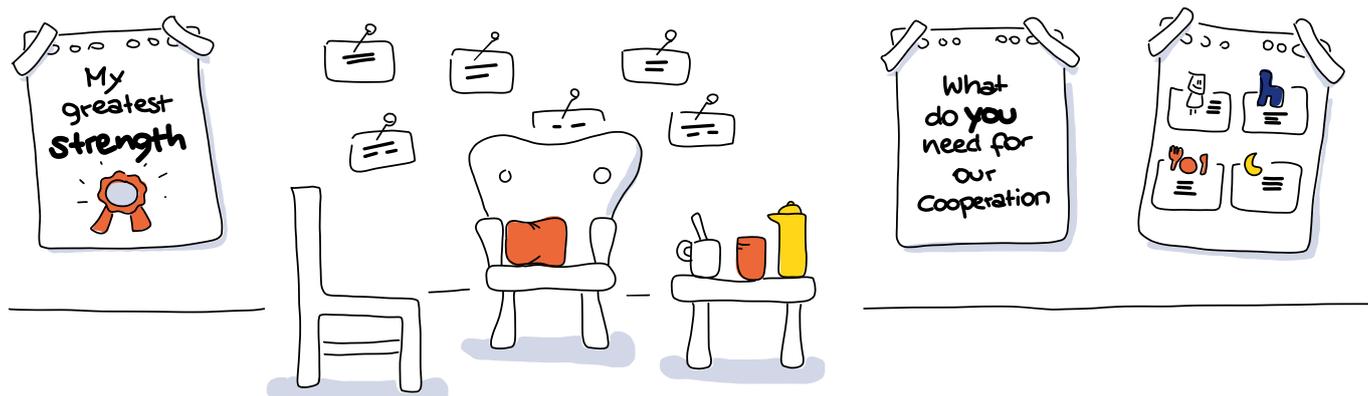
Facilitate a space in which participants un-learn the habit of looking for deficits in others and instead **look for potential for personal growth. Foster equality** in terms of status, treatment and respect. It does not mean, however, that everybody needs to be equal in terms of performance (Chupina, K., 2020, in IJAB, p. 9). Follow **the equitable approach**. Equity takes difference into account to ensure fairness. It recognises that some people are at a greater disadvantage than others and need more support and resources to be on an equal footing. Inclusive approaches shift the focus away from the deficits and instead create an inclusive atmosphere for all.

Question the concept of a safe space. We tend to talk about creating a safe space but, in fact, such a space does not really exist. You can help create such a space by applying the diverse strategies mentioned here but there are always scenarios which can threaten such a space for individuals. A stupid comment, frustration or lack of transparency can all make young people feel insecure or threatened, which in turn affects the group atmosphere. Be aware of this, give space for reflection and maintain contact with the individuals in order to recognise such situations and react appropriately.

Put support systems in place

Fostering a positive and trustful psychological environment means **putting support systems in place to reduce participation barriers and recognise the participants' needs**. For example, as no common language can be assumed, experienced language mediators, and if required, sign language interpreters or other support services need to be available.

In European Solidarity Corps volunteering teams, there is the possibility of **reinforced mentorship** (see ↘ p. 58) as a vital support measure. Mentors and other support persons are important reference persons



in these kinds of activities. Involve mentors from the beginning. Invest time in trust building and also get to know each other by spending quality time together. This builds the confidence to reach out in case support is needed or some emergency comes up.



European Solidarity Corps Programme info: You can apply for funding for reinforced mentorship, i.e. the preparation, implementation and follow-up of tailor-made activities. Check the Programme guide of the [European Solidarity Corps](#).

In general, it is important in all youth projects that the young people know how to reach important contact persons in a crisis or emergency (e.g. accessible contact list).

Some participants may come with personal assistants, so aspects like accommodation or the role of the personal assistant in the project need to be clarified. You also need to think about this in your application. Be aware that not every person with a personal assistant wants to share a room with them or be together at all times. But then the assistant needs to be nearby.



Read more about personal assistants in youth meetings in [Putting support systems into place](#) (Chupina, K., 2020, in IJAB (ed.), pp. 27).

It's a great idea to establish structures of peer support, so young people can take care of each other. But make sure it is at eye level. If you, for example, pressure young people without disabilities to "help" young people with disabilities, you are reproducing oppressive social structures, which will result in a frustrating experience for all.

"I didn't know how to do something, and I didn't believe in myself, so I was thinking that I can't do nothing. But there were so many people who helped me to believe in myself, and after this I knew that I can do everything if I want it."

Participant from Czech Republic in the international inclusive youth exchange Building Bridges.

Group dynamics

It is quite common that young people without disabilities haven't been in contact with young people with disabilities. Such meetings can be dominated by fears and uncertainties at the beginning. It might be important to allow more time for **group building** activities during the first days of the project (see [p. 44](#)) than in more homogenous groups. It creates space for everyone to get to know each other on a more personal level and engage in meaningful interaction. **Monitor group dynamics** and foster effective conflict management. Both are important for running a successful project and ensuring group satisfaction with the process.

To foster positive interaction within the group, create a **(group) agreement** with the young people or the volunteers. You can tackle questions like: "What is important to me when dealing with one another?"

Speak with everyone involved about their needs and ideas and write down what you agreed on. You can use a flipchart and hang it up in a visible spot in the seminar room. As not everybody might be able

to read it due to visual impairments or reading difficulties, it could be an idea to read the agreement out loud every morning. If conflicts or challenges arise, people can refer to the agreement. It can also be adapted during the project. The agreement process is a space to hear each other's concerns and develop empathy.



Have a look at the process of creating ↘ **Group agreements** (Kreisau-Initiative, 2017, pp. 92).

Make sure that the young people know **how to spend quality free time**. Show them areas for leisure-time activities like sport facilities or group rooms. Make board games, creative materials and sport equipment available, so young people can engage in a meaningful way. If young people want to explore the area/city, prepare a guide or assist them in finding accessible transport and locations.

Interacting with people with disabilities and health conditions

REFLECTION

Are you disability-inclusive? What does it mean in your opinion? How can you tackle this topic in the project?



Interacting with people with disabilities and health conditions is, unfortunately, not something people without disabilities experience every day. They feel anxious about doing something wrong or they over-engage by trying to help, even when not asked to. Sometimes this happens to such an extent that they are intruding into the personal space of another person or crossing personal boundaries. And

of course, there are many assumptions about disabilities linked to a lack of interaction and knowledge of societal structures and sometimes, even, ignorance. There are, of course, guidelines which can help you to reflect on your own behaviour and actions, but it is important to stress that it is not the people with disabilities who need such guidelines.

Indeed, instead of following guidelines, **simple human behaviour should guide our actions**:

- Don't do things with people with disabilities you wouldn't do with anybody else (stroking the head, touching without reason etc.).
- Apply the key principle **"Nothing about us without us"**. Make sure that people with disabilities are actively engaged in decision-making.
- Engage **people with disabilities in leadership positions**, if they are interested. This way, other people can appreciate their strength and power and question their own attitudes and stigmas.
- **Never assume, always ask**. A small step doesn't automatically mean that a person in a wheelchair needs help. People with disabilities manage their own lives living in a non-inclusive society. If they need help, they will ask for it. And if you see somebody struggling in a certain situation, offer help and see if it is needed.
- Offer participants **positive "role models"** they can identify with and learn from.



Language and communication in inclusive projects

The use of **language and communication** is crucial and goes hand in hand with the accessibility of information and effective participation. Apart from the fact that a common language cannot be assumed, in mixed-ability groups communication skills in the mother tongue and foreign languages can vary widely. Young people may communicate using sign language, pictograms or other alternative communication strategies. Certain aspects, such as the visualisation of written content or translated working materials, should be integral to the project design from the beginning to reduce visible and invisible language and communication barriers. Communication between all people involved needs to be supported actively.



You might or might not know the communication preferences of your participants from the beginning. Some young people might not even communicate their lack of understanding. To boost communication in your youth activity, there are certain strategies you should implement and establish from the beginning.

One strategy is **the general use of inclusive communication**. Simplify information using plain or Easy-to-Read (ETR) language, use clear, simple speech, step-by-step explanations, body language, visualisations, gestures, pictures, symbols or objects to make information accessible to all participants. Use **visual communica-**

tion, especially when presenting complex abstract contexts in simple graphic form.



Learn more about language and communication in international inclusive education in the publication **➤ Perspective: Inclusion** (Kreissau-Initiative, 2017).

Another one is to apply a **multi-sensory approach** in communication. In the case of one sense being weaker or absent (e.g. vision or hearing), information can be incorporated by another. You can, for example, describe pictures verbally or support written language with pictures. Text and verbal messages, combined with symbols, colours and drawings are easier to understand and reading abilities are not required. This way, you offer multiple channels covering a lot of the communication needs.

And... Be patient. **Always double-check if everybody has understood the information.** If not, explain again. Give participants sufficient time to think and ask questions.

There are some **general recommendations for communication with people with disabilities**. They might give you an idea of what to pay attention to. But the best way to familiarise yourself with the communication needs is to ask the participants. To make this more fun, you can use group activities where the participants get to know each other's communication preferences e.g. multi-sensory partner

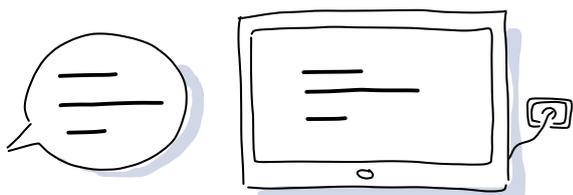
interviews where tasks need to be done using sign language, pictures, verbal language etc.



Have a look at Factsheet 2.5
➤ **10 key principles when communicating with people with disabilities** (Chupina, K., 2020, in IJAB (ed.), p. 20).

An important way to break down communication barriers and ensure that everybody has access to all information is to involve **language mediation** (e.g. skilled in using plain language), **sign language interpreters** or **real-time captioning** (spoken words and audio content are transformed into text and nearly simultaneously displayed on a screen or monitor).

Be aware of the fact that as with spoken and written language, **different national sign languages, as well as dialects**, exist throughout the world. An International Sign system, close to American Sign Language (ASL), has been developed but you cannot assume that all participants using sign language can communicate in International Sign. Consequently, you might need different sign language interpreters.



"The biggest concern was communication, the language. I was afraid I would not be able to speak with others. Luckily my fears were eased very quickly. I understood that "Building Bridges" is really about building bridges of communication. I began to talk more with the other participants, and they understood me and helped me as well."

Participant from Poland in the inclusive international youth exchange Building Bridges.

Young people often mention the fear that they will not be able to communicate. Use **language animation** and other methods and activities through which participants can **practice non-verbal, verbal and alternative communication strategies**. It is a great opportunity to demonstrate to them in a light-hearted way that communication isn't that difficult. It will actively foster communication between participants and motivate them to develop their own communication strategies, which they can use among themselves.



Get to know ➤ **Language animation – the inclusive way.** (IJAB (ed.), 2017).



Erasmus+/European Solidarity Corps Programme info: You can apply for inclusion support to reduce communication barriers. More in the chapter Inclusion support in Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps, [↘ p. 55](#).

However, it is not only the communication itself which is important but equally the way in which it is done. **Set the tone for communication.** Use **positive, diversity-sensitive and inclusive (non-discriminatory) language** which makes people feel welcome and accepted and gives them a sense of belonging. Inclusive lan-

guage uses terminology that avoids exclusion and stereotyping. It renounces descriptive language that portrays individuals (groups of people) as less valuable, powerless etc. Be aware that what you say has an impact and affects how people feel and perform. As team members you are heard and listened to. If you use language to portray a person as helpless, dependent or pitiful, this image is then conveyed to others and influences their perception of a person. So be careful of the words and actions you use because they can be powerful.





Inclusive design of the learning process



In order to design inclusive learning experiences, it is important to recognise that every learner is different. In addition to implementing accessible activities, the scope of inclusive learning experiences dynamically expands to meet needs not only arising from disability but also from the complete spectrum of human diversity. **Awareness and empathy are two core values of inclusive design: awareness to recognise diversity in learners and empathy to include their individual needs** in everything we do.



REFLECTION

Undoubtedly, you've already had the chance to develop project programmes for different projects. What would you do differently when planning an inclusive project?

The programme of an inclusive youth project

A well-thought-out programme and carefully selected methods give you and the young people security and provide orientation for joint action. A balance needs to be struck regarding work time, recreation, fun and learning and should be designed **WITH the young people**, not only FOR them.

However, remember that **unpredictable situations** are a regular part of any activity. So, ask yourself if your programme is sufficiently flexible to allow more time, if it is needed. In general, inclusive projects

should take place at a **slower pace**. Within a diverse group, there will be people who tire more quickly than others or have a lower attention span, so they will need to have **breaks**. Ensure, you have included enough breaks.

As there are often a lot of different activities planned, it is good to **present the daily schedule** at the beginning of the day, as it provides orientation and security. However, repeat at regular intervals what will happen next, as it is difficult for some people to remember all the details. Some people need **more orientation** than others and even get confused if orientation is missing. Make sure you have fixed programme activities (see rituals ↘ p. 45) to ensure structure and guidance. **Explain everything you do**. Make sure the young people always know why things are happening. It is easier for some people to follow an activity when they know the purpose of the process.

Reflection and regular evaluation give the young people space to share ideas of improvements that could be made to activities or of other activities they'd like included. An evaluation process can be quite abstract for some participants. Offer reflection or de-briefing directly after a session or activity, so they can freshly relate to the experience. **Summarise activities** or learning processes and provide guiding questions which help participants reflect on their experiences. Ensure there is a **protected space** where young people can talk about their concerns and needs (e.g. evaluation rounds). Not everybody will necessarily feel comfortable speaking out in a group (even a small one).

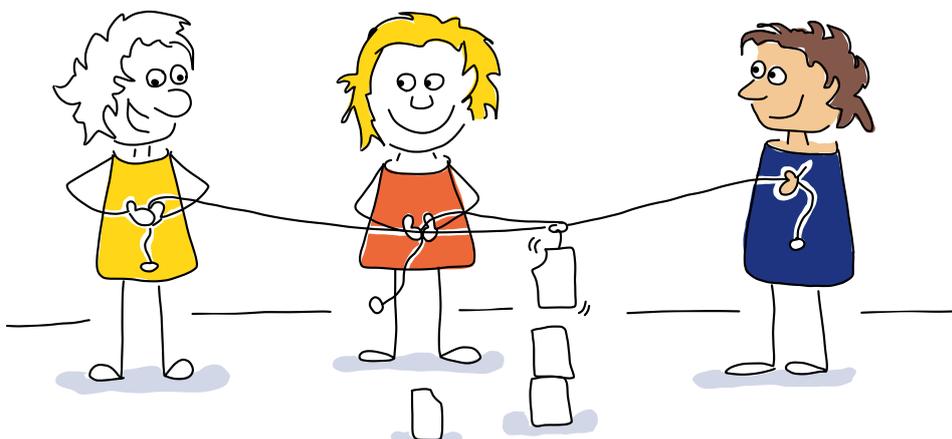
Communicate the possibility of one-to-one meetings with team members to the young people and make sure they know **who they can turn to for support**.

Active participation is not about just sharing ideas; it is about action. Give young people the responsibility of setting up and facilitating activities, so they can share their knowledge and abilities. Be prepared to support them. However, be aware that some participants might not be used to making decisions on their own or think that their opinions matter. Invest time in engaging them. Encourage them (step-by-step!), listen carefully and most importantly show them that their ideas matter by implementing them, if possible. But remember: there is nothing more frustrating and discouraging than being invited to share your ideas and then ... nothing. If you involve **young people indecision-making, take them seriously**. Use their ideas to improve your youth project, and if something is not possible, be transparent and explain why.

For the inclusive learning process, the following programme elements are important:

➔ **Group building activities** create the foundation for the group process and are important in giving the group the opportunity to get to know each other and develop a sense of belonging. A funny icebreaker and getting-to-know-you activities contribute to a positive group atmosphere and foster appreciative and effective cooperation between the young people. In inclusive groups, these processes might need more time, which will need scheduling.

➔ **Energisers** boost the group energy and stimulate concentration. When you use them, speak about **activities or methods** instead of games. Some age groups might be biased, in that they associate games with children. For some young people, these exercises can seem silly and it is harder for them to overcome their personal barriers to participate. It is always good when role models like group leaders and team members engage in these activities too and go along with the fun factor.





Looking for inclusive energisers?
You can find ideas in the
➤ **Game-Creator: DIY** (N/A).

➤ **Language animation** (➤ p. 41) helps participants overcome language barriers and boosts communication and cooperation. As communication preferences vary in inclusive groups, these games can be used to explore them. Participants can improve non-verbal communication strategies or learn to say phrases like "Thank you" or "How are you?" in sign languages. Or have you tried to explore animal sounds in different languages? This can be a lot of fun!

➤ **Working on learning goals** (see personal pathway ➤ p. 27) helps young people to understand their learning processes and reflect on them. A recommended tool is the Youthpass, which invites learners to take part in a process of becoming more aware of their own learning processes, of defining learning directions and reflecting on learning outcomes.



Explore the possibilities of the
➤ **Youthpass** (Youthpass, N/A) as a tool for recognising and documenting learning processes and outcomes.

➤ Speak with the young people about what they want to learn from the project. Start at the beginning of the project (or even during preparation) by asking them about their expectations and learning goals. Employ reflection and daily evaluations to highlight important learning moments and to consider the next steps. Prepare with partners to accompany young people through this process after the project. However, be aware that for some young people this process can seem very abstract. Offer guidance (one-to-one if needed and if possible) and ask specific questions. Listen carefully and summarise in your own words to make sure that you understood what they meant. You could introduce a prepared diary with leading questions about the programme, so that their thoughts and ideas are **documented in a sustainable way**.

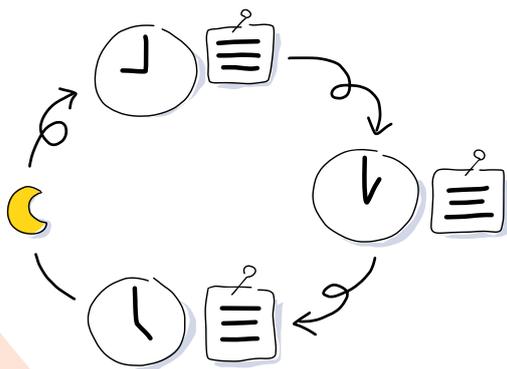
➤ Don't forget about **free time** in the programme, so that the young people have time for recreation and reflection. These are moments where young people spend time together in informal settings. This often provides invaluable learning moments.

Routine through rituals

(Group) rituals create routine within a project. They are regular and repeated activities. As such, they are particularly important for young people (esp. with psychosocial or intellectual disabilities) who need orientation and structure to feel comfortable and relaxed. Rituals promote bonding, a sense of belonging and security, and most importantly provide a point of reference.

Ideas for group rituals could be:

- Morning circles are a routine for starting the day. They should be at the same time and in the same place every morning and should follow the same structure. **This way everybody knows where to go and what will happen first thing after breakfast.** Morning circles can contain the following elements: a common song, an energiser, an orientation session **which takes place throughout the day** (daily programme presentation) and a space for young people to share how they feel and what's on their mind.
- After lunch activities may start in different locations. Another valuable routine is **always meeting at an agreed location (e.g. the seminar room) after a break.** Young people can come independently and won't get lost looking for the facilities (stress, frustration). A quick energiser and a reminder of what's next, and then the group can go together, or a person can be accompanied by a team member.
- The **daily evaluation** (for example, always before dinner) is a vital ritual **to close the day.** Likewise, always having it at the same time and in same place is valuable advice.



Methods in inclusive youth projects



REFLECTION

Think about one of your favourite methods. Would it work with diverse groups? Where do you see challenges? Do you have ideas about what you could change to ensure the method still works and achieves its goals?



You probably came up with some great ideas right off the bat, because in truth, that's what we do: we adapt methods to new contexts, needs and group situations all the time. We add or exchange small elements for the method to work better with the specific group in front of us. Inclusive methods are developed in the same way. **You do not need to reinvent the wheel.** You can continue to use your favourite methods and approaches. The difference is that sometimes more creativity, adaptations and simplifications are needed in line with the disabilities, needs and possibilities of the participants.

Devise methods that **appeal to different senses and abilities**, and enable holistic learning processes. Thus, people who **learn in different ways** will always find something that engages them. Tailor methods in a way that allows young people to **use and show their strengths** and abilities, and can deconstruct the irrational assumption of a deficit. Inclusive approaches focus on an individual's skills

and talents. Maybe a person can draw or sing particularly well. Group tasks, where different strengths and abilities are needed, can sometimes bring different people into focus and lead to appreciation and increased self-confidence. Of course, looking for common ground is vital for a group process. But don't be afraid to make **differences visible, so diversity can be recognised as a positive attribute.**

"A great benefit for all of us was that we were all out of our comfort zone...Here in the project I had to do things that I never had done before with people who I didn't know... But people wanted to experiment, to find things they could do to get out of their comfort zone..."

**Participant from Greece
in the inclusive project ↘ The Mask
(Dadanides, 2018).**

There are multiple ways of achieving a goal. In inclusive settings not everybody needs to do things the same way. Offer diverse possibilities (e.g. some prefer to write, others prefer to draw or to dance etc.), so young people can reach a specific goals in ways most appropriate for themselves. Being able to choose independently how you want to reach the goal has an empowering force. If diverse activities are offered, consider **giving the space to try them out** instead of explaining them (e. g. in teaser workshop sessions at the beginning of the programme). Not everybody can visualise activities. By trying them out, young people get a better impression of the activity and can decide more easily

what they want to do. **Change the setting for variety and stimulation.** Offer activities in smaller and larger groups, along with individual tasks. Some people feel more comfortable in smaller groups and find it easier to cope.

The final phase of an inclusive project

The **final phase** of a project is an **important bridging moment** between a project and the young people's return back to their "regular" life. It is often very emotional, especially when friendships and close relationships have been formed. The young people might have difficult situations at home, or live in institutions with strict structures and rules, and just the prospect of going back can make them struggle. Others might already feel changed and are challenged by the decisions on the next steps of their personal pathway. It is crucial to plan this phase carefully and use activities that empower young people and leave with positive emotions.



Here are some ideas which might be empowering in the final phase of an inclusive youth project:

- A **final event** (e.g. a show or an exhibition) is an effective tool for empowerment. Every individual is invited to share personal achievements as part of the learning process. It is a moment of excitement and positive emotions. People with disabilities, who often do not experience a lot of appreciation by non-disabled peers, feel valued

and that they belong. For young people without disabilities, it can be a further step towards changing their perspectives and attitudes about people with disabilities.

- European learning activities should have a **sustainable long-term impact** on young people's lives, so looking ahead is also an essential part of working on the **personal pathway** (➤ p. 27). This abstract process can be easier for some than for others. **Simplify the process** by offering guiding questions and examples.
- The final evaluation is a vital farewell ritual which allows people to say goodbye and leave with positive emotions. Sharing feelings and thoughts, hearing what's on other people's minds, being surprised and touched by other people is priceless. Choose appropriate methods to engage everyone. A written evaluation might not be the best choice if group members struggle with writing. Support this process with e. g. a selection of positive pictures, translations or creative methods.

You can find some ideas in

➤ **Evaluation methods**
(SALTO-YOUTH, 2014, p. 115).

- All participants of European youth projects are entitled to receive a ➤ **Youthpass**. Youthpass is a certificate and a process that helps participants reflect on and become aware of their learning journey and their development when taking part in

a European youth project. As a certificate, Youthpass recognises participants' learning achievements by including their self-assessment in the official certificate and, this way, recognises the participation in the projects as an educational experience. This formal recognition gives young people with disabilities the chance to 'show' their acquired competences to organisations, potential employers and employment counsellors. To further enhance the effect, you might consider awarding the certificate in a festive ceremony.



Want to know more about the Youthpass: ➤ **Youthpass Unfolded - also for Inclusion Groups** (SALTO-YOUTH, 2016).

"How did we manage to consider this as a great experience? ...We collaborated in an extraordinary way. We knew what the problems might be before getting there, and we were determined to overcome all of them. Through that, something more amazing and unexpected came to me. Real friends. People who inspired me. People who made me feel happy. People who make me feel I know them for decades, even if I only know them for 6 or 7 days."

Participant and film maker with disability from Greece in the inclusive project ➤ The Mask (Dadanides, 2018).



Risk management

To ensure positive experiences during a youth project, it is crucial to plan measures beforehand to be well-prepared for possible challenges. And even then, things can still go wrong. But that's okay. Take it step-by-step! The most important thing is to **create a safe and trustful environment** in which **learning from mistakes** is accepted and can be seen as enriching the process. And if things don't work the way they are supposed to, you can still find solutions together.



Develop a risk assessment plan

The process of developing a risk assessment plan helps you to identify the possible risks and problems which may occur during your project and to prepare for the unexpected. It is a vital tool which enables you and your team to react quickly and ensure the safety and health of the young people. Consult with your team and the young people about **possible misunderstandings, mistakes and accidents** that can happen. Consider the general framework of your project, planned activities, the travel arrangements, the safety and health of the young people, the venue or volunteering location, the individual needs of the people involved, intercultural conflicts or situation of discrimination etc. Then estimate the likelihood of the risk and decide what level of risk is acceptable? **Focus on prevention.** But have a plan B to hand of what you can do if an unwelcome situation arises. Designate responsible persons and strategies so that everyone knows what to do. And don't forget to

evaluate your risk assessment plan during the implementation phase, as projects are **dynamic and responsive processes.**

As inspiration, you can find examples and a template in **➤ Risk Assessment** (SALTO-YOUTH, 2006, p. 53).



Risk assessment – the young people

The potential of conflicts, misunderstanding, discriminatory or exclusionary behaviour decreases when young people have a feeling of belonging and can take ownership of the project's process. But of course, all of these can still occur. They can happen at any time; their causes can be many and varied, predictable or unpredictable. It is important to stay attentive and flexible.

Every disturbance is a priority and needs to be resolved quickly and transparently. Be prepared for situations where you need to change your programme to address them. However, not all situations are visible. Ongoing evaluation and consultations, which offer young people the space to speak out in a confidential setting, can help to identify such situations, so resolution strategies can be developed.

Drawing up a **(group) agreement** (see. **➤ pp. 38**) can assist conflict management. Start an open dialogue and invite young people to express what is important to them when interacting with each other. This way they can reflect on their own needs,

but also listen to the other participants' wishes and develop empathy. In moments of conflict, the group agreement can be a valuable reference.

There can be **anxieties and uncertainties** in mixed-abled groups. It can be the case that certain behaviours like, for example impulsivity or short attention spans (possible symptoms in young people with the neurodevelopmental disorders ADHD or Trisomie 21/Down Syndrome) can lead to irritation or the need in people to distance themselves from members of the group. Usually this becomes visible at some point. Try to identify such situation before they get out of control. Often an open and honest conversation can quickly resolve such situations.

Sometimes you might observe that people do not want to make **physical contact** with another person with physical or multiple disabilities and express this in a way which can hurt the other person. It is important to prevent these kind of experiences. It might be good to avoid methods involving all forms of physical contact at the beginning, to give the young people time to adjust and get to know each other on a personal level first. You can also use your position as a role model. The way you interact with the persons in your group sets an important example for the participants.



Risk assessment – the team

- Brief your team on the risk management. Make sure the team knows the risk assessment plan, as well as the safety procedures and arrangements at the location. **Establish clear responsibilities and accountabilities** and explain action plans, so everybody knows what to do or who to engage in case of an emergency or a difficult situation.
- Share contact lists with important **emergency phone numbers**, numbers of group leaders and other team members with the team.
- The members of your team have unique roles in the project. They build individual relationships with the young people and observe a variety of situations during the process. Their perspectives and approaches are important, as nobody can be everywhere. Raise awareness of this among your team. **Address uncertainties, speak about difficult situations and possible courses of action** in advance to prepare them.
- Engage your team in a process of understanding **youth work values** and how to apply these in youth work practice.
- Make sure that **group leaders have all important information about the participants** and brief your team on relevant aspects, such as food allergies, epilepsy (relevant if flickering light is used), medication, as well as trigger situations etc. Group leaders should also have contact numbers of the families, so they can call them in an emergency.

- Build a trustful relationship between everyone involved, so you can **support each other** in critical or difficult situations.
- Establish a **regular (daily) evaluation** assessment with the team. Such processes can make difficulties and challenges visible and prevent things from going wrong. And as a team you have the added advantage of searching for solutions together, so you can react quickly and make the necessary adjustments.
- Talk with your team about **young people's safety**. Raise awareness of child protection and inappropriate behaviour (negative labelling, discrimination, exclusion etc.) and the need of counteraction.
- Sensitise your team to **recognise discriminatory behaviour** and provide response training



The ➤ **Guidelines for good practice. Young person safety and youth exchange programmes** (Léargas, 2004) provide valuable information on young person safety in youth exchanges.



Follow-Up

Youth projects don't end the moment you wave the young people goodbye. Much of the learning (process) happens after the project when everybody is back home and has had some space and time to digest all the experiences.



The **follow-up** is an essential process of evaluation and monitoring, sustainable project planning, development of the quality of youth work and continued support for young people. Place much of the **focus of the follow-up on aspects related to inclusion, diversity and the participation of young people with fewer opportunities** in your project.

Here are some examples of how the follow-up can impact the inclusiveness of your projects, as well as the people involved:

- Invite your **project team** to reflect on their experiences of working with mixed-ability groups. It is an important step for them to develop and learn from each other's experiences. Talk about challenges, as well as successes, and invite team members

to share their perspectives and similar experiences they've had. What did they learn and what would they do differently next time to be more inclusive and diversity-sensitive? Ask what you could do differently to improve the quality of their work. Encourage them to join relevant trainings to develop.



Explore the method of ➤ **Peer consulting** (Coverdale, N/A) to support team members by incorporating the knowledge and experience of team members and peers.

- **Group leaders** often happen to be professionals working with the participants back home. During inclusive youth projects they observe the young people acting and behaving in a new environment. As they can look at the process from the outside, they are often positively surprised by what they see. Encourage them to reflect on these new perspectives, as they **might significantly impact their professional approach**. Gather their



feedback and advice for the long-term development of your inclusive project, as they have specific knowledge of the participants.

- Evaluate the project with your **cross-sectoral partner network**. Incorporate the feedback received from participants, team members and group leaders. What do you take from the feedback? Have a look at the goals you set. Are you satisfied with the partner network? Should you invite new partners (maybe working with specific target groups)? Did you reach new target groups? Was the project as diverse as you expected it to be? Was it easy to reach potential participants or should you improve your communication materials and strategies to extend your outreach? What did you learn and what do you want to improve to make your projects more inclusive and diversity-sensitive? Document the results of your discussion for the next inclusive project you plan.

Spread the news!

Activities to enhance the visibility, dissemination and exploitation of your inclusive project, its results and successes, are vital to reach a much larger audience, beyond those who took part, and to ensure a sustained impact on inclusive European youth work. Using diverse dissemination strategies, you can acquaint others with the project's results, knowledge gained and noteworthy experiences, and thus inspire their further activities and engagement. **Disseminating your project's results is also a powerful tool to mainstream inclusion and diversity.**

Ideas for the project's dissemination:

- Develop a dissemination strategy with your partners, even **in the preparation phase**, so that you can start activities while the project is running. Take the perspectives and requirements of all parties involved into account and think about **what you want to communicate** through your activities and why, and **who you want to target**, especially in relation to inclusion and diversity.
- **Share your results, experiences, methods and good practices** in inclusive projects to **mainstream inclusion and diversity** and **inspire** other youth organisations and youth workers with your inclusive youth work. Circulate results via all relevant partner networks, existing social-media groups or online-platforms like the SALTO-YOUTH Toolbox or the Erasmus+ Project Results Platform. Reach out to disability communities to draw attention to your youth project and inclusive international youth work.
- Make your dissemination materials accessible. This way you demonstrate a genuine inclusive approach. At the same time, you are creating the possibility of reaching new target groups with your project outcomes. This way you might find new relevant partners, as well as interested young people.
- **Young people are important multipliers for international projects.** Engage them so they can tell their stories, share their experiences and **inform peers** about the opportunities within Erasmus+ Youth and the European

Solidarity Corps. Invite them to write a report for the organisation's newsletter or to organise an event in your organisation or the local community with the support of the project partners.

Arriving back home

It is possible that young people will arrive back to their home environment changed in some ways by the experiences and learning processes of the project. Consequently, they can have **difficulties fitting back into** the position they previously held within their peer or family group setting. This can be a process that **needs more personal support**. They might also have a lot to process and might not have people in their immediate environment they can turn to. Discuss the support aspect, even **during the preparation of the project**, to highlight that it is a crucial part of the whole process and needs preparation. Exchange good practices, so partners and group leaders can develop supportive strategies.

Make sure the young people have key persons whom they feel confident to turn to. Think about methods or coaching strategies to **support the transformation** process in a positive way. Involve the young people's network (family, friends, confidants), if agreed upon by the young person, to make the process as inclusive as possible.

Guide the young people in how to use their new skills, knowledge and perspectives to participate in social activities or youth work or **get engaged** in their local communities. Prepare an overview of local groups and activities, as well as other opportunities such as the **➤ EuroPeers** net-

work (SALTO-YOUTH, N/A). Introduce them to other opportunities which Erasmus+ Youth and the European Solidarity Corps provide, such as **➤ Youth participation activities** (European Commission, 2021) or **➤ European Solidarity Corps Solidarity projects** (European Youth Portal, N/A).



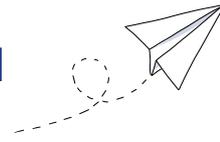
Find ideas for active youth engagement in the **➤ DARE Youth Peer Support Model** (DARE DisAble the barRiErs, 2020).

"I was close to being a school dropout. I was lucky that a local organisation invited me to go on an inclusive youth exchange to Poland. It was my first time abroad. My English wasn't good. I was shy and struggled at the beginning...but in the end, I didn't want to leave, and we all were crying. Somehow this experience changed me, and when I heard I could go a second time next summer, I really started to engage in school and received a lot of help from the youth workers of the organisation I went with. Now, not only has my English improved but I will certainly finish school this year. These experiences changed my life."

Participant with fewer opportunities from Estonia in the international inclusive youth project Building Bridges.



Inclusion support in Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps



Erasmus+ Youth and the European Solidarity Corps offer **additional funding for inclusion** and other features, as inclusion and diversity is an important priority in both of the programmes. Although some features have already been highlighted throughout the chapters, you'll find a summary here to give you a quick overview of the possibilities.

Remember: Inclusion must be factored into project management from the very beginning to effectively break down participation barriers. This also applies to the budget. It is crucial to **plan for the additional costs that might arise, even at the application stage** of a project. Think about additional group leaders, accompanying persons and other people, who might be involved, and consider them in the application.



IMPORTANT

Of course it is not always possible to foresee every inclusion-related support need from the beginning, as some needs and related costs might only become visible when you know exactly who will participate in your project. However, in order to apply for inclusion related financial support in Erasmus+ Youth and the European Solidarity Corps, you should indicate what your needs might be at the application stage, as far as possible. With an accreditation in Erasmus+ or a European Solidarity Corps Quality Label, it is possible to request financial inclusion support at a later stage in the project (see below). However, in the case of indi-

vidual project applications in Erasmus+ Youth or in solidarity projects, it is not possible to apply for additional funding at a later stage, even if support needs come up that you were not aware of at the application stage. Try to get informed and estimate your financial needs as precisely as possible. That also means that you should consider costs for disability-inclusion if you plan to reach out to and involve young persons with disabilities. If you are uncertain about the costs that might occur or about how to apply for inclusion-related costs, you can turn to the programme or inclusion officers at your National Agency for advice.

Financial inclusion support

In all programme formats of the Key Action 1 under Erasmus+ Youth and the European Solidarity Corps, costs incurred in relation to the individual needs of young people with disabilities can be awarded. Examples of such costs are: the cost of removing physical or communication barriers, such as a barrier-free bus for a trip or sign-language interpreters; cost of a personal assistant; cost of the rental of assistive equipment; cost of specialised travel items, additional medical care; cost of insurance needed for the project; cost of implementing a preparatory planning visit; costs incurred in contacting hard-to-reach groups, like young people in NEET situations or in rural areas; financing measures for outreach or the accessible design of project materials etc.

All formats have a very similar funding mechanism:

➤ **Inclusion support on a per unit cost basis:** For every participant with fewer opportunities (excluding group leaders, accompanying persons and facilitators), you can apply for additional funding on a per unit cost basis (not available for youth participation activities and solidarity projects). In the European Solidarity Corps, this support has to be related to reinforced mentorship (see ➤ p. 37), i.e., the preparation, implementation and follow-up of tailor-made activities to support the participation of young people with fewer opportunities

➤ **Inclusion support on a real cost basis (Erasmus+ Youth) / Exceptional costs (European Solidarity Corps):**

➔ In the case of higher inclusion related costs, in **Erasmus+ Youth**, you can apply for 100% funding of these costs if they are directly linked to the needs of participants

with fewer opportunities (including group leaders and facilitators) and their accompanying persons. This includes justified costs related to travel and subsistence if a grant for these participants is not requested through the foreseen budget categories such as "Travel" and "Individual support". All costs must be justified by the applicant and approved by the National Agency. In that case, they will be funded on a real costs basis. Relevant documents will need to be added to the final report.

➔ In **European Solidarity Corps Volunteering Projects**, you can apply for 100% funding of costs linked to reasonable adjustments or investment in physical assets, including accompanying persons. They can also be linked to reinforced mentorship and replace the inclusion support on a per unit cost basis, if the latter does not cover at least 80 % of the costs incurred.



- **Inclusion support on further request:** If you are accredited for Erasmus+ Youth or have a Quality Label for the European Solidarity Corps, you have the possibility of **applying for additional inclusion support on a real costs basis during the project implementation.** If, for example, you realise that the costs for the individual needs of the young people involved in your project are much higher than what you anticipated when applying (e.g., a person with a chronic health condition needs much more support during the project, a deaf person is joining your project and you need sign language interpretation etc.), you can apply for these costs up to 12 months after the beginning of your project.

Specific options for implementation: diverse formats for diverse projects

Erasmus+ Youth Exchanges

- **Short-term projects (5-21 days)** offer a safe setting for first international experiences. Young people can, for example, participate together with a youth group or a friend they already know. For some in the group, the activity can even take place locally.
- **Smaller number of participants:** In youth exchanges involving only young people with fewer opportunities, the minimum number of participants is reduced to 10.
- **Preparatory visits** (see ➤ p. 21) ensure high quality activities by facilitating their planning and preparation. In case of activities involving young people with fewer opportunities, a preparatory

visit can help to ensure that the individual needs of the participants can be catered for. A representative of participants with fewer opportunities that will take part in the planned activities can be involved in the visit, in order to help with their preparation and involve them in the activity design so that their needs are considered from the start. A preparatory visit can be funded on a per unit cost basis. The need for a preparatory meeting needs approval by the National Agency.

European Solidarity Corps Volunteering Projects

- **Short-term individual volunteering** (2 weeks to 2 months) offers an easy, accessible start for young people with fewer opportunities, with the option of completing individual long-term volunteering (up to 12 months) afterwards. In exceptional cases, individual volunteering projects can also take place in-country to encourage and facilitate the participation of young people with fewer opportunities. This is not valid for all programme countries – please check with your National Agency.
- **Team volunteering** activities allow teams of participants to volunteer together for a period of between 2 weeks and 2 months. This offers a safe setting for first volunteering experiences. Young people can, for example, volunteer together with a youth group or a friend they already know. For some in the group, the activity can even take place locally. Most volunteering projects can take place in-country to encourage and facilitate the participation of young people with fewer opportunities.

➤ **Preparatory visits** (see ➤ p. 21) at the venue of volunteering involving young people with fewer opportunities are encouraged. They can help to ensure that the individual needs of the participant(s) can be catered for. A representative of participants with fewer opportunities that will take part in the planned activity can be involved in the visit, in order to help with their preparation and involve them in the activity design so that their needs are considered from the start. A preparatory visit can be funded on a per unit cost basis. The need for a preparatory meeting needs approval by the National Agency.

➤ **Reinforced mentorship** can be financed to support an adequate accompaniment of young people with fewer opportunities, e.g., in the form of step-by-step support or more frequent meetings.

Youth participation activities (Erasmus+) and Solidarity Projects (European Solidarity Corps)

➤ **Youth-driven local activities** are possible, so young people can gain first engagement experiences in a familiar environment. Organisations can, however, support young persons with administrative procedures and with finding a coach.

➤ **Flexible parameters** (duration, maximal number of participants, local/national/transnational activities, topics etc.), which can be easily adapted to the specific needs of young people with fewer opportunities.

➤ Young people applying together as an informal group can get **support from coaches** for a maximum of 12 days during the project's implementation. The financial support to cover coach costs must be justified and approved by the National Agency.

➤ **Costs linked to participants with fewer opportunities** (in European Solidarity Corps linked to members of the applying group or, up to a maximum amount, to the target group of the project) and their accompanying persons are covered on a real cost basis. They must be justified by the applicant and approved by the National Agency.

Every country in Europe and every case is different. Therefore, your National Agency will have to assess that your requests are reasonable, considering the group you are working with. Don't forget to explain why your project needs this support.



REFLECTION

Looking at your own projects and taking what you have read in this guide into consideration:
What additional financial support might be necessary to implement inclusion and diversity in your youth project and support participants' individual needs with fewer opportunities to enable equal participation?

Erasmus+/European Solidarity Corps Programme info: Find details about the funding mechanism in the ➤ **Erasmus+ Programme guide** and the ➤ **European Solidarity Corps Guide**.





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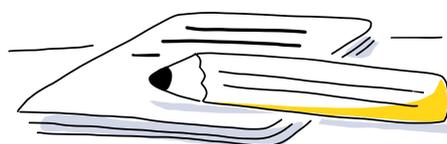
Author:

Elżbieta Kosek has been project manager for inclusion at **Kreisau-Initiative e. V. in Berlin** since 2013. Her path to inclusive youth work began when she started working for the International Youth Meeting Center of the Polish Krzyżowa Foundation for Mutual Understanding in Europe in 2007. Since then she is coordinating and implementing international inclusive youth projects involving young people of different ages, with and without disabilities, with diverse social, economic and educational backgrounds.

Her most significant projects are the inclusive international youth exchange ➤ **Building Bridges** and the ➤ **International Inclusive Dance Festival**. Her philosophy is: The more diversity, the better.

In her experience working in such diverse groups allow participants to connect on different levels. Social lines of difference are questioned, and perspectives changed.

In addition to youth exchanges, she leads trainings for youth work professionals on the topic of inclusion and also trains facilitators and trainers in this field. She is co-author of several publications on inclusion in international youth work.



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The new **Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Programmes 2021-2027** have become even more inclusive, compared to the previous programme generation. Dedicated financial support for inclusion, new formats, simplified application processes as well as training and networking opportunities for organisations and youth workers increase the programmes accessibility to young people who face more obstacles to participating in international projects than their peers.

The **guide on disability-inclusive European youth projects** addresses organisations, youth workers and facilitators who are already experienced in organising European youth projects but do not yet have many experiences with inclusive projects engaging young people with disabilities and health conditions. The goal is to support them strengthen and develop their skills towards more inclusive and diversity-sensitive youth work and provide them with knowledge for working with young people with disabilities and health conditions. Moreover, it is an invitation to them to reflect on the inclusivity of their own youth projects and to explore the potential of disability-inclusive youth work.

The guide provides a compact overview as well as valuable advice on planning, implementing, and the follow-up of inclusive activities within short-term projects of **Erasmus+ Youth** and the **European Solidarity Corps** highlighting specific Erasmus+ Youth and European Solidarity Corps features such as the financial support for inclusion. An additional checklist supports youth workers and organisations to keep an eye on the various important aspects and tasks.

