

INCLUSIVITY AND ACCESSIBILITY GUIDELINES

*Educational product developed by Mila LUKIĆ as part of the long-term training course
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This document was developed with the aim to help youth organisations and youth educators to organise their non-formal education and training activities in a more inclusive and accessible manner, therefore supporting active participation of young people with fewer opportunities¹.

All youth activities should seek to promote equal opportunities and access, inclusion, diversity and fairness for all young people, regardless of their background, abilities, experiences or other. It is up to the youth organisations and youth workers to put in place mechanisms that enable young people with fewer opportunities to fully take part in the activities.

This document looks at multiple types of barriers² that enable or disable young people with fewer opportunities to equally participate. By breaking them down into specific guiding questions and practical suggestions, the document supports planning and implementing non-formal education and training activities. The barriers addressed in this document include:

- Geographical obstacles
- Economic obstacles
- Social obstacles
- Educational obstacles
- Cultural obstacles
- Disability-related obstacles
- Health-related obstacles

Who is it for? These guidelines can be used by youth organisations and youth educators (trainers, facilitators, youth workers, others) who implement non-formal education and training activities that involve young people with fewer opportunities, in either local, national or international context. Despite how much experience you have in youth work and/or non-formal education, these guidelines may inspire you to think out of the box.

¹ People with fewer opportunities means people who, for economic, social, cultural, geographical or health reasons, a migrant background, or for reasons such as disability and educational difficulties or for any other reasons, including those that can give rise to discrimination under article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental rights of the European Union, face obstacles that prevent them from having effective access to opportunities under the programme. More available here: <https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/inclusion/archive/archive-resources/inclusiongroups/inclusionoffenders/InclusionOffendersWho/>

² Types of obstacles were selected based on the priorities of the Erasmus+ programme and in line with the Implementation guidelines - Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Inclusion and Diversity Strategy. More information available here: <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-a/priorities-of-the-erasmus-programme> and <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/document/implementation-guidelines-erasmus-and-european-solidarity-corps-inclusion-and-diversity-strategy?>

How do you use it? The guidelines can be used in both *planning phase* (when you are designing an activity and selecting your participants) and in the *implementation phase* (when you are already delivering you activity). Each type of barrier contains three main parts:

- 1) Short description
- 2) Guiding questions
- 3) Tips and suggestions about mechanisms that can be put in place to address overcoming a particular barrier.

Therefore, you are invited to explore the contents of these guidelines, use it as you see fit for your youth work and/or non-formal education.

Important: As any other publication, this document has its limitations as it does not give a full recipe for how to ensure equal participation of young people with fewer opportunities. It merely serves as a reminder of various aspects that could hinder participation from happening in the first place. Moreover, there might be more barriers than the ones in this document that you would want to consider when planning and organising your activity, so this list can vary from case to case. What is very important is to ask the participants about their needs, and never assume what they might need/want. You can do this through an online survey, in direct communication or already at the application stage.

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If you would like to send suggestions that can improve this document, feel free to contact me at milalukic93@gmail.com.

Geographical obstacles to participation

Living in remote or rural areas, on small islands or in less serviced areas (limited public transport, poor facilities and connections to major urban epicentres) or less developed areas in third countries, may constitute a barrier for participation in education and training.

Where are your participants coming from? Are they coming from remote or rural areas, that are less serviced with public transport? Do they need any assistance in preparing their travel itinerary for the activity?

Organisations sometimes recommend the best routes to these young people on how to reach the activity venue/accommodation. If there are multiple people from similar areas, you might want to connect them so they can travel together and/or encourage carpooling. If there is no public transport in that remote area, you might want to make an exception and reimburse a taxi ride to the nearest bus/train station.

Do you have young people who have never travelled abroad before?

For first timers in terms of international travel, you might want to consider connecting them to other participants, so they can travel together, especially if they are from the same city/region/country. Even if they are not, peers would be able to provide moral support and technical advice. On the other hand, you might need to communicate more closely to these participants than others, suggest them itineraries and means of transportation, support them in buying tickets and managing their way around the airport/station.

Economic obstacles to participation

Economic disadvantage, for instance a low living standard, low income, learners who need to work to support themselves, dependence on the social welfare system, long-term unemployment, precarious situations or poverty, being homeless, in debt or with financial problems, may represent a barrier. Other difficulties may derive from the limited transferability of services (in particular support to people with fewer opportunities) that need to be "mobile" together with the participant participating in activities away from their place of residence or, all the more, abroad.

Can your participants afford to partake in your activity?

Some long-term unemployed youth, low-earning professionals, students and beneficiaries of social welfare cannot afford to buy their own tickets or pay a participation fee to partake in your activity. Some organisations opt for buying pre-paid tickets for them in advance, and in return ask for their written commitment of attending the activity in full. On the other hand, if you require participants to pay a fee to take part in your activity, you might want to consider waiving the fee for these young people partially or fully. If you are sending participants to another activity that requires a participation fee, you might want to consider covering the fee for them (partially or fully).

Are any of your participants employed/studying? How can you ensure participation in the activity does not jeopardise their job/studies?

Some young people often study and work at the same time, but they should not be deprived of the opportunity to participate in non-formal education and sometimes they take vacation days to attend an activity. More often, we see young people who need to attend an online exam or a work meeting during the activity. You may want to give certificates of attendance to your participants who need to skip school/university in order to attend and explain how the activity connects to their personal and professional development, so it is understandable how it contributes to their education.

Are you working with homeless youth? How will you reach out to them? How will you ensure they feel welcome in the group?

You may need to buy travel tickets for them, ensure their accommodation and food are covered for the entirety of activity duration. Explore what [FEANTSA Youth](#) is doing to support inclusion and empowerment of homeless youth.

Social obstacles to participation

Social adjustment difficulties, such as limited social skills, anti-social or high-risk behaviours; (former) offenders, (former) drug or alcohol abusers, or social marginalisation may represent a barrier. Other social barriers can stem from family circumstances - for instance, being the first in the family to access higher education or being a parent (especially a single parent), a caregiver, a breadwinner or an orphan, or having lived or currently living in institutional care. Furthermore, young people facing discrimination based on their gender or sexual orientation can also face barriers in equally partaking in education and training activities.

Are any of your participants single parents or just recently started a family? Do they need to take their baby with them? Do they need their partner to join the activity so they can take care of the baby?

Some organisations, if the budgetary means allow, invite the other parent to come as a personal assistant to the parent who is partaking in an activity, in order to take care of the baby during activity hours. Others offer to cover the costs of the childminder.

Are you working with young people in foster care / recipients of social care?

Sometimes these young people need an accompanying person to come with them to the activity. Consider if you can allocate extra budget to covering this person's travel, meals, accommodation costs. Maybe you can see if the coverage can be split between your organisation and the accompanying person, or local municipality, or some local foundations that support young people in foster care. You also want to check if the accompanying person knows the language of instruction in your activity. If not, you can ask the young person to act as a mediator-translator.

What is the gender diversity in your group? Are you involving young LGBTIQ+ individuals? How can you ensure safe space for all participants to freely express themselves?

Organisations should ensure safe space for everyone in an activity. They usually emphasise the need for this in the beginning of the activity, when discussing the 'group agreement' with all participants. What is usually highlighted is zero tolerance for any

type of discrimination, intolerance or hate speech. This does not necessarily ensure safe space throughout the activity, so it is important to keep a keen eye on the group and establish an atmosphere of trust, so they can approach you if they need to. Some organisations find it useful if participants (whoever feels comfortable) share their pronouns at the beginning of the activity. Whether your group wants to do so or not, it is important to ensure safe space and make sure there is a strategy to prevent any kind of gender-based discrimination. This is why some organisations have a “safe person” or a “safe committee” that could be approached in case of any misconduct during the activity. Moreover, be aware of the difference between terms “gender” and “sex” as these can become trigger points that can open larger discussions. Check out what [The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer and Intersex \(LGBTQI\) Youth & Student Organisation - IGLYO](#) is doing to support inclusion and diversity.

Educational obstacles to participation

These barriers address individuals struggling to perform in education and training systems for various reasons, such as early school-leavers, NEETs (people not in education, employment or training) and low-skilled adults may face barriers. Although other factors may play a role, these educational difficulties, while possibly linked to personal circumstances, mostly result from educational systems which create structural limitations and/or do not fully take into account the individual's particular needs. Individuals can also face barriers to participation when the structure of curricula makes it difficult to undertake a learning or training mobility abroad as part of their studies.

Are you working with school dropouts, early school leavers or young people with poor school performance? Are you working with NEET youth³?

The NEET category can be very diverse itself, so it is important to know what profile of NEET youth you have in your group (e.g. a young Roma person who is not in education, employment or training, because they are a single parent with an infant baby). If you are not familiar with their background, it is always best to ask what kind of support they need to come and partake in your activity, and even offer some things (such as prepaid tickets) in advance to them. You might want to explore how [SALTO](#) approaches work with NEET youth.

Are you working with young people who have challenges with accessing education?

If you want to reach young people who have limited or little access to educational opportunities, especially non-formal education, you need to employ different/innovative techniques to reach out to them. For example, instead of posting a call for participants online hoping that people from little villages will find it and apply, you might need to print application forms and leaflets with relevant information about the activity and visit local schools to get in touch with your desired target group. You also need to

³ The term NEET youth stands for young people who are not in employment, education or training, and therefore are at risk of becoming socially excluded, and individuals with income below the poverty-line and lacking the skills to improve their economic situation. Learn more at: <https://www.oecd.org/en/data/indicators/youth-not-in-employment-education-or-training-neet.html>

consider what other types of obstacles these young people might have (geographical, cultural, health-related, other), and accommodate to their needs the best you can.

Cultural obstacles to participation

While cultural differences may be perceived as barriers by people from any background, they can particularly affect people with fewer opportunities. Such differences may represent significant barriers to learning in general, all the more for people with a migrant or refugee background – including but not limited to newly-arrived migrants, people belonging to a national, ethnic or religious minority, sign language users, or people with linguistic adaptation and cultural inclusion difficulties. Being exposed to foreign languages and cultural differences when taking part in any kind of programme activities may put some individuals off and, in a way, limit the benefits from their participation.

What is the level of English/other language of instruction in your group? Do all participants have a working level of the language of instruction you will use, and can easily follow your programme? Do you need to adapt some parts of the programme or even translate so participants better understand (e.g. specific terminology)?

Firstly, not all people speak native English in international activities and secondly, English is sometimes not the language of instruction. Therefore, you might want to reassure your group that perfect English/other language of instruction is not expected of them and to support them in expressing their thoughts and feelings, when necessary. Moreover, Erasmus+ programme offers linguistic support to those who want to improve their language skills, so you might also want to ensure your participants are aware of this feature.

Do you have participants who come from ethnic minorities (e.g. Roma)? How will you ensure they feel welcome in the group?

You will not always know if you have representatives of ethnic minorities in your group, but it is important to be attentive to whichever specific needs they might have (e.g. economic obstacles, health issues, disability, social status, other). Check out what [Youth of European Nationalities – YEN](#) and [Youth Express Network – Y-E-N](#) are doing in this regard. Moreover, if you are working with young Roma, you might want to explore the work of [Phiren Ameca](#) and [Ternype – International Roma Youth Network](#).

Are you working with young immigrants and refugees, or descendants of immigrants and refugees? How will you ensure they feel welcome in the group? How will you ensure they feel safe to share their stories without being discriminated against? How will you ensure the “do no harm” principle⁴ is respected?

Similar to ethnic minorities, you might not be aware of the background of your participants unless they share this with you and the rest of the group. Therefore, you

⁴ “Do no harm” principle relates to ensuring equal access of all people to their fundamental rights and freedoms regardless of their specific background and profile. Read more at <https://www.undp.org/digital/standards/5-do-no-harm> (part A).

want to stay informed about the participants' profile and ensure that your activity does not trigger/hurt them in any way (e.g. through an exercise you do or a discussion you facilitate). Moreover, you should be aware of trigger points, i.e. painful topics that might trigger your participants (e.g. discussing war or conflict, using the term "home" in general, doing sensitive simulations/role plays). Lastly, be informed and opt for using inclusive vocabulary about refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants, as this can also be triggering. Check out what [Voices of Young Refuges in Europe - VYRE](#) and [Youth Social Rights Network - YSRN](#) are doing to ensure participation and inclusion of young refugees and migrants.

Is your group religiously diverse? Do your participants need a prayer room/worship space during the activity?

Some organisations offer such space during the activities by creating a quiet place for participants to practise their religion. Others recommend the nearest religious houses where participants may go to pray. Also be mindful of the fact that different religions have different prayer times, so you might want to consider how these times affect your programme. If you are not sure, you can always ask your participants whether they have any particular prayer times during your activity that you need to consider and be flexible about. You can check out the work of [CEJI – A Jewish Contribution to Inclusive Europe](#) and [Federation of Muslim Youth and Students Organisation – FEMYSO](#), to see how they approach working with religious groups of young people.

Is your activity taking place during a religious or cultural holiday? Does this affect your participants' diet (e.g. fasting during Ramadan)?

It is important to understand if participants want/need space during the activity to share traditions and customs regarding their religion/culture, and to plan this in your programme. If possible, you should AVOID organising your activities during an important religious (or cultural) event. If this cannot be avoided, consider dedicating evening hours to such joint activities or giving participants space in the morning to explain their holiday customs. It is also important if such events affect the dietary regime of participants so ensure to be flexible towards participants' dietary customs (e.g. preparing them a larger dinner during Ramadan that they can consume during night). If you are not sure, you can always consult your participants and see how to best accommodate their needs. Apart from CEJI and FEMYSO, you can also check out [Don Bosco Youth Network – DBYN](#) who has a particular Salesian approach to working with young people.

Disability-related barriers to participation

These barriers include physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, and in interaction with other barriers, may hinder someone's full and effective participation in society on the same footing as others.

Do you have participants with any kind of physical disability (users of wheelchair, walker or cane)?

If you are not aware of these aspects before you start an activity, it is advised to ask participants beforehand if they have any accessibility-related needs. This way, you can ensure that your physical venue is accessible (e.g. has an elevator or a ramp, accessible path to the doorway, accessible rooms and bathrooms, etc.). Participants always appreciate asking before assuming their needs 😊 Moreover, some participants often attend activities with their personal assistants (some even two, depending on the gravity of their disability). You should ensure to have enough financial means to support their participation as well. [European Network on Independent Living - ENIL Youth Network](#) could be a great inspiration for you.

Do you have hard-of-hearing or deaf participants? Can you afford palantyping (speech-to-text) services or sign interpreters?

Some countries offer these services for their participants attending activities even abroad, so make sure to check that in close communication with your participants. Erasmus+ programme offers additional budget to ensure assistive tools and services (budget category - Inclusion support). Another way to accommodate the needs of hard-of-hearing and deaf young people is to send them materials in advance, so they can easily follow the content of your activity. Check out how [International Federation of Hard of Hearing Young People - IFHOHYP](#) and [European Union of Deaf Youth - EUDY](#) approach to working with young hard-of-hearing and deaf youth.

Do you have participants with visual impairment? How can you ensure their full participation in the activity?

Oftentimes you will need to adjust our educational material (e.g. have descriptive explanations of graphics you use, or not use pictures) if there are blind or visually impaired people in the group. You can also send them all educational materials in advance that they can read with their assistive tools online and use during the activity. [SALTO](#) has great examples of what else you can do.

Do you have neurodivergent participants (e.g. young people with ADHD or autism)? How can you support their learning process?

You might want to consider more breaks in the programme or shorter sessions, as well as sending all learning material in advance or after the activity.

Health-related barriers to participation

These barriers may result from health issues including severe illnesses, chronic diseases, or any other physical or mental health-related situation that prevents someone from participating in the programme. They also include ensuring physical and mental health and wellbeing, as well as dietary regime needs.

Do your participants have any (severe or chronic) medical conditions you should be aware of (e.g. POTS, epilepsy, diabetes, etc)? What type of information should you have in such cases (e.g. how to support participants in the case of medical emergency)?

Be aware that this is confidential information participants share with you, so you also want to consider how and for how long you keep this data. You can also inform participants of your emergency protocols at the beginning of activity, so they have all necessary information and know whom to contact in case of emergency. Lastly, you can have an emergency contact person (either from your team or from the venue reception) who can support participants when needed.

Do you have any dietary restrictions and/or preferences in the group (vegetarians, vegans, keto, allergies, other)? Who needs to know this information (e.g. kitchen of the youth centre preparing the food)? How will you make sure participants know their restrictions/preferences have been taken into account (e.g. having labels on food in the kitchen)?

If possible, ask your food provider (hotel restaurant, youth centre kitchen staff) to what extent they could accommodate specific dietary needs of your group. Additionally, you can label the food with allergens or ingredients so people manage their own needs during the activity as well. If you have participants leaving early in the morning or during the night, some organisations prepare lunch packages for them to take away, so they still have food during their journey (this practice can be applied to the whole group regardless of their dietary needs).

How will you ensure mental health of your participants?

Nowadays, with multiple crises going on in the world (from wars and conflicts, through housing and poverty, to climate change), young people can feel anxious and mentally challenged to cope with all of it. You should consider safeguarding measures you can put in place to ensure stable mental health throughout your activity. Even though you might think your activity is not challenging or triggering per se, you never know what might trigger which person in the room. Therefore, having a strategy in mind what to do if something happens or if someone asks for your help could be of great help for participants. For example, you can nominate a safe person committee to be available during the activity for anyone who would like to talk about something that troubles them. You can also allocate some space in your venue that is usually called a “quiet room” as a safe space where young people can physical and mentally rest and de-load at any point of the activity (especially, if they do not wish to talk about it, but would rather remain quiet). If your activity is tackling a triggering topic (especially if there is experiential learning involved, such as role plays and simulations), you should prepare yourself well for the activity (e.g. have you done it before? Have you been a participant in it before? Have you gone through the experience as a participant, so you can anticipate what your participants might feel now?) and also prepare trigger warnings and give them to participants at the beginning (e.g. leaving the room is okay, hugging yourself, breathing exercise, other). In such situations, it is important to have the whole activity team involved with specific roles and support to each other and participants as well.

