

Mountains for All:

Embracing Inclusion in Mountains and Outdoor Activities



Index

1. Introduction	3
2. Establishing a shared understanding: key expressions explained	4
3. A spectrum of perspectives: mature, mountains inclusion, and opportunities	7
3.1. Henriette Adolf: Are mountains inclusive?	7
3.2. Damien Urbain: The importance of mountain experiences for people with fewer opportunities	9
3.3. Marjeta Čič: Empowering people with disabilities and the significance of volunteering	13
3.4. Veronika Rogelj: Patience and Persistence – cultivating strength through experiences	18
3.5. Leonardo Cerno: Empowering through outdoor experiences	22
3.6. Gregory Collomb: The benefits of long-distance hiking in the moutains	25
4. Steps toward Inclusion: How to build inclusive practices in the outdoors	30
5. Other projects and sources to dive deeper into the topic	38
6. About the project: Via Alpina Youth	41

1. Introduction

Outdoor spaces are often seen as open and neutral—but they are not always equally accessible, welcoming, or safe for everyone. Barriers—both visible and invisible—can prevent individuals and communities from participating in and connecting with these landscapes. Understanding this topic was the main goal of the Via Alpina Youth Project.

With this paper, we* aim to spark and sustain the conversation on inclusion in mountain and outdoor activities and make it visible for a wider public. We want to raise awareness of the challenges faced by newcomers or marginalized groups in accessing and enjoying mountain environments. To gain a holistic understanding of the topic, we gathered insights from individuals and organizations that are actively engaged in promoting inclusion in outdoor spaces – especially in the Alps. We also collected and elaborated practical know-how and actionable steps that support more inclusive practices in the outdoors.

Our goal is not to provide definitive answers, but to encourage questions, dialogue, and learning. Inclusion is not a final destination—it is an ongoing journey that calls on each of us to show up with curiosity and courage. By embracing complexity, reflecting on our own blind spots, listening deeply to others, and taking intentional action—even in the face of fear—we can begin to foster meaningful change. When we remain committed to learning, we start to build safe and welcoming spaces, where equity and diversity are not just ideals, but everyday practices.

*Project Team of Via Alpina Youth

2. Establishing a shared understanding: key expressions explained

Inclusion

Inclusion is a key concept in social and educational policy that emphasizes that everyone should have equal access and participation rights on equal terms. It is seen as a collective and group-driven process that embraces diversity. It involves creating an environment where individuals feel valued, respected, and supported. Inclusion ensures that the conditions are set for everyone to evolve and reach their potential. Inclusion should be reflected in an organization's culture – in its language, behaviors and practices.¹

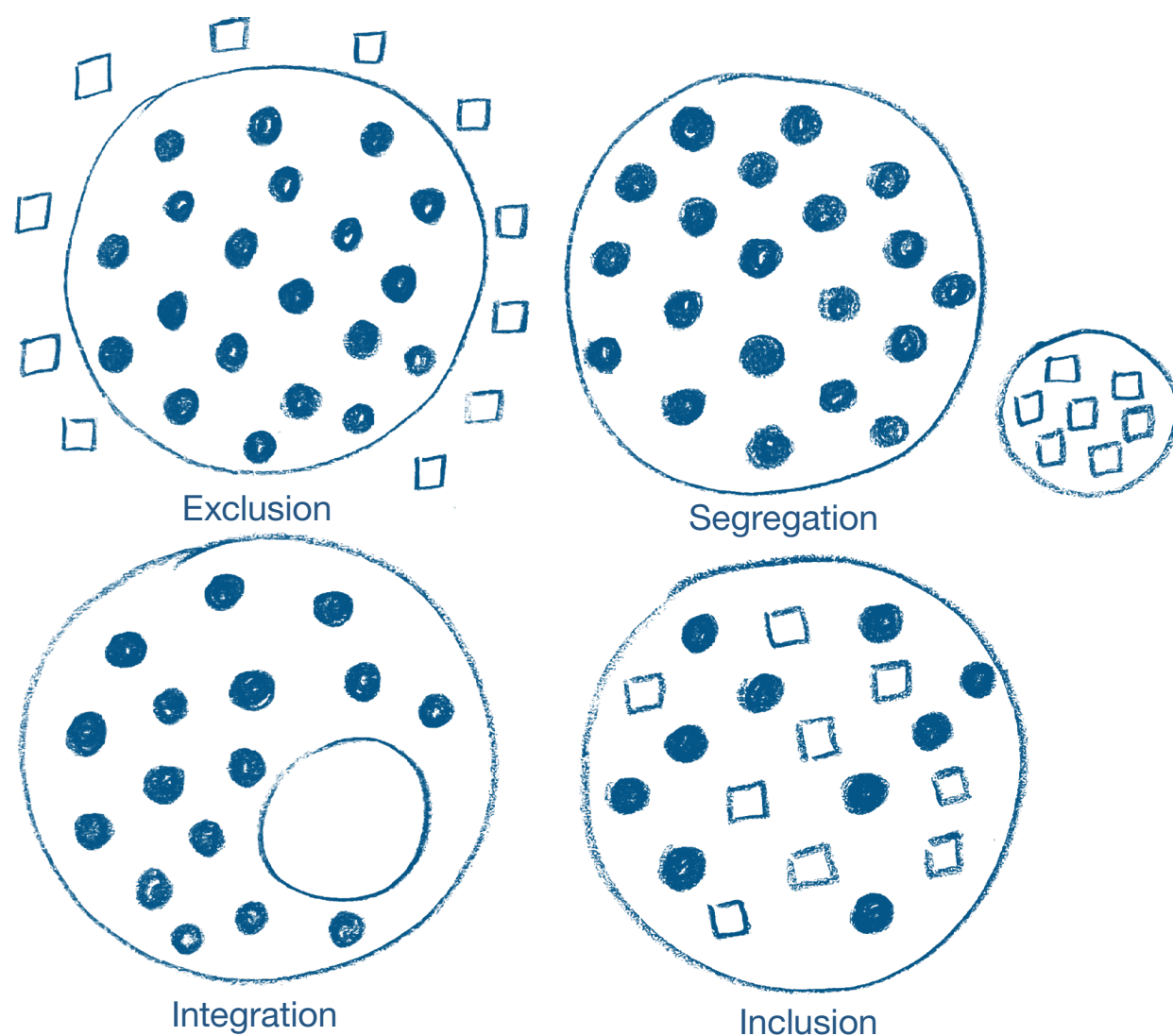


Figure: Four key concepts essential for understanding real inclusion.

Source: Council of Europe and European Commission. (2017). T-Kit8 Social Inclusion: <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/t-kit-8-social-inclusion>

Diversity

This refers to the variety of differences and similarities among individuals, including but not limited to gender, ethnicity, age, culture, generation, religion, class/caste, language, education, geography, national origin, disability, sexual orientation, work and lifestyle, work experience, job role and function, thinking style, food choices, and personality type.

Young people with fewer opportunities (YPWFOs)²

The definition refers to people that are at a disadvantage compared to their peers because they face one or more barriers that limit their access to opportunities. These are: disability, health challenges, educational barriers, cultural differences, economic obstacles, social obstacles, discrimination or geographic isolation.

Important: these factors can – but will not necessarily – influence people's inclusion in society. What is important is that we are aware of them and that we do not „label“ or „tag“ people right away.

Obstacles

When assessing the obstacles, keep in mind that there are...



...**Personal obstacles:** lack of self-esteem, self-confidence; lack of encouragement; fear of being discriminated (again); uninteresting activities...



...**Practical obstacles:** lack of information, lack of time or energy, lack of money, mobility problems, cultural or religious conflicts...



...**Social obstacles:** barriers or challenges in society that hinder individuals or groups from fully participating or achieving success in various aspects of life. These obstacles often stem from social norms, biases, inequalities and systemic structures. Some examples: discrimination and prejudice due to race, ethnicity, gender, religion or sexual orientation; socioeconomic inequality that is mirrored in poverty, lack of access to quality education and employment barriers; cultural and social norms that can relate to traditional gender roles or social stigma...

² Aglietti, C. (2024). Bridging voices: Empowering Youth Diversity in the Pursuit of Climate Justice. SALTO. <https://www.salto-youth.net>

Marginalized groups

This term covers the groups that have been historically disempowered, oppressed and discriminated against by influential groups. To name some examples: women, people with disabilities, people of color, LGBTQ+ folks, indigenous peoples, people of a lower socio-economic status etc.

Intercultural sensitivity³

This is defined as the ability to develop an emotional awareness and appreciation of cultural differences. A person who is interculturally sensitive is motivated to recognize, learn about, and understand different cultures. They actively seek to establish effective intercultural interactions and communication.

Attention: diversities occur also within the same cultural groups, not only between different cultures!

Discrimination

Discrimination is the unjust or prejudicial treatment of individuals or groups based on certain characteristics. It exists in many forms, for example racism, sexism, ableism, homophobia etc. Subtle forms of discrimination can also include macroaggression and stereotypes.

Outdoor learning

Is a general term for inclusive and facilitated approaches that mainly use outdoor activities and experiences to promote learning, better health, well-being, and environmental awareness.

Language

In this booklet, we aim to use language that respects and acknowledges all genders. When referring to a person in a general sense, we use „they“ as a neutral pronoun, ensuring our message includes everyone, without making assumptions about gender.



³ Project OUTdoor for INclusion. (2023). Improving resilience and integration for refugees and migrant women through outdoor experiences. <https://www.out4in.eu>

3. Spectrum of perspectives: nature, inclusion in the mountains, and opportunities

Inclusion is a complex topic and understanding it requires a multifaceted approach. To broaden our insights, we've invited some experts who are trying to foster inclusion in their everyday work lives, to share their thoughts and experiences. Each author provides a unique viewpoint, contributing to a richer understanding of the vital role outdoor environments play in fostering social inclusion and highlighting the importance of ongoing efforts in this area.

3.1 Henriette Adolf: Are mountains inclusive?

Henriette Adolf, former co-director of CIPRA Germany, project manager and environmental educator

Access to the mountains and mountain sports is often unfair, exclusive, segregating and discriminatory. "Mountains are freedom": our mountains, the Alps, are the great common good with free access rights for everyone. Here, in the open air, we are all equal.

Many would probably agree with this statement. Think back for a moment to your last mountain tour or your last overnight stay in a mountain hut. How many people were white? How many were able-bodied (not physically disabled) and able-minded (not mentally disabled)? How many had an academic background? How many were equipped with or dressed in popular outdoor brands? And how many were not? What sounds like a limitless experience of nature, fairness and equality is often less than adequate in reality. Access to the mountains and mountain sports is often unfair, exclusive, segregating and discriminatory.

This is because mountain sports are expensive: a two-day, self-organised hiking tour in the Bavarian Alps costs between €100 and €200, and even a day trip without a stop for refreshments can cost between €25 and €100.⁴ This does not include equipment-intensive sports such as climbing or skiing. More favourable prices for the socially disadvantaged? Not a chance. Mountain sports are practiced by people who can afford them financially – and, according to statistics, these are primarily people without a migration background.⁵ Although there are inclusive and integrative offers for mountain sports⁶, these are often time-limited or only available in urban centres because they depend on funding or infrastructure such as climbing gyms. In most cases, the offer depends on the commitment of individuals. Mountain

sports are practiced by people who are able-bodied and able-minded. Family access is also an important factor for participation in sports: the transfer of knowledge and motivation for mountain sports and nature conservation takes place primarily within the family. Statistically speaking, socially disadvantaged families in particular lack the connections necessary for mountain activities. Mountain sports are the preserve of those from socially privileged backgrounds.⁷

The “freedom of the mountains” is bounded by financial, social, logistical and educational barriers. As a result, participation in mountain sports often remains exclusive and discriminatory, especially for socially disadvantaged groups. For truly equal participation in mountain sports, we need more inclusive programmes, financial support, family education and the creation of access opportunities from childhood onwards. Only then will our encounters up in the mountains be as diverse as those down in the valley.

4 Getting there: in Bavaria between €12 and €26 for a one-day train ticket (double for different arrival and departure days) and up to €30 for an overnight car parking ticket. Equipment: used hiking boots from €50, rain jacket at least €30, hut sleeping bag €24. Overnight stay incl. food: €64 (camping with half board, non-club member, Knorrhütte refuge).

5 Destatis: Statistisches Bundesamt. (2024). Bevölkerung in Privathaushalten 2023 nach Migrationshintergrund und persönlichem Nettoeinkommen. <https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Gesellschaft-Umwelt/Bevoelkerung/Migration-Integration/Tabellen/migrationshintergrund-nettoeinkommen.html>
Ekamba, R. (2022). Wenn du ein Schwarzer bist, bleibst du ein Schwarzer: Rassismus und Integration auf dem Arbeitsmarkt. Bamberg: Otto-Friedrich-Universität. <https://fis.uni-bamberg.de/entities/publication/39a520fd-634d-4f2e-b581-95f7b9aa20f9>

6 Alpen.Leben.Menschen ; Deutsche Alpenverein. (n.d.). Angebote für Menschen mit Behinderung im DAV. Deutsche Alpenverein. Retrieved December, 2024. <https://www.alpenverein.de/verband/bergsport/sportentwicklung/inklusion-integration/angebote-fuer-menschen-mit-behinderung-im-dav>

7 Schmiade, N., Mutz, M. Sportliche Eltern, sportliche Kinder – Die Sportbeteiligung von Vorschulkindern im Kontext sozialer Ungleichheit. Sportwiss 42, 115–125. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12662-012-0239-7>

3.2 Damien Urbain: The importance of mountain experiences for people with fewer opportunities

The association En Passant Par la Montagne (EPPM) has been developing various types of activities to create links between nature and education since 1995. Based in the Chamonix Mont-Blanc Valley, the main goal of EPPM is to make the mountains accessible to people in social or economic difficulties, encouraging them to find motivation and develop life awareness.

Immersion in mountain environments can have a deep and lasting impact on young people, particularly those facing social exclusion, marginalization, or unstable life paths. By removing them from their everyday surroundings—often marked by disruption, constraint, or a lack of structure— the mountains offer a restorative break, a space for self-reflection, reconnection, and personal growth.

Direct contact with nature allows these youth to reconnect with a slower, more essential rhythm. For many, it may be their first time experiencing a space where freedom replaces social pressure. This detachment from urban environments can help foster a new perception of self and others, as well as encourage the development of an environmental awareness rooted in meaning and responsibility.

Outdoor activities such as hiking, rock climbing, or multi-day treks become powerful educational tools. They place young people in front of tangible challenges, often physical, that require them to tap into their personal resources, persevere, manage emotions, and make decisions. These experiences foster transferable life skills: cooperation, responsibility, communication, leadership, and real-world problem-solving.

Beyond technical or behavioral learning, what leaves the deepest imprint are the moments of success. Reaching a summit, completing a trek, overcoming a fear—each of these achievements becomes a source of self-esteem, sometimes felt for the first time in a meaningful way. This rediscovered pride can help break the cycle of failure or invisibility, offering new perspectives and restoring a positive self-image.

In essence, the mountain becomes more than just a physical place—it is a symbolic space for transformation, where young people learn about themselves, build trust with others, and begin to envision a different future. For those in difficult circumstances, these experiences can serve as foundational steps toward inclusion, dignity, and autonomy.

How do mountain and outdoor activities foster resilience, empowerment and personal fulfillment?

Mountain experiences offer a unique setting that powerfully supports the development of resilience and empowerment, especially for individuals facing difficult life situations. The mountain acts as an educational medium—a tool used by social workers to address specific needs of individuals or groups through an experiential learning approach.

This natural environment imposes real constraints (weather conditions, terrain, physical effort), which push participants to develop adaptability, confront the unexpected, and build self-confidence. The notion of pushing one's limits, central to these experiences, becomes a catalyst for personal empowerment.

Mountain activities also carry symbolic meaning: they reflect an initiatory journey, with progress and reaching a summit serving as metaphors for personal achievement. The sense of success in overcoming challenges helps rebuild self-esteem.

Finally, the shared group experience in the mountains promotes solidarity, cohesion, collective risk management, and a form of positive interdependence—all crucial for rebuilding social bonds and feeling empowered within a community.

How can outdoor activities contribute to the development of social and emotional skills?

Mountain activities can become powerful educational tools when they are organized with clear objectives, a thoughtful approach to presentation, appropriate facilitation, and a conscious understanding of the facilitator's role. Mountains serve as an educational medium—as a tool with which social workers address a specific issue or meet the particular needs of a group or an individual. This approach is rooted in experiential education, which emphasizes learning through lived experience.

Educational intervention around these activities is based on three key elements. First of all, a context, with a clear understanding of the educational project needs to be defined; then components, meaning concrete educational situations; and finally, objectives, such as behavioral change, skill acquisition, or attitude transformation.

What strategies can ensure inclusion in mixed groups (age, culture, religion, socio-economic background, etc.)?

To ensure inclusivity and comfort for people from diverse backgrounds in outdoor settings like the mountains, several key strategies can be implemented. The most important is centred around the co-creation of projects: actively involving participants from the beginning allows tailored programs that align with the specific needs of each group. This promotes engagement and respect towards cultural and social differences from the start.

Adapting the specific activities is also of great importance, when referring to mountain activities not only as physical performances, but also as educational tools. As such, they can and should be adapted to suit each participant's abilities, constraints, and sensitivities, of religious, physical or social kind. Especially when considering the involvement of professionals and social workers in such activities, these people should have been previously trained in the understanding and respecting of diversity, in order to create an inclusive environment.

It is fundamental to create a safe and respectful space and to embrace diversity as an asset. With a supportive structure and an established atmosphere of mutual respect, everyone in the group must feel heard and valued. Setting inclusive group rules for psychological support is part of this. As a consequence, diversity would not just be a characteristic of the group, but its own strength, it will help foster group cohesion, intercultural exchange and mutual learning.

What advice would you give organizations looking to take newcomers into the mountains or outdoor settings?

First of all, one should define a clear and tailored project. By setting educational objectives, we can adapt the tools and activities by taking into account the age, physical condition, and specific characteristics of the group. This can include preparation sessions to foster engagement and reduce anxiety. The creation of a project can also involve external partners, some suggestions could be social organizations, community centres, educators. Co-creating with professionals will ensure continuity in educational support and further strengthen the process.

To begin, it is always advisable to start gradually, perhaps with short and accessible outings, all with the main purpose of fostering familiarity with mountain environment. Intense experiences and technical discussions may lead to discouragement all together.

An important step would involve the creation of a supportive and inclusive group environment, which emphasises solidarity and cooperation. Referring to the above strategies, some shared group rules need to be established and respected. The facilitators involved will not only have to be trained in social awareness and respect of diversity, but they should also make sure to celebrate even the smallest success, which will help in boosting self-esteem and motivation.

Logistics-wise, it is necessary to provide gear and equipment in a timely manner and according to everyone's needs. This would also include the anticipation and address of logistical barriers, such as transport, costs, health, with ready practical solutions at hand. To prepare better, one should always consider organizing pre-departure sessions, with meetings and workshops, that should be followed by post-trip reflections. Such discussions and collective evaluations would help reinforce learning and integration.

Listen to a podcast about an Excursion with EPPM here (FR): <https://soundcloud.com>



3.3 Marjeta Čič: Empowering people with disabilities and the significance of volunteering

The InPlaninec committee is part of the Slovenian Alpine Association and focuses on the inclusion of people with special needs in the world of mountaineering. It is dedicated to promoting accessibility in the mountains, organizing inclusive hikes and educational events, and building bridges between diverse groups of mountain visitors.

"The inclusion of people with disabilities in the mountain world is not only a question of access, but above all a question of equal opportunities, belonging and empowerment. Every step in nature is a step towards independence, confidence building and a sense of community. Volunteers play a key role in this - they are a bridge, a support and an agent of change. With their presence, understanding, time and heart, they help create opportunities where none existed before. And best of all: they grow in the process."

Opening up new spaces and new things takes time and perseverance. Patience is the virtue that makes it easier to introduce the new. Individuals with disabilities have been climbing mountains for many years and achieving success. But not in an organized way or in greater numbers than the general population.

A look back into the past of mountaineering, which also started with individual pioneering ascents and which were not mass ascents. And over time, with the development of society, changes in values, changes in mentality, mountaineering has grown to its present dimensions.

Fear of the new, the unknown and caution are part of human nature and everyone has an internal rhythm of acceptance of novelty, which includes diversity, depending on the individual's personality, experience, environment and social climate or attitude towards people with disabilities and persons with special needs.

We cannot force the acceptance of people with disabilities and special needs, but we can guide the process, create conditions and opportunities through good practices to open the world of mountains to them.

Where to start? The InPlaninec Committee started with training sessions aimed at dispelling fears, stereotypes and prejudices. At the same time, we ran inclusion marches, involving both individuals with and without disabilities, and a big number of volunteers. We talked to

people with disabilities and worked together on activities. As they say, *"Nothing about disabled people, without disabled people!"*

The art is to see the person behind the disability or special need. To be able to talk to them without the constant skip or filter of disability. To see the person, to see their desires, their joy, their will, their playfulness, that's what it takes, to see the person. This kind of thing takes empathy, experience, time ... And we share our experience on inclusion hikes "Together in the Hills."

It takes a critical mass to change society, to make something - in this case, people with disabilities in the mountains - accepted, commonplace, and ultimately normal. The perception of mountaineers, that people with disabilities can also want to do it, starts with the information that people with disabilities are in the mountains. It is one step further to see them there, to meet them in the mountains. Even more is the experience of talking to them. Those who can and want to go one step further and hike with them, can even accompany them. All this takes time, small steps and an open space, where there is no pressure of time, no pressure to reach a goal, no pressure that we have to. It is a process in which, if we allow ourselves, we can ennoble and make sense of our lives and theirs, so that inclusion can happen. Inclusion as a process where we learn to live with each other. And so can we truly live.

At first glance, inclusion seems to be left to its own devices and to evolve in a haphazard way. But it is not, it can be guided, it can be a place where everyone feels comfortable, disabled and non-disabled alike. The easiest way is to bring people with the same goal to the same place at the same time, and that is possible in mountaineering. We all want nature, relaxation, to conquer a mountain goal, to have company and to feel accepted, to not be pricked by stares, sniffs behind our backs and even ruder remarks about us.

It is not possible to write down guidelines for contact with people with disabilities as a recipe. How to approach them? As with any person, greetings, introductions and questions are in order.

Why shouldn't people with disabilities go to the mountains? The answer and excuses are endless... because they don't have anything out of it, because it's dangerous, because they can't do it, because it will take too long, because there are no suitable routes and because the way is too long, because it's expensive, because it takes a lot of preparation, because it's a long way, because, what if, something happens ...

But each of these obstacles is really just fear, fear of the unknown, of adapting, of having to push our own limits of understanding.

The simple truth is that people with disabilities and special needs get from the mountains everything that others do - freedom, a sense of empowerment, joy, contact with nature, companionship, good food in the hut, friendship and unforgettable experiences.

Mountains are not just for those who are physically strong - it is for those who are strong at heart.

How do mountain and outdoor activities foster resilience, empowerment and personal fulfillment?

The natural environment offers more than just movement - it is a place of freedom, relaxation, perception, challenge and transcendence. Mountaineering, hiking and climbing provide a multi-sensory space that promotes sensory integration, the development of motor and mental skills, confidence and a sense of competence. In the mountains, changes take place in a natural rhythm: the environment is not static, nature is constantly changing, as are our abilities. At the same time, the individual breaks away from the stigma of disability or the label of "special needs" and becomes - simply - a mountaineer. A sense of belonging, acceptance, sharing experiences and contact with nature builds inner strength.

How can outdoor activities contribute to the development of social and emotional skills?

In nature, we are connected to our environment and the bond with ourselves is stronger and more authentic. In nature, we can strengthen our connection with ourselves when the routine of everyday life dries up. The role of the individual softens, relationships become more genuine and sincere. Helping each other comes spontaneously, solidarity becomes an experience, not a lesson. Shared goals such as reaching a summit, orienteering, carrying a backpack or sharing a snack foster empathy, cooperation and a sense of belonging. Nature brings us back to the essence and it is in this simplicity that we feel ourselves and others more easily.

What strategies can ensure inclusion in mixed groups (age, culture, religion, socio-economic background etc.)?

Difference is a gift, not a barrier. When we talk about inclusion, acceptance and integration, we often encounter prejudice, stereotypes,

even discrimination. But if we stop for a moment and ask ourselves, "Why should being different be a bad thing?"

Each of us carries our own story, our own world view, our own experiences. And it is in this diversity that the greatest strength of a community lies. When we open our hearts and minds, difference can become an asset, not a liability. Instead of emphasising differences, we can look for what unites us - common values, the desire to move, to socialise, to experience nature.

Nature is a wonderful teacher. In the forest, in the hills or by the river, we are all equally at peace with ourselves, with the moment and place. There, the labels we often wear disappear. Nature is neutral, it does not judge, it does not ask questions, it just accepts. And if nature can, so can we.

We can create environments where everyone feels welcome, safe and accepted. Where we take time to talk, where we don't jump to conclusions. Where we look beyond appearances, accents or idiosyncrasies. When we do this, difference takes on another dimension, it enriches rather than divides. It enriches the group, society, human relationships and ourselves.

Let us not be afraid of diversity. Let us take the time to listen, to understand. Let us enjoy nature together, just as we are. Different and therefore connected.

What advice would you give organizations looking to take newcomers into the mountains or outdoor settings?

Connecting with the groups you are addressing is key. It is important to get to know yourself and their wants, interests and needs, to create something with them and for them. Good links with local associations, NGOs and inclusion experts can strengthen your work. And alongside all this, volunteering can be strengthened.

Involve the participants in the process. Ask them what they want, what they are interested in, what they are excited about and design activities with them. This will avoid disappointments and unpleasant surprises and increase the sense of self-worth of all participants.

Start with small, gradual steps, short hikes on easy paths, where there is no pressure of effort and expectation, and where everyone can walk the path in their own way at their own pace. Take time to get to know the people (walkers, group). The focus should be on the

experience, not the achievement. The summit is not the goal, it is the sense of belonging, community and satisfaction that comes from spending time together in nature that is important.

If possible, have a get-to-know-you meeting or talk before your first hike. This will give participants the opportunity to share their expectations and concerns and to ask any questions that may be of interest to them.

Training on inclusion, communication and adaptations should be part of the team's preparation and training, as this is key to the successful implementation of inclusive programmes.

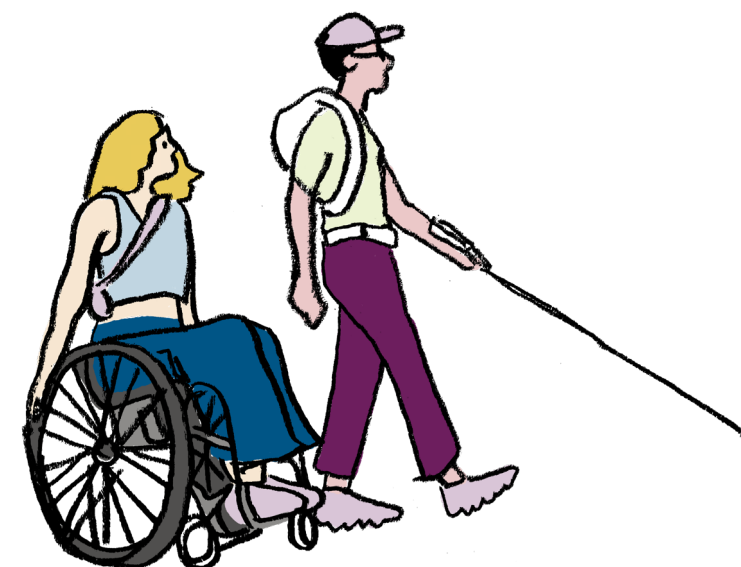
And take the time to make inclusion not just a tick on a to-do list, but a real relationship, a process of learning and growing together. Allow yourself to listen, observe, adapt and create a space where everyone feels seen and accepted.

Any additional thoughts you would like to share?

Let us stop and get in touch with ourselves, with others and with nature - this is what calms us, connects us and leads us forward.

The mountains are a place where everyone can find their own rhythm and space, regardless of physical, emotional or social limitations. The steps may be small, but each one carries a charge that can be a change in the individual and in society. Let's connect on a hike, a talk and a view from the top.

It gives birth to the feeling: *"I can do it too. And I am not alone."*



Listen to a podcast with Marjeta here (EN): <https://soundcloud.com>

3.4 Veronika Rogelj: Patience and Persistence – cultivating strength through experiences

The Residential and Counselling Centre Kranj is a public institution dedicated to the education of children and adolescents with behavioral and emotional disorders. Its mission is to support individuals in their successful integration into everyday life. In addition to daily programmes within residential groups, the Centre offers a wide range of activities at the level of the whole institution, such as hiking and adventure camps and other experiential activities.

Generally, when working with youngsters from less supportive social environments, we tend to focus on just a few main goals. These typically include reducing the negative influences of their primary environment, which are addressed through everyday educational activities. Professional work in this context can be carried out in various ways – through teaching and informing, in the form of workshops, or by creating safe yet realistic life situations in which the child or adolescent tests the skills they've learned, in a real-world context with all its variables and risks.

All three of these approaches are, of course, useful to some extent, depending on the means and goals. However, we particularly emphasize that the last one – encouraging participation in real-life situations – it is often underused or, in some cases, not implemented at all. We are frequently held back by fears (on both the young and the professionals), as these situations are less predictable and harder to control. On the other hand, young people discover and learn not only about other people's reactions, but also about their own triggers, reactions, and behavioral patterns.

Only real-life experience can ensure true preparation for life. In this, the role of professionals is to lead by example and demonstrate how to approach new situations. It's also important how we, as adults, step into new experiences with them, as this sends powerful messages. First, that these situations aren't necessarily frightening or negative, but can be adventurous, exciting, and enjoyable. Secondly, it shows that we trust them, even when they might not trust themselves. And most importantly: it is okay to experience joyful moments that are rewarding and fulfilling.

Practical experiences in the social environment are important milestones for young people and crucial for building a positive self-image and a sense of self-worth. Young people from at-risk environments

often internalize feelings of deprivation and inferiority due to difficult childhood experiences. As a result, they may operate from a belief that certain opportunities and privileges are simply out of reach for them. These feelings are deeply rooted, and only real-life experiences – through which they can receive honest and specific feedback – have the power to gradually shift their fears and negative beliefs.

On one hand, such experiential opportunities provide a space where they can prove to themselves what they are truly capable of. If they succeed. But even if they don't, that too is a valuable experience, because it teaches them how to cope with failure – and this is an essential skill, especially since many young people tend to assume a passive role. This is a moment when they can break through those learned passive and unconstructive patterns and, in a real-life setting, experience the authentic consequences of positive effort and persistence – results that are proportional to the effort they invest and immensely beneficial for their development and wellbeing.

How do mountain and outdoor activities foster resilience, empowerment and personal fulfillment?

In natural environments, the outcomes of one's efforts are immediately visible – when a young person succeeds in completing a trail, lighting a fire, or gathering flowers for tea, these are concrete and direct results of their engagement. Such activities typically involve forms of movement that are natural to the human body (walking, running, swimming, climbing, etc.) and, due to their repetitive nature, possess therapeutic qualities. These types of activities themselves symbolize progress and movement toward a goal (as opposed to standing still or moving in circles which often translates to human communication patterns or stiffness in social interactions).

These types of physical engagement often transcend cultural, social, economic, and cognitive barriers. For certain groups, physical activity may represent one of the few areas of pronounced strength – for instance, individuals with ADHD frequently demonstrate notable physical agility and motor competence. Especially on longer trails and more demanding physical activities, young people test and push their limits and prove themselves to be capable of completing demanding activities and can even be very competent in these areas.

How can outdoor activities contribute to the development of social and emotional skills?

Outdoor activities inherently offer significant emotional relief, primarily due to the change in environment and their beneficial effects—namely, fewer external distractions such as phones, advertisements, television, and crowds. On a social level, this encourages participants to engage in honest interactions and meaningful conversations, often centered around simple yet significant goals. Moreover, such activities frequently create conditions in which young people feel both the opportunity and the need to share their personal life stories—concerns, fears, desires, and more—something that is often overlooked in everyday life due to a lack of time or emotional capacity. Daily responsibilities are reduced to a minimal set of tangible objectives: the journey, food, and warmth.

As one participant remarked during a multi-day hike: “Even peeing in nature—behind a bush or in a wheat field—becomes a uniquely meaningful experience.” Experiences like these offer young people a fresh perspective on their lives, providing space to reevaluate their positions and possibilities.

From the perspective of the society, it is also important for participants from cultural, religious or social minorities to be involved in mountain activities, which are (in the Alpine area) mostly represented by the locals from the main cultural and social backgrounds. This also shifts their perspective – to see young people from diverse background share interests with them and make an effort to interact in leisure activities, significant to the main culture, and eliminate fears and superstitions.

What strategies can ensure inclusion in mixed groups (age, culture, religion, socio-economic background etc.)?

It is important to provide equal equipment for all participants and to design a plan—ideally divided into sectors or stages—that is predictable and easy to understand for everyone involved. A clear list of basic necessities that each participant is expected to bring is also essential. The required equipment can be very simple and accessible to all. Furthermore, to promote equity, it is advisable to present the plan to participants in advance and to discuss any potential dilemmas or questions they might have.

In general, the very nature of outdoor activities helps to neutralize certain differences among participants: the natural environment

is universal and easily appreciated by everyone, typically free from cultural, religious, or social markers. It often doesn't demand specific knowledge, skills, or gear that might otherwise highlight those differences.

However, it is equally important to build social bridges between participants and the surrounding social environment—by encouraging conversations during social moments and in shared spaces such as huts, group gatherings, or while greeting others along the trail. These interactions help everyone feel more welcome and comfortable.

What advice would you give to people and organizations aiming to bring non-experienced or disadvantaged groups into mountain environments?

Involving participants in the planning process or presenting the plan beforehand—while creating space for open discussion and questions—can make a big difference. It fosters dialogue and helps ease any anxiety before the trip begins, making participants feel more included and engaged.

At the same time, it's important to check for basic knowledge and gear choice. What might be self-evident to an experienced hiker—like bringing a jacket for a summer hike—could be completely new to someone just starting out.

While on the trail or in nature, we find it very valuable to have a playful, relaxed approach—not focusing on reaching the final goal, but instead highlighting the many beautiful moments along the way: noticing flora and fauna, enjoying the views, sharing fun facts, personal stories, and experiences. This helps create a more open, connected, and enjoyable group experience.

Any additional thoughts that you would like to share?

We would like to point out the role of the mentors – if they feel passionate about the outdoors, the energy and enthusiasm give the young participants extra drive and a playground for experimenting and experiencing what the mentors experience.

3.5 Leonardo Cerno: Empowering through outdoor experiences

Wild Routes is a non-profit organization operating in Italy with a focus on outdoor education and informal learning. It is an association dedicated to environmental education and experiential learning through outdoor activities. Their experienced guides lead people of all ages on journeys of discovery, promoting learning based on direct experience and authentic contact with nature.

Outdoor education has proven to be an incredibly powerful tool in recent years for achieving greater inclusivity, especially among young people. It is during developmental years that the first friendships and fundamental interpersonal relationships of life are formed, making greater inclusivity highly recommended to foster a more open and engaging mindset towards all cultures and points of view. Experience teaches us that the outdoors is a perfect environment for developing inclusive skills, and non-formal teaching techniques adapt equally well to this type of inner growth.

In our journey of growth as an organization operating in a rural and highly natural area, we have come to understand how the use of outdoor education can have a decisive impact on the development of young people living in these territories. This is especially true because the need to re-establish a connection between them and the natural environment is increasingly evident, both so that young people themselves can enjoy all the benefits derived from an outdoor life, and because this creates the necessary sensitivity to preserve our planet and its diversity for as long as possible.

Furthermore, we are convinced that outdoor education should not only refer to naturalistic themes: we are also carrying out experiments in schools to develop teaching possibilities for different subjects, but always in an outdoor environment. Skepticism in these situations is one of the first obstacles to overcome, but excellent results already exist from other case studies that certify the functionality of these techniques.

Therefore, to advocate for and develop the cause of outdoor education, a community effort is needed, a movement that takes into consideration all those involved in the educational path, not only of young people but possibly of all age groups.

How do mountain and outdoor activities foster resilience, empowerment and personal fulfillment?

Mountain and outdoor experiences foster resilience and empowerment by pushing individuals out of their comfort zones in a safe and supportive environment. Nature's unpredictability teaches patience and adaptability, and overcoming obstacles in the outdoors reinforces a sense of accomplishment, helping individuals realize their strength and capacity to face challenges. These experiences encourage growth, self-awareness, and a deeper connection to both one-self and the world around them.

How can outdoor activities contribute to the development of social and emotional skills?

Spending time in nature helps regulate emotions by reducing stress, anxiety, and mental fatigue. Natural environments promote a sense of calm, allowing individuals to process emotions more effectively. Physical activity in the outdoors releases endorphins, improving mood and emotional resilience. Facing challenges in nature—such as navigating a trail or adapting to weather changes—teaches patience and frustration management. These experiences encourage problem-solving under pressure, helping individuals develop coping strategies and emotional balance. Working as a team fosters trust and empathy, creating a supportive space where emotions can be expressed and understood. Outdoor education strengthens emotional awareness, helping people recognize their feelings, respond to challenges with confidence, and develop a deeper sense of self-control and well-being.

What strategies can ensure inclusion in mixed groups (age, culture, religion, socio-economic background etc.)?

Nature itself plays a key role in fostering inclusivity by treating everyone the same, free from prejudices, which are human constructs. The natural world embraces all individuals, allowing them to connect on an equal and authentic level. To ensure inclusivity and comfort in outdoor environments, create a welcoming atmosphere that respects cultural, religious, and social backgrounds. Adapt activities to be culturally sensitive, consider individual needs, and provide clear communication. Engage guides trained in cultural competence to navigate challenges and foster mutual respect. Open dialogue and respect for diversity ensure positive and empowering experiences for all.

What advice would you give to people and organizations aiming to bring non-experienced or disadvantaged groups into mountain environments?

For bringing non-experienced or disadvantaged groups into mountain environments, focus on accessibility, safety, and inclusion. Start with easy, well-marked trails and build confidence gradually. Ensure clear communication and instruction, provide appropriate gear, and have experienced guides. Create a welcoming, non-competitive atmosphere that encourages teamwork and reflection. Adapt to individual needs and prioritize connection with nature over performance. The goal is to make the experience enjoyable, enriching, and accessible to all.



3.6 Gregory Collomb: benefits of long-distance hiking in the mountains

Gregory Collomb, Eco-Guide in the Geneva Basin, specialized in environmental impact and scientific communication. Focus: biomimicry inspired by biodiversity, serving to reduce collective carbon footprints and rethink business models.

My goal with this short note is to inspire readers to one day take time for themselves, to pack a backpack and set off alone into the mountains on a long-distance hiking route. The benefits are numerous and often unsuspected. In just a few lines, I'll try to share the possible rewards of such an experience.

Below are several concepts and tangible benefits of outdoor activities, particularly long-distance hiking:



1. Rhythm and Instinct

You recalibrate to the rhythm of the sun—you wake early, walk a lot, eat less and better, go to sleep early. You begin to align your pace with that of animals, realizing just how poorly adapted we are compared to them (to cold, damp, fear, hunger). You slow down, live in the present and in the space around you. Immersed in nature, part of a whole, your instincts and intuition reawaken (forecasting weather, finding food, sensing hidden wildlife in rocky terrain).



2. Simplicity

Carrying your home on your back forces you to reduce your needs—and your pleasures. This return to essential needs (food, shelter, washing, water) is one of the most striking aspects of long-distance hiking. It leads to deep questioning of our daily consumption habits (consumerism, travel styles, ownership, eating habits).



3. Digital Detox

Being offline offers a chance to reconnect with your core values. The superficial nature of social networks and virtual lives fades, making room for you, in your present moment. You live for yourself again—almost selfishly—and not for the sake of a beautiful post to impress others.



4. Risk Management, Flexibility, and Adaptation

Long-distance hiking is a constant exercise in decision-making. It's the "3x3" method every minute: at each change, each surprise, to ensure the journey continues safely. Managing your body, the weather, your mood, your food, the terrain, and logistics is a complex daily challenge. But you manage! It develops discipline, logic, and common sense—the 3x3 becomes second nature.



5. Pushing Your Limits

This can be truly surprising. You develop willpower. Your mental and physical resources are often underestimated (Mike Horn: "When you think you're done, you're only at 50%"). We are animals with survival instincts that can drive us further than we imagine. Only an experience that challenges you can reveal who you really are. Your everyday life won't take you there.



6. Reconnecting with the Body's Energy

Humans are built to walk, hunt, and run around 10 km a day. Today, society makes us sedentary. 80% of our energy goes to the brain, only 20% to muscles—when it should be closer to 50/50. Hiking restores awareness of our physical capabilities (endurance, energy autonomy, strength, resilience). We're all athletes—it's modern life that makes us sick, obese, diabetic, lazy, and prone to procrastination. Walking several hours a day resets this balance, helping us feel better mentally and physically.



7. Lasting Personal Change After the Experience

Minimalism, simplicity, sharing, self-awareness, eating organic and local, giving, volunteering, embracing frugality, and reduced material needs—many positive changes arise after a long-distance hiking experience. These are reinforced by the urgency of today's climate crisis, which resonates with younger generations.

How do mountain activities foster resilience, empowerment and personal fulfillment?

Clarifying your life goals and values often becomes possible during a long solo trek. True introspection happens—across all levels and aspects of your being. Realigning with your values, finding peace, and making major life decisions are common outcomes.

Solo Hiking

Those who hike alone do so with specific goals: to complete the journey on their own terms, in full control. They seek a deep connection with nature and a break from the noise of community life. They want to explore wildlife, flora, cultures, meet new people, and challenge themselves—physically and mentally—in full freedom. Group travel can be restrictive (pace, distance, discussion), and often distracts from what we truly came to find.

Past vs. Future

There is a striking parallel between hiking a trail and walking the path of life. In the mountains, as in life, when you look back, you clearly see the path you've already walked. It's familiar, known—it's your past. The future—the next pass, climb, valley, shelter—is uncertain. This mirrors the daily decisions that shape our lives. We can draw life lessons from this: e.g., "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." Should we stop here for the night, or keep going? Is the grass really greener on the other side?

How can outdoor activities contribute to the development of social and emotional skills?

Decision-Making

You make multiple decisions every day, often instinctively. What is a "good" decision? There's no such thing—just decisions. You'll never know what the alternative outcome would have been. Decision-making evolves: do we act now or should we have anticipated this earlier? We learn to make sensible, reasonable, and appropriate choices—and to take responsibility for them.

Letting Go

Knowing when to quit, turn back, or take an alternate route can be one of the hardest but most important lessons. Our instinct is to push on: "Maybe the weather will hold", "Surely there's water at the next spring", "That trail must be cleared by now." But these assumptions can get you into trouble. Sometimes turning back is necessary—vital even. Early mistakes teach us quickly. Over time, letting go becomes a strength, a form of wisdom. In the mountains, hindsight is everything. And remember: The mountain is neither fair nor unfair—it is simply dangerous.

What strategies can ensure inclusion in mixed groups (age, culture, religion, socio-economic background etc.)?

I've learned a lot from personal experience here. For example, despite differences in ethnicity, religion, and background, mealtimes are always a special moment. Everyone can share or talk about their food, country, and flavors—this bonds the group.

Another key point is always planning a route near a water source, such as a stream or lake. Water allows for play, relaxation, observation, meditation, swimming, hygiene—all without language barriers. Water points always bring a spark of life to mixed-group outings.

A third unifying activity is building a campfire, especially in the evening. There are many ways to build and light a fire, often tied to cultural origins—again, a beautiful chance for sharing.

Finally, don't assume the most impressive landscapes will create the strongest reactions. Some participants may never have seen snow before, and will react with childlike joy at first contact. Others might find happiness in something as simple as napping in a sunny meadow—while you expected them to be wowed by the panoramic view.

What advice would you give organizations looking to take newcomers into the mountains or outdoor settings?

Make sure to understand group expectations and coverage (insurance, experience levels, etc.). What are the goals of the group? Surround yourself with experienced professionals for first outings. Foster peer partnerships to learn how to manage such groups with maximum safety and enjoyment.

From my experience, cross-organization outings with various guides have been highly successful—both logistically and inclusively. I've seen participants with migrant backgrounds meet on these hikes and keep in touch long after.

**“My body is the vehicle my soul uses to travel through time and space on this Earth.”
— Gregory Collomb**



4. Steps towards Inclusion: how to build inclusive practices in the outdoors

In this chapter* we share key tips and practical steps that we have gathered through the Via Alpina Youth Project. It should serve as an invitation for reflection and as a tool, that could help us making the outdoor activities more welcoming and inclusive. All insights come from real experiences, experts, shared stories and lessons learned along the way.

Before the Activity

▲ Assessing Needs and Defining Activities

Consider the objectives and goals of the activity. What are you aiming to achieve—cooperation, confidence-building, connection? Which activity is best suited to reaching these goals?

▲ Education and Skills

Different target groups have different needs. Take time to educate yourself about the people you want to include. This might mean seeking advice or doing additional research to better understand their specific challenges and perspectives.

▲ Planning & Evaluation

Consider accessibility and equipment. Reflect on what might prevent someone from participating (e.g. language, physical ability, cultural background, or lack of proper gear). Adapt your plan to remove barriers and ensure your activity is truly inclusive.

▲ Tailored Support

Inclusion often requires different kinds of support. This might be financial assistance, an extra preparation session, a mentor, appropriate clothing or gear, or language interpretation. Ask the participants or their mentors if they have any special needs or requirements that you are not aware of—and plan ahead to meet those needs.

▲ Preparatory Visit or Meeting

If needed and feasible plan a preparatory visit or meeting to introduce the activity in advance. Use this time to give an overview, highlight key details, and explain the meal plan. Most importantly, create a welcoming space where participants feel comfortable asking questions and sharing any concerns. This helps reduce anxiety and builds a sense

of trust from the beginning. If it is an international activity, preparatory video calls can be a good alternative.

▲ Diet

Aim for seasonal, regional, and organic food whenever possible. It's important to understand that people have different food choices that may be connected to their religion (halal/kosher), values (vegetarian/vegan), or health conditions (lactose intolerance, gluten allergy, etc.). The group should be understanding and respectful of these differences.

Never make fun of or shame someone for their diet! If you're organizing an event for a large group, consider offering mainly plant-based meals or reducing the amount of meat. This also benefits the environment.

Another option is collaborative meal planning and cooking, at least for some parts of the project. This helps avoid conflicts by finding compromises. It also teaches young people about food, nutrition, and how to collaborate.

▲ Tailored Goals

Avoid setting goals that are too ambitious—or too easy. Set realistic and meaningful objectives that fit your group's abilities and needs. This helps prevent frustration and keeps the experience positive. Consult with experts if needed. Focus on the overall journey, not just the outcome.

▲ Safety Considerations

Good risk management is a core part of any outdoor program. This means understanding potential risks, identifying them early, actively reducing them, and having a clear risk assessment strategy⁸ in place. Don't forget: safety always comes first. Check the weather in advance, carry a first aid kit*, and pack all necessary safety gear. If possible, visit the area ahead of time to identify any risks and, if needed, bring a qualified mountain guide with you.

▲ Include a Trusted Person

Sometimes, it's helpful to have a familiar adult—such as a teacher, educator, or mentor—join the activity. Their presence can create a sense of safety and comfort for participants. This can be especially important in managing difficult moments, like emotional breakdowns or crises.



Tip: It's always a good idea to include some emergency menstrual products in your first aid kit. Menstruation shouldn't be a taboo topic.

8 Hi-Ability. (2020). Module 3. In Developing social and professional skills through outdoor experiences (p.68-70). <https://www.hi-ability.eu>

▲ **Take Care of Yourself!**

Ensure your support team is large enough. Some groups need more attention. Be mindful of the group size: smaller groups are often easier to manage and more inclusive.

Be a good host not just to others, but also to yourself. Your well-being matters too.

▲ **Don't forget: Have Fun**

It's easy to get stress about getting everything just right. But what matters most—especially for young people—is having fun.

Your mood, energy, and attitude can shape the whole group's experience and wellbeing. Approach each moment with openness and a spirit of fun.



Self-assessment check-list

Take a moment to reflect and prepare for inclusive practice by exploring the self-assessment checklist—a tool to support thoughtful planning and awareness.

	✓	●	✗
Am I personally ready to experience and learn about inclusion?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Am I well informed about the target group, its composition, profile, and their specific needs?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Have I involved participants and/or experts to develop the activity materials/resources and training/learning methods?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Have I clarified my objectives before the activity?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Have I chosen the proper content/methodologies for my objectives and my target group's profile?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Am I aware of my own misconceptions, stereotypes, and limits? How can I work on them?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Who am I including and excluding by my decisions or actions? Am I aware of this?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do I have enough time, space, commitment, skills, and personal resources to ensure inclusion?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Am I flexible enough to adapt to unexpected situations? Do I have a plan B or C?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do I have a risk mitigation plan?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do I have a team to back-up and support me through this experience? Are they well prepared?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Am I prepared enough?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Am I trusting and enjoying the process?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Taken and adapted from European Way2Go Project: Disability Inclusion Guideline
<https://e-learning.way2go-project.eu>

2. During the Activity

▲ Take Time for Check-In

Start with a check-in activity—like an ice-breaker or name game. This helps build trust and sets a welcoming atmosphere. It gives everyone a chance to mentally arrive, get comfortable and start connecting with others. This is also an important opportunity for you, as a facilitator, to get a sense of the group you're working with.

▲ Language Proficiency

Include a simple activity to see how comfortable participants are with the language—especially in international groups. Remind everyone that it's okay to make mistakes or not find the right words, and that the group can offer support in these moments. What matters most is the effort to connect and participate.

▲ Create Common Rules

Take time to create a few clear rules with the group. Listen to everyone's ideas, but keep the number of rules small and simple. For E.g.: "We respect cultural and religious differences" or "We listen without interrupting".

▲ Name a "Good Fairy"

If you're organizing a multi-day event, you can create an opportunity for peer support by inviting a different participant each day to take on the role of the "good fairy." This person can be someone others can approach for a friendly, peer-to-peer conversation if questions or concerns come up.

Of course, it's also important to make it clear that participants are always welcome to speak with the activity leader.

Follow 5 C's

- Say things in a Clear way
- Be Cohesive, stay on topic
- Be Compelling, engage
- Actively listen and be Curious about others' perspectives
- Be Compassionate, kind & avoid assumptions

▲ Be Concrete

Some people struggle with abstract ideas or talking about their feelings. Use simple language, visual aids and small group discussions. Be supportive as they try to express themselves.

▲ Gradualness and Encouragement

Start with short, easy outings so everyone can get comfortable in the outdoor environment. Encourage participants who feel unsure. Avoid activities that are too difficult or risky at the beginning, as they can cause discouragement or even lead to unsafe situations.

Also, take care that your explanations don't unintentionally create fear or anxiety in others.

▲ Discussions Matter

Don't just focus on the activity. Open the space and take time to talk about what people felt, learned, how they cooperated. Encourage everyone to speak—but don't force it. Offer a space also to quieter or reserved group members and encourage them to share.



Some additional facilitation tips

- Be present and listen actively.
- Set group culture early: listening, no interrupting.
- In big groups, make sure everyone has a chance to speak.
Example prompts for facilitators:
"Would someone who hasn't spoken yet like to share?"
"Anyone from this side of the room?"
"What about you, X?"
- Maintain a balanced and respectful atmosphere.
- Sometimes use tools like a talking stick or ball to let people take turns in speaking.
- Offer various seating options—floor, chairs, cushions—whatever makes people comfortable.
- Make sure that the sitting area is organised in a way that everyone can see and hear everyone. The circle form is normally the best way.

- Use hand signs like “T” for a technical question or “L” for language help. Applause can also be shown with open hands waving in the air. Provide translation if needed. Ask volunteers to help with this.
- Acknowledge silence. It’s okay to pause and give people time to think. A little quiet time is okay.
- Bear noise levels in mind. Some participants are sensitive to loud voices.
- Include small group or pair talks/exchanges —some people don’t like speaking in front of everyone.
- Try the Think-Pair-Share method: think alone, talk in pairs, then share with the group.
- Place a box in a private spot where participants can share thoughts or feedback anonymously. This creates a safe space for honest expression without fear of judgment. In workshop settings with flipcharts, you can also dedicate one flipchart to capture thoughts that arise during the session. Don’t forget to check it regularly for new entries.
- Reflection Time is important! Give people time to process—before discussions or at the end of the day. You can also schedule a quiet reflection time, e.g. before dinner (15–30 minutes).
- Use activities that include movement, body awareness, and are inclusive for everyone.

3. After the Activity

Group Evaluation

At the end of the the activity, it’s important to offer space for participants to reflect and evaluate matters. Choose a method that suits your group and setting. Gather feedback. If you are organising a multi day event, do a short reflection round every day. In this way, you can make sure that everyone has a space to share, and you also have an opportunity to adapt the programme if needed. You can also offer a way to give feedback anonymously.



Tip: don’t take feedback too personally: instead see it as a learning opportunity.

Link Experiences to Daily Life

Help participants apply what they’ve learned to their real life. This is ideally guided by the person who has been facilitating the activity.

Depending on the activity, its aim, resources, target group and the overall setting, some additional items can be offered:

Online Check-in (1 month later)

with the activity relevant-topic. People can share further reflections about the activity and share what kind of support they still might need.

Reflection Buddies

People can pair up to stay in touch—if they want! Encourage them to exchange at least one letter or email to share their progress or experiences.

Team Evaluation

Evaluate the activity with your team and any experts or educators involved.

Ask yourselves: What went well? What could be improved? What surprised you?

Embrace the fact:

Not everything will always go as planned - perfection is not the goal. Group work is a journey and, with each experience, we can grow and learn together.



5. Other projects, organizations and sources related to the topic:

- The toolkit T-kit 8: Social inclusion equips youth-work practitioners with broad knowledge of the concepts of social exclusion and inclusion, as well as important considerations when engaging with young people with fewer opportunities.
- Council of Europe and European Commission. (2017). T-Kit8 Social Inclusion: <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47262484/T-Kit+8+Social+inclusion+WEB.pdf/ab8390b6-2d9e-f831-bbcf85972152e6e0?t=1517483662000>
- With a major focus on refugees and migrant women, the project Out4IN created a toolbox OUTdoor for Inclusion. The aim is to encourage overcoming of barriers and obstacles for participations in outdoor activities and to ensure inclusivity of this specific group.
- Project OUTdoor for INclusion. (2023). Improving resilience and integration for refugees and migrant women through outdoor experiences. https://www.out4in.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/OUT4IN-TOOLKIT_EN.pdf
- The project Hi-Ability developed a toolkit, “Developing social and professional skills through outdoor experiences”, with methodologies and strategies for educators and organizations to improve their technical and transversal skills in working with people with disabilities. This promotes autonomy and empowerment, together with the emancipation and legitimacy of groups at risk of marginalization in sectors such as environmental education.
- Hi-Ability. (2020). Module 3. „Developing social and professional skills through outdoor experiences“ (p.68-70). <https://www.hi-ability.eu/3d-flip-book/toolkit/>
- SALTO Inclusion & Diversity and JINT vzw have developed Inclusion Meter, a tool that identifies all sorts of barriers and thresholds for activities with overnight stays and inspires you to overcome them. The test can be completed in its entirety or by sections on the following website: <https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/inclusion/inclusionpublications/inclusion-meter/>

- The disability inclusion guide created in the project Way2Go provided a guide to offer a comprehensive overview of strategies and suggestions, in order to ensure the involvement of people with disabilities. Way2Go. (2024) Disability Inclusion Guideline. <https://e-learning.way2go-project.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Disability-Inclusion-Guideline-September-2024-CES.docx-6.pdf>
- Embracing Diversity: this guide provides for the necessary knowledge to embrace human differences and assists organizations to make their programs more inclusive, giving a better understanding of diversity and promoting dialogue.
- Aschwanden, R. (2020). Embracing Diversity: A guide to diversity management for organisations active in intercultural youth work. SALTO. <https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/inclusion/inclusionpublications/embracingdiversity/>
- For initiatives from Switzerland, you can check the Inclusion Toolkit (DE), which was launched as part of the 2022 Youth Annual Event “Everyone in Exchange” by the Youth Sector of Movetia and has been continuously developed since then. It serves as a resource document that showcases various organizations from the fields of inclusion and extracurricular youth work that are already working (partially) inclusively, and outlines specific aspects, methods, and content of their work.
- Movetia. (2023). Toolkit Inklusion 202 https://movetia.ch/files/03_Beratung/Inklusion-und-Chancengleichheit/ToolkitInklusion2025_D.pdf
- The project “Beyond Horizons” created a toolkit with the main aim to encourage further engagement of disadvantaged young people in the mountains and outdoor sports. Nature should be accessible to everyone, which is why this guide offers insights, learning experiences and best practices to help overcome obstacles to participation and inspire to make outdoor recreation accessible to more young people.
- Beyond Horizons. (2025). Beyond Horizons Toolkit. <https://beyond-horizons.isca.org/>
- Organizations or youth workers who want to implement European projects can use a tool developed by Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps, Engage in inclusion, which offers a better understanding of disability-inclusive youth projects. Proposing solutions and pointing out challenges, it aims to strengthen and develop skills of educators for a more diversity-sensitive project.

- Kosek, E. (2021). Engage in Inclusion! Guide on disability-inclusive European youth projects. SALTO.
- Many barriers and difficulties are internal and may not be immediately noticeable. Some of them are not easily categorised, making it difficult to provide specific guidelines. Planning of inclusive events booklet include many practical tips on how to tackle diverse challenges. Agency For Mobility and EU Programmes. (2024). Planning of inclusive events. https://saltoinclusion.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/ESN_Inclusive_Communication_Manual-1.pdf
- The Swiss Alpine Club (Schweizer Alpen-Club SAC) offers SAC leader training with the title: Inclusion on the mountain: <https://www.sac-cas.ch/de/ausbildung-und-sicherheit/kurse-und-touren/kursangebot/kurs/inklusion-am-berg-44/#course-detail-list-2025-6610A>
- The Slovenian Alpine Club has a department, “InPlaninec”, that offers training whose aim is to equip people with the knowledge to provide high-quality leadership based on disability inclusion.. The training introduces the different categories of disability, the disabled as a bio-psycho-social structure, the adaptation of the programme and the guiding of hikes/tours. More information here: <https://inplaninec.pzs.si/besedilo.php?pid=2>
- European Network for Outdoor Sports <https://www.outdoor-sports-network.eu>

6. About the project: Via Alpina Youth

This publication was produced as part of the Erasmus+ Project “[Via Alpina Youth](#).” The project disseminates knowledge, ideas, and opportunities for sustainable lifestyles, inclusion, environmental protection, and climate change along the Via Alpina—a long-distance hiking trail that has connected all Alpine countries for over 20 years. It Co-funded by the European Union’s Erasmus+ programme and MOVETIA.



CIPRA
LIVING IN
THE ALPS



Co-funded by
the European Union

Erasmus+
Enriching lives, opening minds.

movetia

This project output was made possible through the collaboration of the following individuals and organisations:

Maja Kogovšek and Marta Grena - CIPRA International, Damien Urbain - En passant par la Montagne, Leonardo Cerno - Wild Routes, Dijana Čataković Biagi - CIPRA Slovenia, Francesco Pastorelli - CIPRA Italy, Julika Jarosch - CIPRA France, Christine Busch - CIPRA Germany, Roland Plankl - CIPRA Südtirol, CIPRA Switzerland, Marjeta Čič – inPlaninec, Veronika Rogelj – SC Kranj and Gregory Collomb. Graphic design and illustrations by Justine Hartwig.

Published in August, 2025

More about the project:



Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.