

You are listening to the Shaping Inclusion and Diversity Podcast - Episode 3 - On the importance of having a deep understanding of inclusion and diversity topics among everyone involved in the National Agency

If you're listening in, it's likely that you are already quite familiar with inclusion and diversity topics. Yet... in such a wide field, which is highly affected by political and social changes, we should also spend some time in our strategy endeavours exploring or revisiting questions such as: "What do we mean by "inclusion" in our local context? What does diversity mean to us?"

Here's what [Hanna Schüßler](#) shared about the perspective of the National Agency for Erasmus+ Youth and the European Solidarity Corps in Germany:

For me and for us, for all NA, means that really all persons should be able to participate, first of all, in society in all aspects of societal life. And then of course in the programs, regardless of individual backgrounds. And, what is important for me is that inclusion in that sense is actually, kind of opposed to the idea of integration. Which would be about integrating certain people into a specific system or specific structures, which could be seen as the majority structures of normal structures. And inclusion goes far beyond, because the idea of inclusion for me would be that this "normality" is not really a reality. There is no such thing as normal or majority structures, but that structures should in themselves be designed, be conditioned in a way that they facilitate the participation of all persons. And this is all, of course, quite a vision and our society is far from reaching this kind of structures or society.

In chapter 3, the Shaping Inclusion and Diversity Publication gives us a short overview of basic concepts that are relevant for inclusion and diversity officers and everyone in the strategy team.

Do you feel that your National Agency is aligned when it comes to core concepts linked to inclusion and diversity? Before jumping into the process of creating a strategy, it might make sense to double-check and open up a dialogue with your colleagues and aim for a shared understanding of these concepts and terms.

What do we do with these words? At the moment there's a glossary and a glossary summary and every department commented on it.

You just heard Barbara Eglitis from the National Agency in Austria, sharing how they approach the need to get everyone on the same page on key terms linked to inclusion and diversity.

And here's [Hanna Schüßler](#) again, sharing with us how her National Agency is approaching the need for having everyone aligned on the topic:

“We are also foreseeing to have an internal workshop series this year. Also to really try to get a common ground on this concept of inclusion and the ideal, and vision behind for all the NA members.”

The conversations you have about what terms to use and what they mean, ideally doesn't stop in your office. Including beneficiaries in the conversation doesn't only increase participation, but it also allows your National Agency to learn more about what “having fewer opportunities” actually means in practise.

[Mirella Olivari](#) from the Italian National Agency reminds us to see the person regardless of the categories or terms we use to describe groups they belong to:

“It's ok to have young people from a rural background, from NEET background, from social obstacles or cultural difficulties, but behind this there is always a person that brings his or her, whatever, you know, characteristics, peculiar, so peculiar is so important.”

Have you ever reflected about how the words we use to refer to different groups change over time? More and more awareness is being raised on how words can be problematic and have negative connotations, which is part of societies changing and evolving.

Now, let's think about the day-to-day work. We have asked inclusion and diversity officers about their experiences with words and which words they feel we need to be careful with:

Disadvantaged... for me it's tricky to.. It could be dangerous to use this word, easily. It's because, really, can categorize a group of people that maybe don't feel so disadvantaged. It's really a color that you're giving them. So, the idea for me is not to use these kind of words or... So, internally I try with the other colleagues to use a language that is, that not categorize much more than it is... “young people with fewer opportunities.”

That's [Mirella Olivari](#) who stressed a lot about how an intersectional lens is important when we look at beneficiaries of the programmes.

Other words that inclusion and diversity officers shared to be problematic were “inclusion organisations”, “blind spots”, “special needs” and sometimes also “target group”. How about taking these words back to your strategy group and discussing how they could be harmful? Use it as a starting point to reflect on what words you would like to use and which ones you prefer avoiding in your strategy.

What is more, if as part of their inclusion and diversity work, National Agencies create a dialogue about which words to use to refer to certain groups, they can also bring new reflection and terminology to the European level. Because, let's keep in mind, Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps are not static programmes. They keep evolving, taking socio-political changes into account.

We asked Barbara Eglitis how she feels about words and if she ever fears using the wrong ones:

Previously I, I don't know, maybe, I have also friends, for instance, with disabilities and I realized that sometimes it is better to call it the wrong way rather than talking around, like saying "people with special, I don't know, talents", or whatever there is this fantasy creation. I rather prefer like saying the things and maybe not saying correct, but being able to discuss about it. Also, yeah, with the people and the groups. And I was really lucky that I always had someone I could ask. And also, I realized for instance, if you check, like, the disability movement also their own words changed. So I think it is nothing stable and that is ok.

So what do you do when you're unsure about what terms you should use?

We did and I think we will also do use different words. Like, I think there is a bit trend and language based. What we did previously was also to consult a self-advocacy organisations, how they define or how they call themselves - to put in simple words. And then, of course, there is always a controversial discussion.

So... if in doubt, reach out to the groups you'd like to talk about, to find out what words they would like you to use. That might differ from one country to another, even from organisation to another and sometimes even from one individual to the next. But all of these conversations allow you to be in touch with the groups whose inclusion you want to promote and to learn more about their many realities and the perspectives they can bring to the programmes.

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This podcast has been produced by SALTO Inclusion and Diversity Resource Centre, for more check: www.salto-youth.net/inclusion/