



# **Guideline: Creating an Inclusive, Discrimination-Free Environment for Youth Facing Social Obstacles**

## **Introduction**

Participants with fewer opportunities—those facing gender discrimination, social exclusion, ethnic or religious bias, or personal challenges (e.g., disabilities, single parenthood, past substance abuse)—require extra attention to feel safe, respected, and empowered to participate in a youth exchange project. This guideline offers detailed strategies to ensure that every participant can engage fully in a supportive, open environment.

## **1. Methods for Creating an Open and Inclusive Environment**

### **1.1 Establish a Code of Conduct**

At the very beginning of the project, it's crucial to establish a **Code of Conduct** that promotes respect, tolerance, and equality.

- **What is it?**  
A set of guidelines that every participant agrees to follow, emphasizing the importance of inclusivity and mutual respect. The Code of Conduct should explicitly state that discrimination, harassment, and exclusion will not be tolerated.
- **How to implement it:**

- Engage participants in creating the Code of Conduct during the project's introduction. This ensures a sense of ownership and accountability.
- Use inclusive language and emphasize that the guidelines apply to everyone equally.
- Display the Code of Conduct in all shared spaces (common rooms, workshops, and meeting areas).
- **Example:** Include principles like "We listen to all voices," "We celebrate diversity," and "We challenge discrimination together."

## 1.2 Foster an Open Dialogue Culture

Creating a culture where participants can openly express concerns, opinions, and experiences without fear of judgment or retaliation is critical.

- **What is it?**  
An atmosphere where participants can discuss issues they face, ask questions, and raise concerns related to discrimination or social exclusion.
- **How to implement it:**
  - Introduce **daily reflection circles** where participants share their feelings and experiences in a safe, structured format.
  - Encourage facilitators to use active listening, validating participants' feelings, and addressing concerns immediately.
- **Example:** During reflection sessions, a participant may express discomfort with gendered language used in a session. The facilitator should acknowledge this concern, lead a discussion on how to be more mindful of language, and adjust future sessions accordingly.

## 1.3 Physical and Emotional Safety Measures

Participants with fewer opportunities might be more sensitive to social dynamics and may feel vulnerable. Ensuring both physical and emotional safety is paramount.

- **What is it?**  
Measures that ensure participants feel secure and respected in their environment, both physically (in terms of space and accessibility) and emotionally (in terms of emotional well-being and mental health support).
- **How to implement it:**
  - Ensure the space is physically accessible to all participants, especially those with disabilities.
  - Establish **safe spaces** within the venue where participants can retreat if they feel overwhelmed or need a moment of privacy.

- Assign facilitators or support staff to act as **emotional support contacts**—trusted individuals whom participants can talk to if they are experiencing emotional distress.
- **Example:** A participant with a history of social anxiety may use a designated quiet room during breaks to decompress. The facilitator checks in periodically to ensure they are comfortable rejoining the group.

## 2. Workshop Methods to Encourage Open Participation

### 2.1 Workshop: "Building a Trusting Community"

- **Objective:**  
To create a sense of trust and belonging among participants by facilitating activities that promote teamwork, mutual respect, and understanding.
- **Activity: The Human Knot**
  - **Materials:** None.
  - **Method:**
    1. Participants form a circle and reach across to hold hands with two different people (not directly beside them).
    2. The challenge is to untangle the "knot" without letting go of anyone's hand, requiring collaboration, communication, and trust.
    3. After the exercise, a discussion follows about what made participants feel trusted and included, and how they relied on others for support.
  - **Inclusivity Focus:**  
This activity emphasizes teamwork and shows how every individual is necessary to reach a common goal. It physically represents the concept of inclusion—everyone is interconnected, and their contribution is vital.
- **Activity: Story Exchange**
  - **Materials:** Paper, pens.
  - **Method:**
    1. Participants are paired with someone they do not know well and are asked to share a personal story related to overcoming obstacles (anonymously, if desired).
    2. Each person writes down their partner's story and presents it to the group as if it were their own.
    3. This allows participants to step into each other's shoes, fostering empathy and understanding.
  - **Inclusivity Focus:**  
This activity highlights personal experiences, providing insight into the obstacles others have faced. It promotes empathy by encouraging

participants to embody someone else's story, breaking down prejudice and fostering respect.

## 2.2 Workshop: "Understanding Privilege and Power"

- **Objective:**  
To raise awareness of the different privileges and power dynamics present in the group, and to highlight how these dynamics can unintentionally exclude certain participants.
- **Activity: Privilege Walk (Extended Version)**
  - **Materials:** Pre-written list of privilege statements.
  - **Method:**
    1. Participants stand side by side at a starting line. The facilitator reads a list of statements that represent various privileges (e.g., "I have never been judged for my religion," "I've always felt safe expressing my gender identity").
    2. Participants step forward if the statement applies to them.
    3. After the walk, a debriefing session follows where participants reflect on the emotional experience and discuss how these privileges (or lack thereof) impact their participation.
  - **Inclusivity Focus:**  
The activity visualizes the differences in privilege among participants, helping those with more privilege to become aware of it while validating the experiences of those with fewer opportunities. It opens up conversations about inequality and how to actively promote equality within the group.

## 2.3 Workshop: "Challenging Discrimination Through Role Play"

- **Objective:**  
To challenge stereotypes and discriminatory behaviors in a safe, controlled environment through role-playing scenarios that encourage participants to confront these issues head-on.
- **Activity: Stereotype Role Play**
  - **Materials:** Scenario cards with different discrimination or exclusion scenarios.
  - **Method:**
    1. Split participants into small groups and give each group a scenario card (e.g., a participant is excluded from a group because of their gender, a comment is made about someone's ethnicity).
    2. The group role-plays the situation, with one person playing the discriminator, one the victim, and others as bystanders or supporters.

3. After the role-play, the group discusses what happened, how it felt to play each role, and how the situation could be handled differently to create a more inclusive environment.
- **Inclusivity Focus:**  
This workshop allows participants to experience discrimination from multiple perspectives—victim, bystander, and discriminator—creating empathy and understanding. It also teaches participants how to respond to discrimination when they witness it in real life.

### 3. Detailed Examples of Best Practices for Inclusive Participation

#### 3.1 Example: Adapting Language for Inclusivity

One of the most significant barriers to participation for people facing social obstacles is language. Language can be unintentionally exclusionary, especially for those with limited social skills, disabilities, or non-native language speakers.

- **Best Practice:**  
Use **simple, clear language** that avoids jargon, colloquialisms, or culturally specific phrases. Facilitate discussions in a way that ensures everyone can understand, and provide opportunities for clarification.
- **Example:**  
When discussing gender equality, instead of using academic terms like "patriarchy," explain it as "a system where men hold more power than women." This makes the conversation accessible to everyone, regardless of their educational background or familiarity with the subject.
- **Implementation Tip:**  
Encourage participants to raise their hands when they don't understand something, and make it clear that there are no "stupid questions." Consider assigning "language buddies" who can quietly assist participants struggling with understanding the material.

#### 3.2 Example: Peer Support Systems

Participants with social obstacles often benefit from peer support, which can make them feel more connected and valued within the group.

- **Best Practice:**  
Implement a **buddy system** where each participant is paired with someone who will check in with them throughout the project. The buddy's role is to provide informal support, ensure the participant is included in activities, and be a friendly face to turn to.
- **Example:**  
A participant who struggles with social anxiety is paired with a buddy who

makes sure they feel comfortable during group activities and sits with them at meals. The buddy also serves as a liaison between the participant and facilitators, raising any concerns or needs in a supportive manner.

- **Implementation Tip:**

Ensure that buddies receive training on how to support their peers respectfully and without being overbearing. Pair people based on complementary personalities or interests to foster a natural, positive connection.

### **3.3 Example: Flexible Participation**

Participants with social obstacles may feel overwhelmed by long sessions or intense social interactions. Flexibility in participation is key.

- **Best Practice:**

Allow for **flexible participation**—give participants the option to step out of activities if they feel overwhelmed, without fear of judgment or exclusion.

- **Example:**

During a long group discussion, a participant with ADHD is given the option to leave the room for a short break if they find it difficult to focus. Facilitators make this option available to everyone, normalizing the practice of taking breaks when needed.

- **Implementation Tip:**

Announce at the beginning of the project that anyone can take a break during activities, and designate a quiet space for participants to recharge.

## **Conclusion**

Creating an inclusive, discrimination-free environment for participants facing social obstacles requires intention, planning, and continuous reflection. By using non-formal education methods such as role-playing, group challenges, and open dialogues, facilitators can foster a space where everyone feels valued and respected.

Empowering participants with fewer opportunities to fully engage not only enriches their personal development but also enhances the overall group dynamic, paving the way for a more inclusive and equal society.

**Created by Greek Youth Mobility - GYM**