Inclusive & Accessible Erasmus+ Events

Be mindful of your participants' access and participation needs

CONFIA

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Written by: Tijana Stojanovic and Dominique Montagnesse
Edited by: Safi Sabuni and Mickael Golinski

Graphic design by: Josipa Friščić

Introduction

Being inclusive is not only a service you do to others. Being inclusive is an opportunity you make for yourself. By being inclusive, you gain outcomes that are more diverse, you create a learning environment that is filled with different perspectives, and you gain the opportunity to learn something different. By being inclusive, your organisation can reach out to a larger audience. Your project can benefit from many more points of views and be better adapted to what final users need.

If organising an inclusive event may seem overwhelming at first sight, it is not rocket science and relies mostly on common sense. Event organisers and project partners often don't lack the willingness to be more inclusive in their practices, but rather lack the time to dig into the topic and understand what it means concretely. Take our word: it is not as complicated as you might think and all it requires is the right mindset, a couple of tips and careful preparation.

When it comes to finances, remember that Erasmus+ project funding includes the financing of special needs support costs for project-related activities, which you can use for:

- Hiring sign language interpreters;
- Hiring palantypist who will type into text everything that is being said orally;
- Supporting financially the costs of extra assistance at the airport or train station;
- Covering the travel and accommodation costs of a participant's personal assistant;
- Printing documents in braille, easy-to-read or other inclusive formats;
- Etc.

Make sure to consult your funding institution (e.g. National Agency for Erasmus+, EACEA) about it to receive more guidance on what are the eligible costs you can request. Note that this needs to be requested at **the application stage.**

Thank you for taking the steps to contribute to a more inclusive and diverse society! We wish you a great and inclusive reading.

The importance of the registration form

While these guidelines contains plenty of useful suggestions to make your Erasmus+ events more inclusive, before you bend backwards to implement all of them, the most important thing is to **ask your participants what they need.** If you don't ask, you will not know. If you don't know, you cannot act and ultimately ensure their full inclusion.

It is important to keep in mind that disabilities have their scales and variations. For example, you may have two different participants who use a wheelchair. However, one may need to use it at all times, and one only for long distances. In this case, these two participants do not have the same needs and their specific cases cannot be approached in the same manner. This is why **your registration form is your best friend** when organising an inclusive event. This is your time to ask participants for their access, communication and participation needs.

We have created an [example of a registration form](#) that you can copy and use for your event purposes. If you already have your own and only want to integrate questions related to the needs of participants, here are some suggestions on what to include:

☐ What is your gender? Options: Male, Female, Other, Prefer not to disclose.
☐ Do you have any medical conditions that may require urgent attention during the meeting such as epilepsy, diabetes or allergies?
☐ Do you have any specific dietary requirements or food allergies?

☐ Do you need a sign language interpreter?
☐ Will you use International Sign Language (ISL) as your primary language during the meeting? If not, which language will you use?

☐ Do you require step-free access?
☐ Are you a wheelchair user?
☐ Tell us more about your access needs connected to your use of the wheelchair.

☐ Are you bringing a personal assistant?
☐ If you are bringing a personal assistant, are you able to share a room with them?

☐ Will your personal assistant attend all parts of the meeting with you?
☐ Would you like an introduction to [topic of the meeting]?

☐ Is there anything else we can do to help you feel included (for example regular breaks, somebody to talk you through meetings in advance, etc.)?

☐ Is there anything else we should know or you would like to share with us?

If you have participants with several different needs, consider if you are able to accomodate for all the needs of those you select and give them the option to choose whether to participate or not depending on what you can accommodate.

Venue and logistics

Booking the right venue can significantly simplify organising an inclusive and accessible event. Professional venues and hotels normally include all the necessary features to ensure accessibility for people with various inclusion needs, such as accessible bedrooms, wide elevators, and accessible bathrooms.

To make your and the participants' life easier, the whole event should ideally take place at the same venue as their accommodation, such as hotels that provide meetings and conference rooms. If this is not possible, try ensuring a short travel distance between accommodation and meeting venue and check if the local transportation system (metro, tram, bus) is accessible.

Regardless of which venues you book, there are several pointers to follow to ensure accessibility.

Physical and visual accessibility

☐ There is a **ramp** and **a rail** at the entrance to the accommodation and the meeting venue or the entrance is step-free.

☐ The accommodation has **adapted bedrooms** for wheelchair users with no step, a spacious bathroom and an adapted step-free shower, and accessible dining rooms.

☐ All the venues have **adapted restrooms** for wheelchair users.

☐ There are automatic doors or a button to open the doors at your venues.

☐ There are **spacious elevators** in all the venues with accessible buttons.

☐ The **height of the tables** during meals is suitable for people using wheelchairs.
Tip: If you are planning a standing dinner with tall tables, consider providing several regular tables with chairs and space for wheelchairs. You don't want your participants who use wheelchairs to feel excluded from the conversations.

☐ The **thresholds of a door** are not too high and if they are, place a mat or a temporary ramp.

☐ There are **no cables or other obstacles** lying on the floor of the venues.

☐ There are **signs in braille** at your venues, such as in the elevators.

☐ There is enough **space for a guiding dog** during meals and sessions.
Tip: Make sure there is a relief area for the dog and check whether you need to provide food and water bowl for the dog.

☐ The conference/training/ seminar **rooms are big enough to accommodate wheelchair manoeuvring or guiding dogs.**

Venue logistics

☐ There is a **quiet safe space room.**
Tip: For example, people with anxiety might need a quiet room to take a break so that they can continue to participate in the programme.

☐ The main room does not have a **loud echo**.
Tip: Environments with significant echo create barriers for people who are hard of hearing.

☐ There are **adjustable lights** so you are able to control the brightness of the room.
Tip: Good lighting helps people who are Deaf or hard of hearing read lips or communicate using sign language.

☐ There are c**lear and easy-to-read signs** provided around the venue signalling accessible facilities, such as bathrooms, elevators, etc.

☐ Offer **multiple types of seats** with backs, considering people's variable needs regarding preferences and issues of comfort.

☐ Check for the **fire-escape protocols** and if they are adapted for people with disabilities.

Transportation

☐ There is **accessible transportation** available nearby.

☐ There is an accessible **parking space** near your venues.

Catering

☐ Your catering includes **options for people with allergies and special food requirements**.

☐ You can provide **bendable straws** and **cups with handles** upon request

Other

☐ Create **colour-coded communication** for participants to communicate their level of comfort among other people during social situations. These can be name tags, stickers, or bracelets. For visually impaired, you can have volunteers acting as "image describers".

☐ Is a participant coming with an **accompanying person?** You should ensure accommodation, meals, and space at the meeting/training room for this person as well.

☐ Are you asked to **provide a personal assistant** during the event? What about before the event for booking tickets or preparing for the event?

Communication

From emails to documents, to social media, it is very important that the tools are used properly to ensure your participants with disabilities such as visual impairment will get all the information about the event correctly. Below are some pointers to keep in mind.

☐ **Include links properly in the text** of your emails and documents?
Tip: If you share web links in an email or document, avoid copy-pasting the full link as text. Otherwise, the screen reader would read out the whole link.

Bad example: "for more information, click here https://mapped.eu/sites/default/files/ima/IMA%20 recommendations%20-%20Final%20version.pdf"

Good example: "for more information, you can check the recommendations for a more inclusive Erasmus+ programme"

☐ Make sure you have **clear descriptions under all the pictures** you included in all your online communication, including on social media such as Facebook posts.
Tip: Make sure the descriptions are detailed and informative. They are important for those who may have difficulties seeing it clearly and understanding its message. This is especially important if you have pictures that contain text.

Bad example: "Look at this great picture!"

Good example: "On the picture below, you can see a dozen of young people on the street, promoting European diversity with flags of their countries and colourful balloons."

☐ **Make sure your videos have subtitles.** This is crucial if you have participants who are hard of hearing, but it is also useful for participants who are not entirely comfortable with the language of the video.

☐ Whenever possible, be mindful of the accessibility of **the size of fonts and the kinds of colours** you are using throughout your online communication.

Content

Whatever meeting you organise, there are several aspects to take into consideration. However, make sure to always ASK the participants in advance what they need.

Presentations

☐ Use a **microphone, speak slowly and describe images** that are projected on the screen.

☐ Make sure your **lips are visible** so hard-of-hearing participants who read lips can follow.

☐ **Try not to improvise** a lot outside what's on your slide and don't overuse expressions like "as you can see" because it can make it difficult for some to follow.

☐ PPT rules: **text 18 points, clear font** like Arial, **high contrast colours, not overpacking slides.**
Tip: Mind the amount of text on one slide, make two slides if needed.

☐ Having speakers **pre-record their presentations** in audio/video format can be useful for some participants.

☐ Some participants may need **physical handouts** of the PPT to follow the presentations.

☐ Sporadically ask participants if they are comfortable with the **pace**.

☐ If **presentations run longer** than planned, people who use specialised transportation services may need to leave earlier.

Sign language interpreters

☐ **Book them well in advance.**

☐ Before booking an interpreter, **check which version of sign language interpreting you need.**
Tip: There are 100+ sign languages in the world. Don't assume every deaf person uses International Sign Language (ISL). Ask!

☐ You will normally **need at least 2** sign language interpreters.
Tip: For large conferences and events, a minimum of 3 is better so they can take turns and rest.

☐ Make sure they are *placed next in the front* so deaf/hard of hearing pax can have an unobstructed view.

☐ **Content of presentations and training sessions should be made available to them beforehand** for preparation and should include explanations for specific terminology.

☐ Always **introduce the interpreters** at the beginning of the event. Explain also that the deaf/hard of hearing participants should be addressed directly, not the interpreters.

☐ Check that your participants are not bringing their **own interpreters.**

Other considerations

☐ Establish a **sign commonly agreed** with the group to **slow down or pick up the pace** of the meeting.
Tip: Your participants could use colour-coded cards (green, orange, red) to signify how they feel about the pace of the meeting at any given moment. However, the most important is that the group agrees on a system, depending on the access needs of the participants. The colour cards are just one example and would not work in all situations. Signs should be introduced at the beginning of a meeting.

☐ Explore **accessible methods and energisers.**
Tip: For example, you may not want to use colour-coding with post its because some of your participants may be colour blind or visually impaired. Instead, you can use post-its of different shapes. Similarly, energisers that include jumping or doing similar physical activity may not be a good idea if you have participants with limited movement. Also, ensure that there is room for discussion and sharing of different perspectives for everyone to be able to voice themselves and have the time needed for this.

☐ It's good to have **anonymous ways of commenting and asking questions** if you are tackling controversial topics.
Tip: You can try out Slido.com or mentimeter.com.

☐ Try **Speech to text (Palantypist) or Real-time captioning** so participants can follow the meeting and so that those who may have to leave a part of the meeting can go back and check what was discussed. Keep in mind an additional screen is needed for real-time captioning.

☐ Explore how to make **accessible PDF and Word documents** so they can easily be read by screen readers.

☐ Visually image-rich films where no words are spoken are not accessible to the Blind and others with visual impairments, so you should try using **descriptive audio, sometimes called audio description.** If there are spoken words in the video, make sure you have subtitles.

☐ Make sure that written material can be made available in braille format upon request.

☐ Some participants may request to have the files available before and after the event in order to be able to follow the meeting. Make sure you have your material ready in advance so you can provide it to them.

References and further reading

Booklets

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