

# Guidelines for Implementing Inclusive Youth Work Activities



Co-funded by  
the European Union

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	4
Understanding Disability in the Context of Youth Work .....	5
Key Principles of Inclusive Youth Work .....	8
Inclusive Planning and Preparation.....	12
Inclusive Facilitation of Youth Activities .....	16
Inclusive Methods Across Activity Types.....	20
Creating a Culture of Inclusion .....	24
Training and Support for Youth Workers.....	28
Monitoring, Feedback and Continuous Improvement .....	32
Annexes and Practical Tools.....	36

Funded by the European Union. 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.”

## Introduction

Youth work plays a vital role in empowering young people, strengthening their voice, and encouraging their active participation in society. Yet, many youth organisations across Europe still face challenges in meaningfully involving young people with disabilities in their programmes. These challenges often arise from a lack of knowledge, tools, or experience in making activities fully inclusive.

This handbook is part of the Erasmus+ project *DIDA – Disability-Inclusive Debate and Advocacy* (2024-2-NL02-KA220-YOU-000281524). The aim of this project is to bring together different strands of youth work - particularly debate-based and disability-based youth work - and build their capacity to support young people with disabilities in developing advocacy skills and participating actively in civic life.

As a foundational output of the DIDA project, these guidelines provide youth workers and organisations with practical advice on how to include young people with various disabilities in everyday youth work activities. Whether you are planning a discussion, creative workshop, volunteering opportunity or a local campaign, this handbook offers clear, structured suggestions to make your work more accessible, engaging and empowering for everyone.

Inclusion is not a one-size-fits-all approach. Therefore, the guidelines cover different types of disabilities and propose concrete adaptations to ensure that participation is both possible and meaningful. They are designed to support youth workers, trainers and volunteers - with or without prior experience in disability inclusion - in creating environments where all young people can thrive, express themselves and be heard.

Together, we can build a more inclusive and democratic youth sector, where the voices of young people with disabilities are no longer overlooked, but amplified.

## 1. Understanding Disability in the Context of Youth Work

Before developing inclusive activities, it is important for youth workers to understand what disability is - and how different approaches to disability shape the way we include, support and engage young people. This section introduces key concepts and frameworks to build a strong foundation for inclusive practice.

### Definitions of Disability: Social Model vs. Medical Model

Disability is not simply a medical condition. There are different ways to understand it - and these understandings influence how youth work is designed and delivered.

- **Medical Model of Disability**

This model views disability as a problem located within the individual. It focuses on diagnoses, impairments, and what the person “cannot do”. The aim is often to “fix” or rehabilitate the individual to fit into society.

- **Social Model of Disability**

The social model, developed by disabled activists, shifts the focus from the individual to the environment. It sees disability as the result of barriers in society - such as inaccessible spaces, lack of inclusive communication, or negative attitudes - that prevent people with impairments from participating fully.



Example: A young person who uses a wheelchair is not “disabled” by their legs but by the lack of ramps or lifts in the youth centre.

Youth work should be based on the social model, which encourages us to remove barriers and create inclusive environments where all young people can thrive.

## Intersectionality: Disability and Other Identities

Disability does not exist in isolation. Young people with disabilities may also face discrimination or disadvantage based on other aspects of their identity - such as gender, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, or socioeconomic background.

This concept is known as **intersectionality**, and it reminds us that inclusion must go beyond a “one-size-fits-all” approach. For example, a young disabled woman from a migrant background may experience exclusion in ways that are shaped not only by her disability, but also by her gender, cultural background, and migration status. These overlapping aspects of her identity can create unique barriers, such as limited access to services, language challenges, or additional social stigma. In contrast, a white disabled man may face discrimination mainly related to his disability, but is less likely to encounter the same layers of marginalisation connected to race, culture, or gender. Recognising and understanding these overlapping identities – often referred to as *intersectionality* – enables us to design youth work practices that are not only more inclusive, but also more sensitive to the real-life challenges faced by young people. By doing so, we can create programmes that truly respect and reflect diverse lived experiences, ensuring that no one is left invisible or unheard.

## The Rights-Based Approach to Disability

Inclusive youth work must be grounded in **human rights**. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) is a legally binding international treaty that affirms the rights of persons with disabilities, including young people, to full participation in all aspects of life.

- **Article 12** of the UN CRPD recognises that persons with disabilities have the right to equal recognition before the law and to make decisions about their own lives.

- **Article 7** focuses on children with disabilities, highlighting their right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them.
- **Article 29** calls for the participation of persons with disabilities in political and public life.

These rights apply equally to youth work settings. Youth workers have a responsibility to respect and promote these rights by ensuring that young people with disabilities are not only present, but also actively heard and involved in decision-making.

## The Value of Inclusive Youth Work for All Participants

Inclusion benefits everyone. When youth work is inclusive of disabled young people, it:

- **Promotes empathy and understanding** among all participants
- **Encourages creativity** by challenging standard ways of working
- **Strengthens group dynamics** through diverse perspectives and abilities
- **Models the values of fairness and equality**, which are at the heart of youth work



## 2. Key Principles of Inclusive Youth Work

Inclusive youth work is not just about ensuring access - it is about creating an environment where every young person feels valued, respected, and able to participate fully. The following principles serve as a foundation for making youth work truly inclusive for young people with disabilities.

### 1. Nothing About Us Without Us

Young people with disabilities are the experts of their own experience. They should be actively involved in all stages of planning, delivering, and evaluating activities - not just as participants, but also as co-creators, organisers, trainers, and leaders.



*Example:* Instead of only inviting disabled young people to attend a youth debate, ask one or two of them to co-facilitate the session, suggest discussion topics, or sit on the planning team.

“Nothing about us without us” is more than a slogan - it’s a call for youth workers to treat inclusion as a process of collaboration and empowerment.

### 2. Universal Design and Reasonable Accommodation

Start by designing activities that are usable by all young people, regardless of ability - this is called **Universal Design**. At the same time, be ready to provide **reasonable accommodation**, which means making individual adjustments when needed (e.g. providing a sign language interpreter or allowing extra time for tasks).

These two approaches work hand in hand:

- Universal Design reduces the need for separate or segregated arrangements.
- Reasonable accommodation ensures that individual needs are met when necessary.



*Example:* When planning a workshop, print materials in large font (Universal Design) but also be ready to provide a Braille version for a blind participant (Reasonable Accommodation).

### 3. Accessibility Is a Mindset

Inclusion is not just about physical ramps or large print materials. It’s a way of thinking. Ask yourself:

- Who might be left out of this activity?
- What barriers (physical, attitudinal, or organisational) might exist?
- How can I adapt this session to include everyone?

Be proactive. Inclusion should not be an afterthought, but an integral part of youth work design.



*Example:* If you are organising a treasure hunt game, ask yourself whether clues placed only on paper disadvantage those with dyslexia. Add picture-based or audio clues too.

### 4. Language Matters

Use respectful, inclusive language. Be mindful of how you talk about disability - avoid outdated or offensive terms. Ask young

people how they prefer to be described. In some cases, **identity-first language** (“disabled person”) is preferred; in others, **person-first language** (“person with a disability”) is more appropriate.

Most importantly: be aware of your prejudice about disabled people and just try to connect with the person.

## 5. Flexibility and Responsiveness

Inclusive youth work requires openness to change. Be ready to:

- Adjust your programme if someone needs a break
- Offer alternative ways to participate
- Provide information in different formats
- Allow for different communication styles

What works for one group or individual may not work for another. Stay flexible and willing to learn as you go.



*Example:* If a participant with chronic fatigue needs frequent breaks, adjust the schedule to allow a pause without disrupting the whole group.

## 6. Participation Is More Than Presence

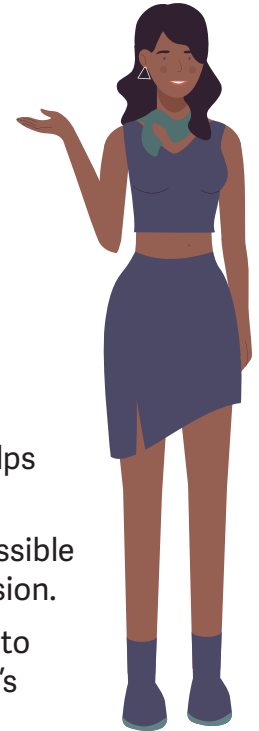
True inclusion means **meaningful participation**. This goes beyond physical attendance - it involves making sure that all young people can:

- Express their opinions
- Influence decisions
- Contribute in ways that are respected and recognised

Create space for different ways of engaging: speaking, drawing, moving, writing, or simply listening and reflecting.

## 7. Diversity Strengthens Youth Work

An inclusive group brings together different perspectives, abilities, and experiences. This diversity is a strength. It leads to richer conversations, more creative solutions, and a greater sense of belonging for all.



## 8. Working with Families and Carers

Parents, carers, and family members often play an important role in supporting young people’s participation. Positive cooperation with them helps create trust and continuity.

- **Share clear information** in plain and accessible formats about activities, safety, and inclusion.
- **Acknowledge their role** by inviting carers to share useful insights on the young person’s needs and strengths.
- **Offer orientation or information sessions** so families feel confident and reassured.
- **Respect autonomy** by balancing family involvement with the young person’s right to make their own choices.
- **Maintain regular contact** through short updates, photos (with consent), or follow-up calls.



*Tip:* Families who feel informed and welcomed are more likely to encourage and support ongoing participation.

These principles are not a checklist to be ticked off once - they are values to be lived every day in your work. When youth workers commit to inclusion, they help build a society where all young people - including those with disabilities - can grow, lead, and thrive.

### 3. Inclusive Planning and Preparation

Inclusion starts long before an activity begins. The way we **plan, prepare, and communicate** can either open the door to participation - or unintentionally close it. This section provides practical guidance for designing youth work that welcomes and supports young people with disabilities from the outset.

#### 1. Involve Young People with Disabilities from the Start

Planning should be done **with** young people with disabilities, not just *for* them. Invite them into brainstorming sessions, preparation meetings, or advisory roles. Their insights will help identify barriers that others might overlook.



*Tip:* Create a youth advisory group that includes disabled youth and consult them regularly.

#### 2. Choose Inclusive and Accessible Venues

When selecting a venue, think beyond just wheelchair access. Consider:

- **Step-free access** to all rooms
- **Accessible toilets** and changing facilities
- **Good lighting and acoustics**
- **Quiet spaces** for rest or sensory breaks
- **Public transport access** or parking for adapted vehicles



*Example:* A youth group plans to meet in a café. Before confirming, they check if there's a step-free entrance, a toilet big enough for a wheelchair, and if the background music can be turned down for participants sensitive to noise.

Checklists and accessibility audit tools can help ensure nothing is missed.

#### 3. Prepare Inclusive Communication

Make sure your invitations, forms and information are accessible:

- Use **plain language** or **easy-to-read formats**
- Offer materials in **alternative formats** (large print, Braille, audio, digital)
- Include clear instructions and **contact details for accessibility support**
- Provide **visual aids** or images to support understanding



*Tip:* Ask in advance if participants have any specific access needs - and follow up to confirm arrangements.

#### 4. Design Accessible Registration and Consent Forms

Standard forms can be difficult for some people to understand or complete. Make them:

- **Short and clear**, using everyday language
- **Visually organised** with clear headings
- Available in multiple formats (print, digital, Easy Read)

Ensure consent forms clearly explain how personal data and images will be used - and that participants understand their rights to say no.

## 5. Plan for Flexibility

Disability is not always visible, and not everyone will feel confident to request adjustments. So:

- Build **flexibility** into your programme by allowing breaks, offering optional tasks, and using varied formats
- Prepare to make **last-minute adaptations** if needed
- Have **back-up options** (e.g. online participation or one-to-one sessions)



Tip: Always have a plan for how to respond if a participant becomes overwhelmed, anxious or fatigued.

## 6. Brief Your Team and Volunteers

Everyone involved should understand the importance of inclusion. Before the activity:

- Provide a short **accessibility briefing** to staff and volunteers
- Share **information about participants' needs** (with consent)
- Encourage an open, respectful attitude and proactive support

*Consider running a short training session on inclusive practice or disability awareness.*



## 7. Risk Assessment with Inclusion in Mind

Traditional risk assessments often overlook access needs. A truly inclusive risk assessment should:

- Identify **barriers to participation** (not just physical risks)
- Include **communication support**, assistance during emergencies, and sensory sensitivities
- Be updated in collaboration with participants or their support persons

By embedding inclusion into every stage of preparation, youth workers signal that all young people - with or without disabilities - are not just welcome, but truly expected and valued.

## 4. Inclusive Facilitation of Youth Activities

Facilitation is where inclusion comes to life. It's in how we speak, how we listen, how we adapt on the spot, and how we create a group atmosphere where everyone feels safe and encouraged to participate. This section provides practical tips for delivering youth activities that include all participants - especially young people with disabilities.

### 1. Set the Tone for Inclusion

From the very beginning, create a group culture that values:

- **Respect for difference**
- **Active listening**
- **Choice and autonomy**
- **Non-judgement and encouragement**

Start with a group agreement (e.g. "rules of the room") that all participants contribute to. Include points like "One person speaks at a time," "Use accessible language," or "Respect each other's communication styles."



*Tip:* Use visual symbols or icons to represent key group values.

### 2. Use Accessible Communication

Clear communication benefits everyone - not just those with communication-related disabilities.

- **Speak clearly and at a steady pace**
- **Avoid jargon and idioms**

- **Use plain or Easy Language when needed**
- **Support verbal instructions with visual aids or handouts**
- **Give written summaries of key points**

If possible, provide **multiple ways of receiving information** (spoken, written, visual, tactile, etc.).

### 3. Offer Multiple Ways to Participate

Not everyone is comfortable speaking in front of a group. Make space for different styles of expression:

- Verbal discussion
- Writing or drawing
- Role play or body movement
- One-to-one conversations
- Using assistive technology or communication devices



*Tip:* Always let participants know that "passing" (choosing not to participate in a moment) is okay.



*Example:* In a discussion, allow participants to contribute by holding up colour cards (green = agree, red = disagree) if they don't want to speak out loud.

### 4. Co-Facilitate with Lived Experience

Whenever possible, involve **disabled facilitators**, peer educators or role models with lived experience. This promotes authenticity and builds trust with participants.

- Ensure that co-facilitators have meaningful roles

- Avoid tokenism - support their full engagement
- Provide any accommodations they may need as well

## 5. Manage Group Dynamics Inclusively

Some young people may require more time to process, express, or engage. Others may find group environments overwhelming.

To ensure inclusive group dynamics:

- Be patient and allow **extra thinking or response time**
- Encourage **turn-taking and gentle facilitation** of dominant voices
- Use **small group or pair work** for those who find large groups difficult
- Watch for signs of distress, anxiety or withdrawal - and offer support discreetly

## 6. Provide Sensory and Emotional Safety

Some young people, especially those with neurodivergence or psychological disabilities, are sensitive to their surroundings.

Make the space more comfortable by:

- Offering **quiet zones** or breakout areas
- Allowing **noise-cancelling headphones or sensory aids**
- Letting participants leave and return when needed
- Being calm and non-reactive in stressful situations



*Example:* During a long workshop, set up a corner with beanbags, low lighting, and noise-cancelling headphones where participants can take a sensory break.

## 7. Be Ready to Adapt in the Moment

Even with the best planning, unexpected needs will arise. Stay flexible:

- Ask what a participant needs without making assumptions
- Be transparent: "I'm not sure, but let's figure it out together"
- Adjust timings, tasks, or methods to suit the group energy

*Inclusion isn't about getting it perfect - it's about being responsive and open.*

## 8. Celebrate All Contributions

Recognise different types of success and participation:

- A participant who shares a drawing instead of speaking
- Someone who chooses to observe quietly but gives feedback later
- A young person who expresses themselves with the support of a peer

Affirm and celebrate each person's unique way of showing up.

Facilitation is a practice - one that improves through reflection, feedback and humility. When we lead with empathy, creativity and collaboration, we foster spaces where all young people - including those with disabilities - feel genuinely included, seen, and heard.



## 5. Inclusive Methods Across Activity Types

Young people with disabilities participate in youth work in many different ways - in discussions, creative projects, games, volunteering, advocacy and more. Each type of activity presents unique challenges and opportunities for inclusion.

This section provides **activity-specific guidance** to ensure that inclusion is not only possible, but embedded in practice - making sure every young person can contribute meaningfully, feel safe, and have fun.

For each activity type, we explore how to address:

- Physical, sensory, intellectual, psychological, and neurodevelopmental needs
- Barriers and adaptations
- Inclusive facilitation strategies

### 1. Discussions and Debates

Discussions and debates are powerful tools for developing voice, confidence and critical thinking. However, they can also exclude those who face communication or sensory barriers unless thoughtfully adapted.

#### Key Inclusion Strategies:

- Use a **microphone** and ensure good acoustics
- Introduce **clear rules for turn-taking**
- Provide **visual summaries** of key points
- Encourage **written or alternative expression**
- Offer **extra time** for reflection and responses
- Ensure a **safe atmosphere** for all voices

## 2. Creative Workshops

Creative activities are often more flexible by nature, making them ideal for inclusive participation. Still, they require accessible materials and varied forms of engagement.

#### Key Inclusion Strategies:

- Provide a **variety of materials** for different motor skills (e.g. thick brushes, textured paper)
- Use **step-by-step visual guides**
- Allow **non-verbal expression** (e.g. collage, sculpture, movement)
- Focus on **process over product**
- Offer **quiet, low-stimulus areas** for those who need it

## 3. Games and Simulations

Games can foster teamwork, laughter and learning - but not if they rely on abilities some participants don't have. Choose and adapt games so that everyone can take part without feeling exposed or excluded.

#### Key Inclusion Strategies:

- Select or adapt games to remove **physical or speed-based barriers**
- Provide **rules in multiple formats** (written, visual, verbal)
- Emphasise **cooperative rather than competitive goals**
- Allow **repeat explanation** and **freedom to opt out**
- Ensure the game is **safe and non-stressful**

## 4. Volunteering Activities

Volunteering builds responsibility, belonging, and social skills. To be inclusive, the roles and tasks should be varied and adaptable to different abilities and energy levels.

### Key Inclusion Strategies:

- Offer a range of roles (physical, organisational, creative, digital)
- Use **simple task instructions** with clear goals
- Provide **on-the-job support or mentors**
- Allow for **flexible timing and pacing**
- Recognise contributions in inclusive ways

## 5. Street Work and Informal Meetings

These informal settings can be more relaxed and accessible - but may also lack structure and predictability, which some young people need.

### Key Inclusion Strategies:

- Choose **physically accessible and familiar locations**
- Offer **clear information in advance** (what to expect, who will be there)
- Be **patient and open to non-traditional communication**
- Create a **low-pressure atmosphere**
- Check in regularly with individuals to ensure comfort

## 6. Campaigns and Advocacy

Campaigning is a space where young people can lead, inspire, and influence - but it must be made accessible so all can participate in shaping the message and methods.

### Key Inclusion Strategies:

- Provide **multiple ways to contribute** (e.g. writing a message, designing a poster, recording a voice note)
- Create campaign materials in **accessible formats** (audio, large print, Easy Read)
- Involve disabled young people in **planning and strategy**
- Ensure events are **physically and socially accessible**
- Emphasise **empowerment and safety**, especially in public-facing roles

By intentionally adapting each type of activity, we move beyond theoretical inclusion into real, daily practice. This approach not only removes barriers - it unlocks new forms of creativity, leadership, and solidarity within diverse youth groups.



## 6. Creating a Culture of Inclusion

Inclusion is not just about individual adaptations - it's about the *culture* we create. An inclusive culture goes beyond one-off accessible events; it's a continuous commitment that shapes values, behaviours, leadership, and everyday decisions in youth work organisations.

Creating this culture requires leadership from youth workers, active involvement from young people, and a shared belief that *everyone belongs*.

### 1. Embed Inclusion in Your Organisation's Values and Practice

Inclusion must be **intentional and visible** in your organisation's:

- **Mission and values** statements
- **Policies and procedures**
- **Staff and volunteer training**
- **Public communications and branding**

When inclusion is at the heart of your work, it becomes easier to prioritise and sustain. Consider developing an **inclusion policy** that includes specific commitments around accessibility, representation, and participation.

### 2. Lead by Example

Youth workers set the tone. Inclusive attitudes, language, and behaviour from staff and volunteers show young people what is expected and welcomed.

- Use **respectful and inclusive language** at all times
- Be open about learning and adapting

- Challenge ableism, discrimination, and exclusion when you see it
- Celebrate diversity openly and often



*Tip:* Share stories, successes, and role models that reflect the diversity of your participants - including young people with disabilities.

### 3. Make Inclusion Everyone's Responsibility

Inclusion is not the task of one person or role - it must be shared across the team. Everyone, from leadership to peer mentors, should understand their part in creating inclusive spaces.

- Offer regular **discussions or reflections** on inclusion
- Create space for staff and volunteers to raise concerns or ask questions
- Encourage a culture of **collective problem-solving and learning**

### 4. Build Peer Support and Allyship

Peers play a powerful role in shaping young people's sense of safety and belonging.

- Facilitate **peer support activities** where young people help each other
- Promote **allyship** - encouraging non-disabled participants to be inclusive friends and advocates
- Address bullying or exclusion early and directly



*Tip:* Include topics like empathy, accessibility, and social justice in your regular youth discussions.

## 5. Ensure Representation and Visibility

Young people are more likely to feel included if they see people like themselves represented.

- Include disabled youth as **leaders, facilitators, and decision-makers**
- Use images and materials that **reflect a wide range of bodies, minds, and identities**
- Make sure disability is not presented as a “problem to fix,” but as a **valuable part of human diversity**

## 6. Create Welcoming Physical and Social Spaces

A space can be physically accessible but still feel emotionally or socially exclusive. Create environments where everyone feels welcome:

- Use **warm, inclusive language** on signage and materials
- Provide **options for quiet, rest, or reflection**
- Allow **flexible participation** without judgement
- Avoid over-emphasising “normality” or forcing conformity

## 7. Celebrate Inclusion Publicly

Highlight inclusive achievements and moments:

- Celebrate the contributions of disabled participants
- Share inclusive practices on social media
- Partner with disability-led organisations in public events

Inclusion should be visible, not hidden behind the scenes.

An inclusive culture is not built overnight - it grows through reflection, relationships, and commitment. But when inclusion becomes embedded in your organisation’s identity, it creates a lasting impact for all young people - and sends a strong message: *you matter, you are welcome, and you belong here.*



## 7. Training and Support for Youth Workers

Youth workers are at the heart of inclusive practice - and they need the right support to do their job well. Many exclusionary experiences are not the result of bad intentions, but of **lack of knowledge, confidence, or access to training**.

This section outlines how organisations can support youth workers in developing the skills, attitudes and resources they need to meaningfully include young people with disabilities.

### 1. Recognise Inclusion as a Core Competence

Inclusive practice is not a bonus skill - it's a **core responsibility**. Youth workers should be supported to develop competencies in:

- Understanding different types of disabilities
- Communicating inclusively and accessibly
- Adapting methods and environments
- Recognising and challenging ableism
- Co-creating with young people with disabilities



*Tip:* Include disability inclusion as part of job descriptions, induction processes, and professional development plans.

### 2. Provide Ongoing Learning Opportunities

Training should not be a one-off event. Offer diverse and ongoing opportunities to learn:

- **Workshops and seminars** on disability, accessibility, inclusive language, and adaptive facilitation

- **Peer learning circles** where staff reflect on real-life challenges and successes
- **Mentoring schemes** pairing less experienced youth workers with inclusion champions
- **Online learning** (videos, articles, case studies) for flexible access

Make space for learning from mistakes - and from the lived experience of disabled colleagues and youth.

### 3. Train-the-Trainer and Cascade Models

Use a **train-the-trainer** approach so knowledge spreads throughout your organisation. One or more team members can:

- Attend specialised training
- Adapt it to your local context
- Deliver short sessions for their peers

This builds internal expertise and helps inclusion become part of your organisation's DNA.

### 4. Create Safe Spaces for Staff Reflection

Inclusion work can raise complex issues - including fear of getting things wrong. Create **safe, non-judgemental spaces** where youth workers can:

- Share challenges openly
- Reflect on their attitudes and behaviours
- Ask questions without embarrassment
- Support each other in inclusive practice

## 5. Use Inclusive Training Methods

Ensure your internal training sessions are themselves accessible and inclusive:

- Use a mix of formats (visual, spoken, written, hands-on)
- Allow for breaks and quiet reflection
- Share materials in advance and in accessible formats
- Co-train with people with disabilities whenever possible

*How you train is just as important as what you train.*

## 6. Know Where to Find Help

Even experienced youth workers can't know everything. Help staff know where to turn when they need support:

- Build relationships with **disability organisations** or **advisory councils**
- Keep a list of **accessibility consultants** or **interpreters**
- Maintain an internal **resource library** of tools, templates, and checklists
- Encourage peer support within your team

*Inclusion is a collective effort, not an individual burden.*

## 7. Celebrate and Recognise Inclusive Practice

Acknowledge when youth workers take steps to include others:

- Share success stories in team meetings
- Create "inclusion spotlights" in newsletters
- Nominate inclusive teams or individuals for recognition

Recognition reinforces the message that inclusion is valued and rewarded.

When youth workers feel supported, confident, and capable, they create powerful spaces of belonging for young people with disabilities. Training is not just about skills - it's about building a team culture where inclusion is shared, expected, and celebrated.



## 8. Monitoring, Feedback and Continuous Improvement

Inclusion is not a fixed goal - it's a **continuous process of reflection and adaptation**. Even well-designed activities can unintentionally exclude, and even experienced youth workers can overlook barriers. That's why **regular monitoring and honest feedback** are essential.

This section offers practical guidance on how to evaluate your inclusive practice and improve it based on real input - especially from young people with disabilities themselves.

### 1. Define What Inclusion Looks Like in Your Context

Start by agreeing what success looks like. Inclusive practice can be measured in many ways:

- Are all young people **able to access** the activity?
- Are they **actively participating**, not just present?
- Do they feel **safe, respected and heard**?
- Are adaptations provided **without delay or stigma**?
- Is their **feedback acted upon**?

Develop your own set of **inclusion indicators** suited to your programme - and include both *quantitative* (numbers, attendance) and *qualitative* (feelings, experiences) measures.

### 2. Use Multiple Feedback Methods

Young people with disabilities may express themselves in different ways. Offer a **range of feedback tools**, such as:

- Anonymous written or visual surveys
- One-to-one conversations

- Easy Read feedback forms
- Feedback through drawings, symbols or emoji scales
- Group discussions or debriefing circles
- Audio or video reflections



*Tip: Ask for feedback more than once - after a session, at the end of a programme, and after changes have been made.*

### 3. Actively Involve Participants in Evaluation

Feedback should not be extractive - it should be part of a dialogue. Involve young people (especially those with disabilities) in:

- Designing feedback tools
- Analysing results
- Identifying what worked and what didn't
- Co-developing improvements

*"What would you do differently next time?"* is a powerful starting question.

### 4. Collect Feedback from Families and Support Persons (if appropriate)

In some cases, especially when working with younger participants or those with complex needs, families or support persons can offer valuable insights into:

- What helped or hindered participation
- Whether communication was effective

- How the young person felt after sessions

Always prioritise the **young person's own voice**, but don't ignore those supporting them.

## 5. Use Feedback to Inform Real Change

Feedback is only meaningful if it leads to action. Build feedback loops into your regular cycle:

1. Gather feedback
2. Discuss it with the team
3. Decide on adjustments
4. Communicate what will change
5. Re-evaluate after the change

Let participants know: *"We heard you - here's what we're doing differently next time."*

## 6. Reflect as a Team

Regular reflection helps inclusion become embedded in your culture. Use team meetings to explore:

- What went well and why
- What challenges came up
- What support staff needed
- What lessons can be carried forward

Create a **safe space for honesty**, not blame - inclusion is a shared learning journey.

## 7. Track Progress Over Time

Use a simple tool or log to track:

- Participation rates of young people with disabilities
- Adaptations made
- Staff training completed
- Feedback themes
- Changes implemented

This helps demonstrate growth - and justify continued investment in inclusion.

## 8. Share Learning Beyond Your Organisation

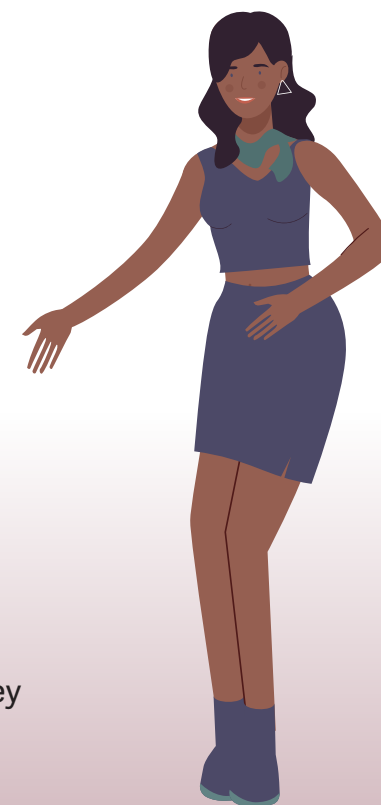
What you learn can benefit others.

Share your inclusive practice:

- In networks or newsletters
- With partners or schools
- At youth work events or conferences
- On your website or social media (with permission)

Inclusion is stronger when knowledge is shared.

Monitoring inclusion is not about perfection - it's about listening, learning, and doing better each time. When young people see their feedback leading to real change, they know their voices truly matter.



## 9. Annexes and Practical Tools

This final section brings together ready-to-use tools, templates, and resources to support youth workers in putting inclusive principles into action. These annexes can be adapted to suit your organisation's style, activities, and the needs of the young people you work with.



### 9.1. Checklist for Inclusive Activity Planning

A quick-reference checklist to ensure inclusion is considered from the start:

- Have I involved young people with disabilities in planning?
- Is the venue physically accessible (entrance, toilets, space layout)?
- Have I prepared materials in accessible formats (e.g. plain language, large print)?
- Have I asked participants about access needs and followed up?
- Are my activities adaptable for different communication and mobility needs?
- Have I built flexibility and choice into the programme?
- Do staff/volunteers understand how to support inclusion?
- Have I considered emotional and sensory safety?
- Is the evaluation process inclusive and accessible?

*Use this checklist during team planning meetings or activity design sessions.*

## 9.2. Accessibility Audit Template

Use this template to assess how inclusive your venue or event is.

### Areas to assess:

- **Entrance and parking** - is there sufficient parking space that is close to the entrance? Is the entrance itself accessible?
- **Paths and corridors** - are all pathways physically accessible (width, surface) and clearly indicated (signage)?
- **Toilet and hygiene facilities** - are there sufficient facilities available that offer space for a wheelchair? Are there toilets close to all main areas the activity takes place in?
- **Lighting, sound, and temperature** - is the quality of sound and lighting good, allowing people with impaired hearing or vision to fully participate? Are lighting, sound and temperature easy to adjust to avoid overstimulation?
- **Seating and rest areas** - is there sufficient seating for all participants? Are there areas where people can go to rest? (eg. quiet spaces)
- **Emergency procedures** - are there emergency procedures in place that take into account participants with different mobility and communication needs?
- **Wayfinding and signage** (pictograms, Easy Read) - is all signage accessible to people with different disabilities? Are options with pictograms or in Easy Read available?
- **Access to information** - is all important information available in different forms, eg. printed, spoken, digital?
- **Staff awareness and readiness** - is all staff aware of the inclusion practices in place and prepared to adapt to specific needs in the moment?

Consider doing the audit with young people with disabilities.

## 9.3. Inclusive Registration and Consent Form (Sample)

Include:

- Plain-language explanation of the activity
- Clear contact details for access support
- Space to describe specific needs (e.g. mobility, communication, medical)
- Flexible options for giving consent (e.g. written, verbal, pictorial)
- Clear explanation of data/photo use and the right to opt out

*Offer this form in print and digital formats, and in Easy Read if needed.*

## 9.4. Inclusive Feedback Form (Easy Read Version)

**Example format:**

**Did you enjoy the activity?**

[😊] Yes [😊] It was OK [😊] No

**What was good?**

(Blank space, or pictorial choices)

**What could be better next time?**

(Blank space, or symbols)

**Do you want to do something like this again?**

[Yes] [No] [Not sure]



*Tip: Encourage drawings, stickers, or recorded answers for non-writers.*

## 9.5. Glossary of Key Terms

Term	Definition
Ableism	Discrimination or prejudice against people with disabilities.
Accessibility	The design of environments, information, and activities so everyone can use them equally.
Inclusion	Creating spaces where all individuals feel welcomed, respected, and supported to participate.
Neurodivergent	Describes people whose brain functions differently from the "typical" - e.g. autistic, ADHD.
Reasonable Accommodation	Adjustments or modifications made to remove barriers so that a person with a disability can participate equally. These are practical, individual solutions - for example, providing a sign language interpreter, allowing extra time to complete a task, or rearranging furniture for wheelchair access. They do not lower standards but ensure fairness and equal opportunity.

Term	Definition
Universal Design	Designing things from the start to be usable by as many people as possible.
Youth work	Youth work is a broad term covering a wide variety of activities of a social, cultural, educational, environmental and/or political nature by, with and for young people, in groups or individually. Youth work is delivered by paid and volunteer youth workers and is based on non-formal and informal learning processes focused on young people and on voluntary participation. Youth work is quintessentially a social practice, working with young people and the societies in which they live, facilitating young people's active participation and inclusion in their communities and in decision making. (by Council of Europe)

## 9.6. List of Useful Organisations and Resources

This annex provides a non-exhaustive overview of key European-level umbrella organisations, EU institutions and thematic networks relevant to disability rights, accessibility and inclusion.

### A. Umbrella organisation (European level)

#### European Disability Forum (EDF)

- Main umbrella organisation representing persons with disabilities at European level.
- Advocacy on EU legislation and policies.
- Monitoring the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) in the EU.

<https://www.edf-feph.org/>

### B. European Union institutions and bodies

#### European Commission – Disability Policy Framework

- Responsible for the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030.
- Policy development in employment, social protection, transport, digitalisation and accessibility.
- Management of EU funding instruments (e.g., ESF+, Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, CERV).
- Key Directorates-General: DG EMPL (employment and social inclusion), DG MOVE (transport and passenger rights), DG ECHO (civil protection and crisis management).

<https://commission.europa.eu/>

#### European Parliament

- Legislative body of the European Union.
- Adoption and oversight of EU legislation relevant to disability rights.
- Parliamentary Intergroup on Disability promoting disability inclusion across policy areas.

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/>

#### European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)

- Advisory body representing organised civil society.
- Provides opinions on EU policies, including disability, social inclusion and equality.
- Platform for participation of disability organisations in EU policymaking.

<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/>

#### EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)

- Collects and analyses data on fundamental rights and discrimination.
- Research and reports on the situation of persons with disabilities in the EU.
- Evidence-based support for EU institutions and Member States.

<https://fra.europa.eu/>

#### European Ombudsman

- Handles complaints concerning maladministration in EU institutions.
- Promotes good administration, non-discrimination and accessibility, including in EU services.

<https://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/>

## C. European networks and thematic platforms

### European Accessibility Resource Centre (AccessibleEU)

- Supports the implementation of the European Accessibility Act (EAA).
- Exchange of good practices on accessibility of the built environment, transport and digital services.
- Training activities, guidance materials and expert networks.

<https://accessible-eu.eu/>

### European Network on Independent Living (ENIL)

- Advocacy for independent living and deinstitutionalisation.
- Promotion of personal assistance schemes.
- Strategic advocacy and awareness-raising at EU and national levels.

<https://enil.eu/>

### Inclusion Europe

- Advocacy for the rights of persons with intellectual disabilities and their families.
- Development and promotion of Easy-to-Read information.
- Support to self-advocates and family organisations.

<https://www.inclusion-europe.eu/>

### Autism-Europe

- European umbrella organisation for autism.
- Policy advocacy, research and awareness-raising.
- Network of national autism organisations across Europe.

<https://www.autismeurope.org/>

### European Blind Union (EBU)

- Representation of blind and partially sighted persons at European level.
- Advocacy for accessible information and digital inclusion.

<https://www.euroblind.org/>

### European Union of the Deaf (EUD)

- Representation of deaf persons and national deaf associations.
- Advocacy for sign language recognition and accessibility.

<https://www.eud.eu/>





**2025**