EUROPEAN MOSAIC

How To Organise Inclusive Events

european youth forum

European Movement International

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Introduction

This manual is intended to provide guidelines on creating inclusive spaces and events. Before we explore how you can make your national consultation as inclusive as possible, there is one fundamental question that needs answering: 'Why?'

The most straightforward approach is to recognise that, as the organiser of a national consultation on the EU long-term budget, you are responsible for ensuring the consultation process includes as many voices and perspectives as possible. This is particularly important for reaching marginalised groups, to ensure that the resulting discussions and reports reflect the needs and understanding of a diverse range of communities in your country. As you will be publishing a national report after your consultation, you must ensure that it does not reflect only one dominant voice.

The process of organising an inclusive event begins at the conceptualisation stage and continues throughout the event, from the facilities provided to the methods used to reach out to participants. This continues during implementation, when it is important to give different participants space, respect their needs as much as possible, and facilitate different understandings and perspectives. After your consultations, it is also important to reflect on the inclusion measures you implemented and any adjustments that can be made for the future.

The aim of this manual is therefore to help you identify areas where you are already strong in terms of inclusion, as well as areas where you might have blind spots. Inclusion and accessibility are long-term processes, not simply tasks to be completed. They require intention, commitment, and reflection to be effective. This is why we encourage you to approach this manual and your process with curiosity and an open mind, and to let us know if you think you could contribute to making it even more comprehensive.

Definitions

The following are definitions of terms relevant when addressing inclusion.

Diversity Having a mix of different people in a group, such as differences in race, ethnicity, gender, age, abilities, socioeconomic status, beliefs, etc.	**Inclusion** Intentionally designing the event to ensure everyone feels safe, valued, and fully able to engage, connect, and contribute, no matter how different they are.
Equity Giving people what they need based on their specific circumstances, so everyone can fully participate and achieve the same end result.	**Justice** The process of dismantling systems and structures of historical and current oppression that create inequalities.

As your national consultation will not take place in English, it will be important for you to check which terms are used and which to avoid in the language you will be speaking.

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Preparation: Before the Event

2.1 Inclusive Outreach & Participation

Reaching diverse communities

National consultations should be built on meaningful dialogue and active relationship-building with people from different parts of your community, creating the space for every voice to be heard. This includes individuals from marginalised groups who face systemic barriers to democratic participation and engagement. One of the first steps in planning your consultation is to determine who you want to include to ensure a truly representative process.

Step 1: Self Assessment

If you have organised events or consultations in the past, you likely collected post-event feedback and held reflection meetings to evaluate your successes and challenges. In most cases, you would have asked for some kind of feedback after the event and had reflection meetings after these meetings to assess what did and did not go well. Some of these questions may include:

- What would you say were the strengths during your previous work and events with regards to inclusion and diversity?
- Where would you say your previous work and events fell short when it came to inclusion and diversity?
- Did you receive any feedback from participants from your previous events regarding how inclusive and diverse your events were?
- Which marginalised communities did you reach out to in the past? Was it successful? Why or why not?
- Which channels did you use in the past to reach out to marginalised communities?
- Do you have existing connections or partnerships with marginalised communities in your country?
- Who is part of your organising team? Who of them is paid and who is a volunteer?
- What underlying assumptions do you have? How do you assess potential risks?
- When it comes to knowledge on inclusion and diversity, how knowledgeable would you say you and your team/organisation are? Where do you know a lot? Where are your gaps?
- Who has decision-making power? Who defines the agenda, selects speakers, facilitates the event and decides which perspectives are considered relevant?
- Do you have the necessary budget, time, or tools allocated to act on your past feedback? (e.g. funding for interpreters, accessible venues, or extra time for outreach etc.)

This self-assessment will help you to assess where your organisation or group currently is when it comes to inclusive practices and having events with a diversity of participants.

Step 2: Inform & Connect

Now that you have finalised your self-assessment, you can deepen your knowledge and follow-up on the existing partnerships, as well as establish new ones.

Local Organisations: Research and connect yourself with local organisations that work with marginalised communities in your country. Understand what they are doing and how your national consultation can be interesting and accessible for their communities/the communities they're working with. Where you can, partner with marginalised communities to co-create events.

Social and Cultural Spaces: Connect yourself with local youth clubs, sports clubs or cultural centres to see who visits these spaces and to consider how to make your event relevant to them. These spaces often attract a wide diversity of people from their local community. This is relevant everywhere, but especially in rural areas where these are often the main meeting points.

Schools and Universities: Schools and universities have a very wide variety of people attending them. Partnering with schools and universities can help broaden your reach. Through interactions with schools, you can attract people under 18 to attend your event, which will be very valuable. Just make sure you have a Child Protection Policy in place if you do so.

❗ Ask your partners how they choose who to invite from their community, and whether those people are representative. Be honest about how much time, money and ambition you have for the process.

Step 3: Communicate Inclusively

The assumption of many will be that your event is not inclusive and accessible, as this is often the norm for events. Communicating that your national consultation is inclusive, and how, will be important for people of marginalised groups and/or communities to show up. That said, be careful not to promise things you can not accommodate.

Registration Form

One very important part of communicating inclusively is by providing a registration form, where you can find out more about your participants' needs. It also sends the message to participants that you care, and that you are attentive to their situation. We highly recommend adding the following questions to your registration form, depending on the type of event you are organising:

- One question for name(s): 'Name' (don't say 'preferred name') and another for 'Legal Name'.
- Gender: 'Female', 'Male', 'Non-Binary', 'Prefer not to say', and if possible, include a free field for self-input.
- To be able to follow-up with minors: Will you be below 18 at the time the event is taking place?
- If you plan for the participants to stay overnight: Which gender(s) would you feel most comfortable sharing a room with?
- Accessibility: Are there any accessibility requirements that we should be aware of? (Please also mention here any accompanying person or requirement of visa support letter etc.)
- If food is provided: Are there any dietary requirements that we should be aware of?

Keep in mind: Information about your participants can be personal and sometimes sensitive. Make sure to only collect the information that you need for your event! Store this information according to the GDPR regulation. Store it in secure locations, use it for internal purposes only, and delete it after 5 years.

Making your webpage accessible:

People with limited sight often use machine reading to access the internet. Here are some basic rules about making sure your page and registration form can be read easily:

- Accessible forms include Google Forms and Microsoft Forms.
- Accessible questions are: Single or multiple-choice; short or long answers; and ranking. Avoid drop-down lists. Check if you can fill in the form without using a mouse.
- Send the link to register via email/post on social media.
- Ensure that images and logos have alt text and documents/programs are accessible.
- Include a statement letting people know that they can request accessibility requirements.
- Do not provide links (e.g. click here), but link the programme, registration form etc. directly.

Welcome Note

Another way to showcase inclusivity and that you are welcoming participants from different communities is by adding a section that explicitly welcomes different communities.

Communicate about tools or services that you will provide to facilitate accessibility e.g. sign language interpretation, wheelchair accessibility etc.

Mention and provide a link to your safeguarding policy and code of conduct, as these are more often needed when breaches take place. Those from marginalised communities will tend to look out for them to ensure there are protection mechanisms in place.

2.2 Designing Your National Consultation

Planning an inclusive national consultation means designing it from the start so a diversity of participants can be included. In the context of your national consultation, inclusion means ensuring every participant has the structural support to engage meaningfully in all available activities. To achieve this, deep, intentional efforts should be made to include underrepresented groups, such as LGBTQI individuals, persons with disabilities, racialised individuals, and ethnic, religious, or linguistic minorities.

An accessible consultation allows everyone to fully participate, engage with the content, and interact meaningfully with others. Prioritising accessibility creates a more intuitive, seamless and user-friendly experience for every single participant.

Training of staff, trainers and volunteers

Firstly, to be truly inclusive, your staff and trainers must be informed and able to act and speak inclusively. It is therefore important that all staff, trainers and volunteers involved, not just the main organisers, are informed and trained to create a safer environment for all participants, as well as recognising and responding to any form of harassment. Create a shared understanding of what inclusion and accessibility mean within your team and the organisations you work with. This can also include specific training on topics such as dimensions of Poverty, Antigypsism or how to communicate inclusively.

On the one hand, this could mean that they actively hire and invite a wide range of facilitators, trainers, and experts, including LGBTQI individuals, people with disabilities, persons of colour and people from rural backgrounds. Ensure trainers, panellists, and organisers reflect the audience's background. But remember to value these experts for

their professional skills, not just who they represent. People with marginalised backgrounds have lots of different areas of expertise and should not be limited to talking about diversity issues. As part of this process, we encourage reflecting on who gets paid for their contribution and who does not. Experiences gained through lived experience are also a form of expertise and should be valued equally to academic or other forms of formally recognised expertise.

We recommend that you and your team approach this process with curiosity and are also ready to prepare alternatives for when things go wrong. Clarify who can make decisions on what, so that you can make clear decisions while preparing, but also on the spot.

Safe, safer and brave spaces

According to Merriam-Webster, a “safe space” is a place that is "intended to be free of bias, conflict, criticism, or potentially threatening actions, ideas, or conversations". Facilitators may attempt to create safe spaces for their participants to feel comfortable and thrive in discussions. A popular line of thought is that a safe space is impossible to guarantee. Instead, it is more realistic to nurture a ‘safer space’ in which efforts have been made to achieve safety, but that said safety cannot be guaranteed.

Additionally, there is currently an increased movement towards creating “brave spaces” that encourage participants to be brave enough to speak their authentic truths, and challenge others to be brave enough to listen to opposing views with respect and curiosity.

Safeguarding policy and code of conduct

The foundation of organising safer and braver spaces is ensuring that participants are safeguarded during the event and that you have clear procedures in place in case something threatens them. Your organisation must have a safeguarding policy for events. If not, it is important that you implement one before holding the event.

Your safeguarding policy must include actions the participants should take if they are harassed or disrespected, and underline that all cases of harassment will be dealt with seriously. Train diverse teams to handle discrimination, racism, and harassment. Make sure to include:

- What are accepted and unacceptable behaviours?
- What is the process for individuals affected by a breach of the Code of Conduct? Are the affected person’s needs, wishes, and dignity placed at the centre of the follow-up procedure (survivor-centred approach)?
- Who is responsible for responding to safeguarding concerns if they arise? Who is the first point of contact for participants and who can be contacted if they are in need of assistance?
- Is there a clear escalation process for sensitive or inappropriate situations?
- Why do the safeguarding policy and code of conduct matter?

For your safeguarding policy to be effective, you also need to make sure that the people taking part in your event know about it. This also includes any external service providers you might be working with e.g. caterers, venues, hotels or security services. Put it on your event website and communicate about it directly.

Need inspiration? Feel free to look at the European Youth Forum’s Safeguarding Policy.

The location of your national consultation

An important, but at times overlooked, aspect of creating an accessible, inclusive and also engaging event is the event location. Your location will have a high impact on what you can and cannot implement, and will therefore shape how meaningful your national

consultation is. For example, if there is no wheelchair accessible entrance, you will be excluding everyone using a wheelchair from sharing their views in the national consultation from the very start, as they simply cannot enter. As a result, valuable perspectives would be excluded, and the outcomes of the event will not be as representative as possible.

Don't just assume that your venue provider or other providers have everything they say they have. Always conduct a physical site visit in advance. If that's not possible, ask for detailed pictures, dimensions, and video walk-throughs. When you're doing that check, think about how easy it is to get to and use the:

- Entrance
- Meeting and networking rooms
- Food place
- Corridors
- Toilets
- Lifts
- Surrounding areas, including proximity to public transport and parking
- Ramps

It's important that your venues are physically accessible and accommodating to individuals living with disabilities, those with mobility issues, as well as older people. We highly recommend that your location has:

- Clear signage
- An induction loop
- No steps and/or elevators that are not wheelchair accessible
- Quiet room: Separate from the main workshop space with very low stimuli
- Interactive space: Create spaces where people can interact verbally or non-verbally in smaller groups, as larger group settings can be overwhelming for some people, restricting their ability to interact and share their views.
- Parking and public transport close by

Making Restrooms Inclusive

Think about who can access your toilets. If you have toilets at your venue, we recommend that you have a gender neutral toilet in addition to toilets for women and men. There should also be accessible restrooms.

We also encourage you to provide menstrual products in all bathrooms or in spaces that are accessible to everyone and are located in a way where such products can be taken discreetly.

Planning your sessions and activities

Design your sessions so that people with different communication styles, needs and experiences can all take part.

Offer different ways to participate. Activities should cater to different personalities and communication styles. Some participants may prefer to speak, while others may find it easier to engage through writing, chat functions, or visual tools. Make sure the tools you are using are accessible to all your participants. For example, whiteboard tools like Miro can be inaccessible to screen reader users. Facilitation styles should allow time for processing, avoiding putting individuals on the spot, and creating space for alternative forms of expression (e.g. after each question, pause for 10 seconds before calling on anyone else). Providing sign language interpretation, live captioning, or communication support where needed can significantly improve accessibility.

Inclusion also means recognising neurodiversity and including people with autism, ADHD, dyslexia and other cognitive differences. Create environments that consider sensory sensitivities (e.g. lighting, noise levels, crowded spaces, etc.) and offer quiet areas or breaks where possible. Clear expectations, structured agendas, and predictable formats can help to reduce stress and encourage participation.

Representation matters. Review the examples, stories and case studies you share to ensure that different experiences are visible.

Consider breaks and food. What constitutes a break can vary from person to person. Some people want to socialise and appreciate having a starting point, such as a conversation prompt. Others need a proper break, with no expectation to talk or participate. There is no one approach to breaks that will work for everyone, but keeping these different needs in mind can help you plan breaks that are more inclusive and accommodating.

Moreover, think about the food you are offering and the places it will be served. Dietary information encompasses more than just allergies and whether someone is vegan. It can also relate to food sensitivities, health considerations, and foods that feel safe.

Preparing your materials

All materials should be presented in clear, simple, and inclusive language. Avoid jargon and overly complex phrasing, and consider providing information in multiple formats (e.g. easy-read versions, audio, large print etc.). Sharing agendas, questions, and key documents in advance allows participants, particularly those who are neurodivergent or who require more processing time, to prepare and engage more confidently.

From an inclusion perspective, this means that when producing materials, consider the following:

- All materials (websites, newsletters, social media, reports, and outreach messages) are reviewed for inclusive language, stereotypes, or exclusionary assumptions;
- Images produced show a diverse range of people of different abilities, races, body sizes and gender expressions, and do not reproduce stereotypes or depict the same type of person;
- Captions, transcripts, and screen reader-friendly materials are provided so that all attendees can engage with the content;
- Refer to the European Disability Forum checklist on communication materials to see if your event material is accessible.

❗ For more information on how to make your sessions and activities engaging, you can check out the Manual on How to Engage Citizens.

2.3. Thematic Focus Areas on Inclusion

Below are some examples and focus areas to help ensure your event is as inclusive as possible for a wide range of people. It's important to note, however, that individuals cannot be reduced to a single category; people have intersectional identities and individual experiences. For example, someone may be a queer person of colour who uses a wheelchair, and their experiences are shaped by the combination of these identities.

Focus: Anti-Racism

It's important to acknowledge that racism is systemic and requires active unlearning. It is present in public spaces and among people in general. Organising an anti-racist event starts by acknowledging that this means that it will also be embedded in your organisational structure and with that, the framework in which you organise your event.

Local youth councils and youth organisations can serve as safe entry points for marginalised individuals. However, many joined organisations and then were one of few black, indigenous, people of colour (BIPOC) members of that organisation, often overcoming the initial hesitation of participating due to this lack of representation. Representation matters, and we encourage you to strive to make your event as representative as possible. That said, when planning your event, particularly with regard to speakers and trainers, consider the different experiences and power relations within communities, and avoid treating individual organisations or participants as representatives of an entire community.

Some considerations:

- Explicitly state your event's values at the start (e.g. zero tolerance for racism).
- Selecting someone based solely on their skin colour is also a form of racism.
- Microaggressions and safety: White participants sometimes exhibit aggressive or condescending behaviour toward BIPOC attendees, requiring proactive safeguarding measures.
- Educate participants on respectful language, and avoiding discriminatory language, jokes that reference different cultures and backgrounds etc.
- Names can carry a history and pronouncing them correctly is important. This is especially important for moderators and facilitators. Learn the speakers'/participants' names, such as by having a round where everyone says the name they prefer.

❗The responsibility to recognise and address racism should not fall primarily on affected participants. Facilitators, staff and safeguarding teams should be prepared to anticipate or intervene, without requiring racialised participants to repeatedly identify or explain discriminatory behaviour. For reporting mechanisms, we recommend reading the section 'Procedure for reporting an incident' from the Safeguarding Policy of the European Youth Forum.

Sub-Focus: Antigypsyism

'Antigypsyism refers to a specific form of racism: racism against people from Roma communities. It is very similar both in meaning, and in terms of its impact, to Romaphobia, which describes fear, dislike or hatred of Roma people.'(Mirrors, Council of Europe). This means that part of organising an anti-racist event also means reflecting on Antigypsyism in your organisation and making sure to reach out and include Roma communities in your country. Antigypsyism operates on three connected levels:

- **Attitudes:** the beliefs and stereotypes people hold about Roma.
- **Individual behaviour:** how people treat Roma and speak about them.
- **Society as a whole:** the structures and policies that discriminate against Roma.

Negative attitudes shape how people treat and talk about Roma, and that treatment strengthens the attitudes. Unfair laws, policies and institutions do the same on a bigger scale. Each level feeds the others, so tackling only one is never enough.

Important to note is that Roma, like everyone, are individuals first. Roma people have very different life experiences, and no single story represents everyone. At the same time,

systematic exclusion and discrimination across Europe mean that many Roma face poverty and segregation. This also means that many recommendations found in the focus on poverty (p.14) are also relevant when making sure Roma persons can participate in your event.

Some considerations:

- When involving Roma persons, it is important to understand the historical facts surrounding Roma communities in your local context as well as the consequences they have on the present.
- For some Roma youth, travel and participation in international activities can be difficult. Take this into account when planning activities that require travel, and support participants in getting the tailored support they need.
- Be mindful that non-Roma participants may have strong prejudices about the Roma and be ready to address this during your event while being sensitive to the Roma in the room.
- Some terms for Roma carry negative connotations, and in some countries these terms are being reclaimed. Do not assume which term is right. Ask each person how they want to be addressed.

For more information and background, we recommend that you read 'Mirrors – Manual on combating antigypsyism through human rights education' developed by the Council of Europe and its civil society partners.

Focus: Disability Inclusion

Adopting a holistic approach to disability inclusion helps to create an equitable, respectful and effective consultation space for everyone involved. It is essential to ensure that all participants can access and engage with the meeting. Rather than relying on a one-size-fits-all solution, inclusive consultations should be flexible and participant-centred. Participants should be invited to share their requirements in advance so they can be taken into consideration throughout the whole consultation, so that people with disabilities can participate comfortably and contribute meaningfully.

Accessibility begins with thoughtful preparation. Clear agendas, multiple engagement opportunities, and adequate breaks can facilitate participation and promote inclusivity. Consider whether your formats are accessible to people with different types of disabilities, and be prepared to adapt them. Planning for accessibility means considering the entire process – before, during and after the event. Many points to consider are already addressed in the above sections but here are some additional points.

Some points around language:

- Person-based language: 'Persons with disabilities, autism, intellectual disabilities' etc., not 'disabled person'.
- Accessibility requirements, not accessibility needs or special needs.
- You can say deaf or blind.
- Differentiating between deaf and hard of hearing.
    - Deaf = They will require professional sign language interpreters.
    - Hard of hearing = They rely heavily on assistive technology such as implants and use of induction loops and/or live captioning/subtitles.

Unsure? Ask the person or organisation working with people with disabilities

Examples of Accessibility Requirements

Sign language interpretation: People who are deaf usually need someone to interpret sign language for them. Sign language interpretation is a two-way street; this means the person can get spoken language interpreted in sign, and can also get sign language interpreted to spoken language through the interpreter, which enables the exchange. It's important to make sure you hire interpreters who use the national or local sign language. Just like with spoken languages, there are many different sign languages.

- Hire a sign language interpreter as early as possible.
- Usually, 2 interpreters switching every 10 minutes are needed.
- They will need materials and presentations in advance.
- For in-person events, sign language interpreters are also needed for networking breaks.

Real time captioning: Some providers offer real-time captioning, which are like subtitles. It's important to remember that this is one-way communication only. This means that people who are deaf will not be able to contribute their thoughts if it is used exclusively.

Personal assistants: A personal assistant is a person who provides support to a person with disabilities. It can be a professional, a family member, a friend, or a colleague. Sometimes, more than 1 assistant is needed. Some people have assistance dogs.

For further tips and a comprehensive check-list, including specifications for communication, accessible venues, how to prepare for an accessible meeting and more, consult the European Disability Forum's Guide for Accessible Communications and Events for All.

Focus: Geographic Inclusion

Geographic inclusion means intentionally designing your consultation to include people from rural and remote areas. According to Eurostat, over 50% of the population lives in areas characterised by low population density and limited infrastructure.

The main challenges that rural youth face in participating.

- **Travel:** Most trips need to be done by car to bigger cities, picking up other peers and requiring extra expenses such as extra overnight stays or parking. Be aware that sustainable travelling might not be available for them. Include mileage rates. Recognise that rural participants often rely entirely on personal vehicles to reach the venue. Offer and provide step-by-step travel guidance to those who need it This assistance should be framed as standard organisational support for everyone.
- **Costs:** As travelling is more expensive, we recommend full travel reimbursement to cover costs for less privileged people living in rural areas (including parking fees or mileage rates for driving,...)
- **Timing:** There are also certain timings such as Farming season (May to September) which makes people (not only farmers) less available.
- **Topics:** National and EU policy is often very city-focused. To include rural youth, it is important to ensure that the topics that will be covered will also be something that people from rural areas can identify with. Health, mental health, LGBTQI issues and employment are good examples of cross-cutting topics. Explicitly communicate why their unique geographic point of view is essential to a balanced democratic outcome.

Everything goes back to why that particular project or activity should be interesting for them and what they will gain from it in their everyday life!

Focus: LGBTQI inclusion

Creating a safer space for LGBTQI youth requires intentional choices throughout your programme, a facilitated approach, and group agreements. Inclusion is not only about what you say, but also about how activities are designed, how participants are addressed, and how safety is actively upheld. Many of these points are already addressed in the above sections, but here are some additional points.

Your Activities

In your programme, pay close attention to how activities may implicitly reinforce exclusion. For example, reflect on whether activities need to be divided by gender (e.g. if you are playing sports), why, and how this excludes gender non-conforming people. Reflect on how activities which require specific clothing or partial nudity (i.e. swimwear) can feel uncomfortable for some people, especially if their bodies might not reflect dominant societal norms/align with ideas of gender and sex binaries, and how you can support everyone to feel safe, respected and included.

Some points around language

- Do not assume the gender of a participant. Assuming gender means, for example, using feminine pronouns for a person who you assume to be a girl or a woman based on appearance alone. If you misgender someone, acknowledge your mistake, apologise, and make sure you don't do it again.
- Encourage using gender-neutral language in written and spoken communication;
- Address each person by their name. It can differ from their legal name;
- Include (optional) pronouns in nametags;
- Make it normal to introduce yourself by also mentioning your pronouns.

Logistical considerations

Inclusion also depends on thoughtful logistical and practical arrangements. Thoughtful details in registration, accommodation, and mobility can significantly impact whether LGBTQI youth feel safe and respected.

Registration forms are often the first point of contact and should reflect inclusive practices. Ask for name and legal name separately, recognising that queer people may use a name which is not their legal name. Avoid the expression “preferred name,” as this is not a preference. If a person uses a name different from their legal name, share their legal name only with the absolute minimum number of people (for example, hotel personnel who need it for identification purposes), and do not use it on certificates, name tags, or participation lists.

Particular care is required for accommodation. If participants are sharing bedrooms, do not automatically divide them according to their assigned sex. Instead:

- ask participants which gender they identify with, leaving an open field (no closed options)
- ask participants if they prefer to be placed in a shared room with people of their same gender or of any gender;
- ask trans or gender-non-conforming participants in which bedroom they prefer to sleep or with whom they prefer to share a room;
- In some situations, consider booking a single room for trans or gender-non-conforming participants if this is safer.

Finally, consider the broader environment of the event. Ensure that both the main venue and spaces for social activities are LGBTQI friendly (e.g. staff trained on LGBTQI inclusion, spaces not segregated by gender or LGBTQI services promoted). Transportation is

another important aspect: public transport or moving alone in the city can be unsafe for LGBTQI people, especially trans and gender non-conforming participants. Offer the option of booking a taxi if they feel unsafe moving around in the context of the event.

Focus: Poverty Inclusion

People who experience poverty often live with instability: changing schools, time in foster care, and institutions that control more than they support. Many also carry shame, feel isolated, and find reading and writing difficult. This makes it hard to trust others and to enter new spaces. Inclusion of people experiencing poverty therefore starts with an honest question: do you genuinely want their views, and are you ready to adapt to their lives rather than the other way around? Be realistic about the level of participation you ask for, and about your time, money and ambition.

Unless you have significant experience, we recommend working through an experienced partner organisation or support person, who can be the main link between you and people experiencing poverty. If you want to invite a group, it is important to meet them first, together with your link, and go to where they live. Travel there by public transport to gain an understanding of their reality.

That said, trust that young people can contribute as they are. You don't need to trick them into participating: they are curious and capable, and it is fine to feel uncomfortable while discovering new things.

Some considerations:

- Hold several smaller regional and local consultations, and consider a bigger one later for those who want to join.
- Provide detailed information. Map out the entire journey to your event, from leaving home to returning, and consider each step to identify any potential obstacles. Make sure you communicate all of these steps to the participants. Show them where the building is, what it looks like, and how the room is set up.
- Exploring new things can be stressful, especially when your event may already be a new experience. You can ease this by keeping the programme dynamic, avoiding long periods around a table, serving food that people recognise and enjoy, talking about topics everyone can relate to, and adding familiar activities.
- A big gap between people's lived reality and the event you are organising can create discomfort. This is why it is good to avoid extravagant venues and hotels.
- Consider the entire experience. Either accompany participants on the journey or arrive early to allow time for informal conversation. Have staff present during the event who are actively checking on participants' wellbeing, and ensure there is a process in place for after the event has finished. Transitions between different spaces can be difficult and should also be accompanied.
- Informal time is where power dynamics are most active. Think about it beforehand and facilitate it.
- Not everyone is comfortable with written tasks. Offer other ways to take part.
- Use local languages where possible. People should be able to read materials in their own language.
- Pay the costs upfront, including per diems, and buy tickets for participants rather than asking them to pre-finance.
- Think about childcare. Without it, some people cannot attend.
- Participation is secondary to their lives, so expect cancellations and stay flexible. Don't commit unless you have the time to adapt.

Curious to learn more? Read the Report on Hidden Dimensions of Poverty.

2.5 Reflection on Limitations

Finally, the goal is to make your event as inclusive as possible, but it is not always possible to include everyone, due to various factors. It is important to be honest about who you can include and not make promises you cannot keep. We encourage you to ask yourself the following questions:

- What inclusion challenges remain?
- Are there areas you would like further training on? Where could you get it?
- What trade-offs were necessary?
- How will you acknowledge these transparently? What will be your next move?

Implementation: During the Event

3.1 Creating an Inclusive Environment

Setting Expectations from the Start

At the start of the national consultation, clearly establish the purpose and atmosphere of it. Emphasise that this is a space for respectful dialogue, not necessarily agreement. Participants should feel comfortable sharing different perspectives without pressure to reach consensus. Encourage participants to listen actively, engage constructively, and remain respectful throughout.

Acknowledge that topics such as the EU long-term budget can be complex and sometimes challenging. These discussions require time, reflection, and space for different viewpoints to emerge. Setting this expectation early helps participants approach the conversation with patience and openness.

To support a positive environment:

- Use icebreakers and energisers to build trust and ease participants into discussion.
- Allow flexibility to “break the setting” if energy drops or tension rises.

For organisers and facilitators:

- Plan team check-ins during the event (e.g. “How are you feeling?”).
- Reflect and adapt if something is not working as expected.

Creating an inclusive environment during the event requires clear structure, consistent communication, and visible support. From the moment participants arrive, they should feel informed, respected, and that it is safe to engage. This starts with how the space is introduced, how expectations are set, and how support is communicated.

Actively Upholding a Respectful Environment

Creating a safe space is an ongoing process. It requires actively reinforcing agreed standards throughout the event. Consistency in implementing the Code of Conduct and

Safeguarding mechanisms will help maintain trust and accountability. Make sure to share the Code of Conduct and Safeguarding mechanisms with participants before the event.

This includes:

- Introduce the Code of Conduct alongside any safeguarding measures in place, and ensure that both participants and staff understand and agree to them.
- Act as an active bystander if inappropriate or harassing comments arise.
- Ensure all team members are prepared to respond to breaches of the Code of Conduct – make sure your safeguarding actually works and people get responses to their complaints/comments. Comments cannot be ignored.
- Remind participants to give trigger warnings when discussing sensitive topics.

Supporting Learning and Participation

Participants will arrive with different levels of knowledge and experience. Creating an environment where questions are welcomed supports inclusion and learning. Be open and approachable – for example, recognising that not everyone may be familiar with different pronouns, and offering opportunities for participants to approach you to ask questions.

Making Accessibility Visible and Proactive

Accessibility should be built into the event, not treated as an afterthought. At registration and departure points, ensure staff are available to:

- Guide participants to accessibility resources and support;
- Invite participants to share additional requirements or questions.

Clear communication helps participants feel supported and prepared.

Practical Considerations:

- Ensure sufficient staffing at registration and at the closing of the event to respond to issues or requests.
- Have a designated contact person available at all times.
- Be prepared to adapt your methodology based on participants' needs.
- Address people with disabilities directly, rather than through their assistant.
- When speaking with people with visual impairments, introduce yourself and others clearly, and explain your position in the space.
- Ask participants with hearing impairments how they prefer to communicate.
- Confront discriminatory behaviour immediately (e.g. racist remarks from speakers).

3.2 Facilitating Inclusive & Accessible Discussions

Facilitating inclusive activities requires active engagement and a commitment to creating a supportive environment. One of the key aspects of inclusive facilitation is adaptability. Facilitators should be prepared to modify their approach based on the needs of participants, ensuring that everyone can fully engage with the material. This might involve adjusting the pacing, offering additional explanations, or incorporating visual, auditory, and hands-on learning techniques. To make this possible, check in with participants during the session and be open to feedback.

Accessible facilitation is about removing barriers that hinder participation. For example, provide space for a wheelchair user to sit comfortably alongside other participants. In case your workshop has international sign language interpretation, please reserve space

for participants who are deaf or those with hearing impairments with a sign language interpreter who can sit in front and close to speakers.

Tips & Tricks

- Speak slowly.
- Use clear, jargon-free language, and no abbreviations.
- Provide multiple ways for participants to engage, including written, verbal, and non-verbal methods.
- Allow extra time for responses so that participants can think about their answers.
- Consider having breaks to leave time for processing information (e.g. a 10-minute break every hour or so).

3.3 Inclusive & Gender-Sensitive Moderation

Like facilitators, moderators and speakers play a central role in shaping the atmosphere of the consultation. Their approach can influence whether participants feel comfortable contributing, whether discussions remain respectful, and whether different perspectives are genuinely heard. Inclusive moderation is not only about managing speaking time, but also about recognising group dynamics, encouraging balanced participation, and creating space for diverse experiences and viewpoints.

Moderators should be aware of unconscious bias and ensure that discussions are facilitated in a fair and inclusive way. This includes using inclusive and gender-neutral language, paying attention to who speaks most or least, and catching if a speaker mentions terms the audience is not familiar with. The objective is not to create agreement, but to ensure that everyone can participate meaningfully and respectfully.

Accessibility should also be considered throughout presentations and discussions. Speakers should be informed in advance about any accessibility requirements and encouraged to communicate clearly and inclusively.

Recommendations for preparing speakers and presentations

- Encourage speakers to speak slowly, clearly, and at a moderate pace.
- Avoid unexplained acronyms, jargon, or non-descriptive language such as “here” or “as you can see”.
- Complex topics and technical language should be explained in an accessible way so that all participants can follow and engage with the discussion.
- Avoid acronyms.
- Ask speakers to verbally describe visual content and provide summaries during longer interventions.
- Ensure presentation materials use accessible formats, including readable fonts and sufficient contrast.
- Inform speakers about relevant accessibility requirements of participants.
- Check if the speaking area, lighting, and room setup are accessible for all participants.
- If you speak for more than 10 minutes about the same subject, make a summary.
- Ask for the presentations from speakers in advance.

Follow-up: After the event

You have successfully implemented your national consultation. Congratulations! Now what?

Inclusion is not a one-off task or simply a checklist to be ticked off – it is an ongoing process. A quick debrief immediately after each activity can help to address pressing issues and improve the following activities.

You may use the following questions as a guide:

- Was our activity inclusive and accessible?
- How did you feel about the group dynamics?
- Did we learn anything about inclusion or accessibility?
- What can we improve for the next activity?

Conduct a full debrief at a later stage with your colleagues to understand what went well and what can be improved. Remember to focus on the process, not the person, so both you and your organisation can implement concrete improvements for the future.

You may use the following questions as a guide:

- **Facts**
  - Follow-up with participants who required support to see what worked well and what didn't. Also make sure to check external places and services, such as the hotel where you booked, to see if there were any forms of discrimination experienced by participants.
  - Follow-up with the organisations you cooperated with that specifically represent or work with marginalised groups to see what worked well and what didn't.
  - What steps did we take to be more inclusive of our participants?
  - How effectively did we accommodate participants with diverse backgrounds and their different requirements?
  - Was there a case of lack of inclusion? How did we deal with it?
- **Feelings**
  - Were you satisfied with the level of inclusion in the activity?
  - Were all participants able to join in and contribute meaningfully?
  - Do you think everyone felt welcomed and valued?
- **Findings**
  - What did we learn about inclusion from our experience?
  - What newfound knowledge or experience can we transfer to our organisation?
- **Future**
  - What would you keep for future activities?
  - What would you do differently?



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