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THE BIG THING

**Guidelines on inclusion and accessibility for
trainers and facilitators**



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Opening Note

The Big Thing was a different training, at least different from what we, as trainers, usually do. I am still wondering for whom this experience was more meaningful, the participants or the trainers team?

The way we planned the learning process had the focus on providing accessible learning spaces for all. The reason to do so came from previous experiences in which, having a mixed group, with participants with and without disabilities, at some point along the way those activities were not so inclusive, the learners with disabilities had to run behind the others to keep themselves in the learning path, because we, as trainers, could be able to adapt to their needs, but the rest of the group (the ones without disabilities) might not wait for anyone. And as much as the physical space needs to be accessible, the materials must be adapted to the different accessibility needs, also the rhythm of the learning must be taken into consideration. Working with deaf participants means working with sign language interpreters, and interpretation needs time. Working with blind participants means descriptions and explanations from accompanying persons, and it needs time. Working with wheelchair users means that the accessible way is longer, the elevator gets stuck... and it needs time. Having parallel processes, in which each group could learn following their own path, having a common goal, made sense. And then, probably the biggest challenge, was to bring them all together in the same room and let them develop their own learning process together.

Another difference with other trainings was that, at the end of the day, the team meeting did not include only the trainers, but Sign Language interpreters, accompanying persons, personal assistants... because we all were a team, and it was important to listen to each other concerns, and understand what was going to happen the next day, where would they be needed the most, how to balance the energy...

The Big Thing trainings, national and transnational, were an incredible team work in which individuals played a very important role, bringing their own values, experiences, expertise and needs to build together an accessible learning path and we, trainers, only supported the process bringing topics, principles, competences and methods that would facilitate the discovery of what, for each of them, being a trainer means.

You will not find in this document a guide of methods and activities to use in your trainings, but some recommendations, the outcomes of our own learning process as trainers in The Big Thing, that could be useful for you in your future practice. Nowadays some of those recommendations are pure logic for us, but 8 or 6 months ago they were the most amazing realization. We also hope that what you will find in the following pages will encourage you to take the next step in this diverse world, that you are not afraid of working with participants and trainers with disabilities, and that they are needed if we want to talk about inclusion and accessibility. We wish you a beautiful and inclusive learning experience.

Viki H. Alonso (Trainers' team coordinator)

Everything is possible when you have the right support.

Movement is key for those who talk with their bodies

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1. Introduction

The Big Thing (TBT) is an Erasmus+ Partnership for Cooperation project whose main objective is to promote the inclusion of people with diverse abilities in youth work and non-formal education across Europe.

TBT focuses on empowering young people by providing them with the necessary skills, knowledge, attitudes and competences to develop and implement inclusion-based training programmes.

This project directly involved 21 young people with functional diversity, including people with hearing impairments, wheelchair users and people with visual impairments. By basing their training on the ETS competence model, TBT ensured that participants have received quality preparation to become trainers and facilitators in non-formal education and youth participation settings.

This guide is the key outcome of The Big Thing project: a structured design to provide trainers, facilitators, youth workers, social organisations and public institutions with practical recommendations for improving the creation of inclusive learning environments. It offers concrete strategies and methodologies to improve and design new spaces, materials and dynamics based on the specific needs of diverse groups of young people with diverse abilities.

By encouraging and promoting these practices, this guide aims to create a more inclusive and equitable environment in youth work and non-formal education.

The Big Thing project is a collaborative effort between three partner organizations:

- **Arkhe** (Spain): An organization with over 20 years of experience in developing and implementing non-formal education activities, focusing on inclusion, equality, and social engagement. Through summer camps, rural and neighbourhood revitalisation and international mobility projects Erasmus +, Arkhe supports the development of people and communities in rural areas. Arkhe coordinates TBT due to the identified need to train and work with trainers with disabilities in rural areas.
- **ZAVOD ODTIZ** (Slovenia): An institute with over 13 years of experience in performing educational, research, social and other non-profit activities. They are dedicated to inclusion and to creating a junction of opportunities for disabled and non-disabled individuals, with a strong commitment to empower especially those with physical disabilities by encouraging their active participation. ODTIZ Institute joined the TBT project because they advocate for increasing the number of physically disabled trainers in non-formal education, as they strongly believe that their unique perspective and experiences are a great asset to the world of Erasmus+ and youth work.
- **VEIEWS International** (Belgium): An European non-governmental organization working to promote the independence, mobility, and social inclusion of young people with visual impairments. Through international mobility projects under Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps, VIEWS supports visually impaired youth in developing autonomy and confidence, whether through volunteering, training, or internships. VIEWS International joined “The Big Thing” project to help make youth work and non-formal education more inclusive and accessible. With accessible methodologies and diverse and inclusive learning environments, more persons with visual impairments will have real opportunities to develop as trainers and facilitators—on equal footing with their peers.

2. Creating an inclusive environment for participants with disabilities

This section provides general guidance for trainers working with diverse groups, particularly those including participants with varying abilities and needs. Creating an inclusive learning environment means going beyond “one-size-fits-all” approaches and embracing flexibility, adaptability, and participant-centred planning. The following practices focus on methodologies, materials, human resources, and individual needs to help trainers build truly inclusive spaces.

2.1 Methodologies and Methods

Inclusive learning begins with intentional planning and a willingness to adapt your methods to the group in front of you. This section explores foundational approaches like Universal Design for Learning and experiential learning, while offering practical suggestions to improve clarity, communication, and flexibility. By designing with accessibility in mind from the beginning, trainers can create rich learning experiences for all participants. Trainers are encouraged to:

- **Follow the principles of Universal Design for Learning.** Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework that supports the design of learning experiences that are accessible and engaging for everyone. UDL encourages flexibility in how information is presented, how participants express what they know, and how they stay engaged in the process. Integrating UDL principles means thinking ahead to remove barriers and offering multiple ways for participants to learn and contribute;
- **Communicate clearly and simply.** Avoid jargon and complex metaphors. Use straightforward language and support your message with multiple formats—verbal, visual, and written. This not only respects diverse learning styles but also enhances understanding. Make it a habit to pause and check for comprehension, encouraging participants to ask questions or request clarification;
- **Plan ahead and structure activities.** Provide clear instructions, calendars, and agendas well before each activity. Break activities into manageable steps with flexible timelines. Setting expectations early around participation and behavior helps establish a safe and respectful space where everyone knows what to expect;
- **Use experiential learning.** Hands-on activities—like those involving movement, sensory elements, or creative expression—create richer, more inclusive learning environments. Always pair experiential learning with reflection: give participants time and space to process what they experienced and relate it to their own contexts;
- **Be ready to adapt.** Flexibility is key. Participants may need adjustments to the schedule, method, or pace of activities. Be open to experimenting, learning as you go, and changing plans based on what’s working. Managing time differently—allowing for slower pacing or extra time for transitions—can make a big difference.
- **Create and seize feedback opportunities.** Regular chances to give and receive feedback to improve the training experience, including accessible feedback methods. Providing channels for participants to give feedback on the training and making adjustments as needed to improve inclusivity.

2.2 Materials and Tools

Materials and tools are the backbone of any training activity—and making them accessible is essential. This section outlines how to provide materials in multiple formats, leverage assistive technologies, and integrate both digital and sensory tools to ensure everyone can engage comfortably and confidently.

- **Make materials accessible.** Ensure that all materials are available in a variety of accessible formats, such as large print, Braille, easy-to-read language, or digital formats compatible with screen readers. Also consider providing visual alternatives or sign language interpretation where needed.
- **Integrate assistive technologies.** Be prepared to accommodate different technological needs, including captioning tools, Braille displays, or magnification software. Collaborate with participants to identify and provide what they need to engage fully.
- **Use collaborative and sensory tools.** Digital tools like Google Drive, Padlet, or Trello can promote real-time collaboration and information sharing. Sensory tools—like textured materials or calming scents—can enhance comfort and focus, especially in longer sessions.

2.2 Human Resources

People are at the heart of inclusive facilitation. From interpreters and assistants to co-facilitators with lived experience, this section highlights how human resources contribute to an inclusive training environment. Clear roles, strong communication, and mutual respect are key to ensuring everyone involved can support participants effectively.

- **Work with interpreters and assistants.** Support staff such as interpreters or personal assistants play a vital role in fostering inclusion. Include them in planning discussions, share materials ahead of time, and ensure they're part of regular team meetings to stay aligned with participant needs.
- **Consider co-facilitation.** Co-facilitation, particularly with trainers who have lived experience of disability or functional diversity, can enrich the learning space and promote equality. Communicate openly with co-facilitators and participants alike, and ensure that everyone feels respected in their role and contributions.

2.3 Specific Needs

Inclusion means understanding and responding to the specific needs of each individual. This section provides guidance on gathering information from participants, designing accessible environments, and supporting autonomy. It also encourages awareness of intersectionality and the complex identities that shape how people experience your training space.

- **Tailor your approach.** Each participant brings unique needs, strengths, and preferences. Use intake forms, interviews, or informal conversations to understand individual needs without making assumptions. Treat each person as an expert in their own experience.
- **Consider accessibility in all dimensions.** Ensure that venues are physically accessible and that communication supports (like interpreters or captioning) are in place. Transportation, lighting, signage, and sound should all be considered in planning.
- **Encourage autonomy and agency.** Support participants in being as independent as possible, offering help only when it's needed or requested. Foster an environment where everyone feels confident and capable of contributing meaningfully.



- **Respect intersectionality.** Recognize that diversity isn't one-dimensional. Participants may navigate multiple identities and experiences that shape how they engage. Be attentive to these overlapping dynamics and be ready to adjust your approach if new challenges or needs arise.
- **Be adaptable.** Be prepared to adjust the training content, delivery methods, and schedules to accommodate the needs of all participants.

3. Responding to the specific requirements of participants with hearing, visual and physical impairments

3.1 Persons with Hearing impairments

In order to ensure the creation of inclusive training spaces for people with hearing impairment, the work of trainers must take into account adapted methodologies, needs-oriented tools and the analysis of specific communication barriers taking into account the wide diversity of the spectrum. It is crucial to remember that hearing impairment is a spectrum, and individuals will have varying needs and preferences.

This section deals with strategies that have proven to be effective for trainers working with this particular target group after the project has been realised. Specifically, methodological strategies, related to materials or human resources, and in relation to specific needs are shown.

3.1.1. Specific methodologies and methods used (based on ETS model)

- **Visual learning:** The information given for each activity should be based on the use of posters, infographics and structured presentations, giving participants' time to explore the materials before explaining them, and afterwards to identify any questions that may have arisen. An example might be to take a joint gallery tour of infographics detailing the steps and materials covered in each phase of the upcoming activity.
- **Body learning:** Expression through movement and spatial awareness is common for deaf participants. Emphasising the importance of body language and physical representation of concepts improves cognitive processing and enhances the communicator's perception of engagement from the participant's perspective. For example role-playing or theatre techniques are very useful for group dynamics.
- **Clarity and structuring:** When dealing with something new, deaf people often experience a lack of clear information and multiple communication barriers. Use sequenced expressions, provide a summary of each activity before it starts (in visual format) and repeat key points, reinforcing them visually, during the activity.
- **Direct and explicit communication:** Explanations, as reflected in sign language, do not rely on metaphors, but make explicit what is expressed. Complex figurative language should be avoided, and straightforward explanations should be ensured. For example, the expression 'breaking the ice' for an activity is less descriptive than 'getting to know each other'.
- **Learning by doing:** Based on experiential learning as a principle of non-formal education, a clear explanation of this methodology, expectations and objectives should be generated. For example, when approaching a training activity, a table of contents and a review of the contents, followed by a detailed schedule of the session, accompanied by time to reflect on and analyse each of the topics presented.
- **Peer support:** Intentional efforts should be made to foster a welcoming and inclusive group atmosphere. Ice-breaking activities allow participants to connect beyond the formal training content. Mutual assistance and the sharing of lived experiences can and should be encouraged in a way that promotes solidarity: assigning small group tasks, encouraging co-facilitation opportunities, or creating

informal buddy systems can help build trust and empower participants to support each other in ways that feel natural and respectful. Positive peer interaction not only reinforces individual confidence, but also enriches the overall learning experience.

3.1.2. Suggested materials and need-oriented tools

- Sign language has to be considered, as well as written materials in the native language of the participants, guaranteeing access to all content in both formats, thus favouring their understanding.
- Visual facilitation in the generation of materials, incorporating drawings, diagrams and descriptive text is key to comprehensive understanding.
- Incorporating the interactivity of the elements and materials incorporated in the activity improves the development of the activities, such as spaces for movement-based activities, interactive murals, etc.
- Again, body language is essential together with visual representation, for example using gesture maps to express ideas about a concept.

3.1.3. Recommendations when working with human resources for this specific group

It is considered advisable to have sign language interpreters, and if available:

- Ensure that trainers speak directly to the participant, not to the interpreter.
- Check that interpreters are familiar with non-formal education methodologies to facilitate smooth communication.
- Take into account the duration of activities, as the presence of interpreters may require more frequent breaks.
- If possible, give priority to trainers who are fluent in sign language so as not to rely solely on interpreters.
- In terms of group dynamics and team collaboration, there are several aspects to take into account in order to create an inclusive space for these participants
- When dividing the group into small groups, ensure that there are enough interpreters available for effective communication.
- Provide visual cues or assign a facilitator for each group to help guide discussions without conflict.
- Include interpreters in preparation meetings to ensure that they understand and are familiar with the training content and methodologies.
- Provide materials in advance to both participants and interpreters, giving them time to familiarise themselves with key concepts.

3.1.4. How to address individual inclusion needs in this specific group

Here it is necessary to take into account the diversity of needs contained in this group:

- Sign language users: the communication barriers they face on a daily basis should be recognised and addressed. These users rely on direct and visual communication, so training must guarantee their linguistic rights, ensuring that sign language interpretation is available whenever necessary.
- Deaf participants with oralist hearing difficulties: Participants who rely on lip-reading will need clear visibility of the speaker's face. This includes maintaining eye contact, avoiding turning around while speaking, keeping the mouth uncovered and speaking

at a natural pace, and providing speech-to-text or real-time captioning software or tools where possible.

- In mixed communication groups (with sign language users and oralists) ensure the availability of sign language interpreters as well as written communication and visual representation tools. It is useful to identify each participant's preferred method of communication at the beginning of the session.

3.1.5. Inclusion in ETS competence model

Difficulties in fully understanding the ETS competence model were identified at the outset due to the broad text format.

A visual representation solution was implemented, with the competences as interconnected elements on a poster (simulating a constellation of competences) making the abstract concepts more tangible.

For future trainings it is recommended to include sign language translations of the ETS model and the generation of an easy-to-read version for accessibility.

By implementing these strategies and methodologies, fostering an inclusive and more efficient learning environment geared to the needs of the participants, accessibility beyond physical adaptations is ensured, that is, a visual, interactive and embodied learning approach is being pursued.

3.2 Persons with visual impairments

3.2.1. Specific methodologies and methods used (based on ETS model)

When designing hybrid training sessions for participants with visual impairments, it is essential to ensure that both online and in-person components are fully accessible and inclusive. Training should be based on non-formal, participatory, and peer-to-peer methodologies, with appropriate adaptations for each format. Clear and timely communication before the training is key—providing participants with detailed programme information, practical guidance, and accessible tools supports active engagement and helps ensure that each module runs smoothly.

Online Training Sessions

As virtual sessions can rely on less interactive prompts, they need to be carefully structured to foster active participation and engagement. In the case of visually impaired participants, online sessions should avoid or supplement communication methods that might not be fully accessible, such as visual aids (infographics, slides, images) and body language cues.

To maximize engagement, the trainer can use a variety of interactive methods, including plenary discussions, brainstorming, role plays, and simulations. These techniques encourage voluntary participation while fostering a conscious, holistic learning environment that places participants at the centre of their learning journey.

During a virtual training session, it is important to consider ensuring that some adaptations are in place:

- **Digital Accessibility.** Share materials and resources in accessible digital formats before, during, and after each session, to allow participants to familiarise themselves with the digital materials and revisit them after the training session. Platforms like Google Suite (Docs, Forms, etc.) allow participants to work collaboratively, modify content, and download files in accessible formats such as PDFs;
- **Video conferencing platforms accessibility.** Pre-dict accessible videoconferencing platforms and familiarise yourself with its accessibility features, such as Google Meet, which supports users with screen readers. It is important to ensure that all participants are familiar with the chosen digital tools and that they are offered adaptations that respond to their specific requirements. To ensure platform usability, a good practice is to consult participants with visual impairments on the most relevant keystrokes and navigation tips;
- **Voice-Based Guidance.** Use clear verbal instructions to guide participants through transitions, such as shifting between plenary and breakout sessions, and to provide additional information when needed.

In-Person Training Sessions

The in-person activities are based on the same principles, but they offer a more dynamic and sensory-rich environment. In this case, the focus can be shifted on experiential learning, with an emphasis on avoiding traditional lecture-based methods. The following specific adaptations need to be considered:

- **Sensory-Enhanced Materials:** Where Braille materials are unavailable, provide training materials designed to engage other senses.
- **Spatial Awareness and Organization:** Keetems and materials were kept in consistent locations, and participants were informed if objects or room layouts were changed. Trainers described the setting at the start of each session (e.g., arranging chairs in a circle for introductions or tables for group activities). Any changes to the room's configuration were made during breaks, with clear updates provided to participants.
- **Navigation Support:** Participants were offered guidance to help them move autonomously within the training venue. This was done by discussing individual preferences—some participants opted for personal assistance, while others chose to navigate independently.
- **Voice as a Reference Point:** Trainers used their voices to guide participants during transitions and to share additional instructions and materials.
- **Breaks and Reflection Spaces:** Regular breaks were provided, giving participants time to relax, reflect, and share insights with peers and facilitators.
- **Accessibility for Digital Device Users:** Adequate space was arranged to allow participants to use digital devices and screen readers without interfering with each other's learning experience.

3.2.2. Suggested materials and need-oriented tools

To create an inclusive and accessible learning environment for participants with visual impairments, it is essential to adapt both physical and digital materials to meet their specific needs. Below are recommendations based on effective practices:

- When using physical materials such as plasticine, paper, or textured objects, it is important to clearly indicate their placement, allowing participants to independently access and choose what they need. Incorporating tactile elements in traditionally visual activities, such as creating posters, can also enhance participation by allowing engagement through touch—for example, by adding textured shapes or models.
- Certain methodologies that rely on body awareness may require additional adjustments. It is advisable to have individual discussions with participants to assess their comfort level and willingness to explore such activities, ensuring that their experience is positive and adapted to their preferences. For activities involving spontaneous participation, where visual cues like eye contact might otherwise guide the process, a tangible signalling method can make a significant difference. VIEWS has successfully implemented this by using a stone as a speaking token during group discussions. After speaking, participants place the stone back in the centre, allowing others to pick it up when they are ready to contribute. This small adaptation helped create a more inclusive dynamic and allowed everyone to participate comfortably.
- Digital resources play a key role in enhancing accessibility before, during, and after training sessions. Sharing materials in advance provides participants with time to familiarize themselves with the content. Google Suite (Docs, Forms, etc.) is particularly effective, as it allows participants with visual impairments to adapt, edit, and download materials in formats that best suit their needs. VIEWS has also created

a dedicated folder containing additional resources, documents, and links to give participants the opportunity to explore key topics in greater depth.

- When preparing digital documents, it is essential to follow specific accessibility guidelines. Both Google Docs and Word files should have a structured, clear layout that facilitates navigation for participants using screen readers or magnification software. Adding descriptive alternative text (alt-text) to images and graphics is another important step, ensuring that visually impaired participants can fully understand the visual components of the materials.

For further guidance on creating accessible content, useful resources can also be found on the [European Blind Union](#) and [European Disability Forum](#)'s websites, as well as consulting the [W3C Web Accessibility Initiative](#), as well as the [ADD@ME project platform](#), which provides detailed recommendations on accessible documents and websites.

3.2.3 Recommendations when working with human resources for this specific group

Accompanying persons play a crucial role in ensuring that participants with visual impairments can fully engage in training activities and navigate their surroundings with confidence. Their presence helps address specific accessibility needs, such as providing vocal descriptions of visual cues, assisting with mobility in unfamiliar spaces, and supporting the arrangement of materials and spaces during sessions. They also contribute to a smoother overall experience by offering practical support during breaks and meals and by facilitating communication, especially in dynamic group settings.

Accompanying persons and assistants should ideally possess the following skills and competencies:

- **Digital Literacy** – Proficiency in digital tools to assist with accessible materials and communication.
- **Communication Skills** – Strong interpersonal skills to effectively address specific needs and facilitate smooth interaction.
- **English Proficiency** – Ability to communicate fluently in English, particularly in international training contexts.
- **Experience with Visual Impairment** – Previous experience in assisting people with visual impairments to ensure familiarity with common needs and effective support techniques.
- **Spatial and Visual Assistance Skills** – Ability to provide visual feedback, manage the space, and arrange materials for the smooth implementation of activities.
- **Empathy and Flexibility** – A capacity for patience, adaptability, and understanding, which are essential for effective collaboration.

To ensure that human resources are well-prepared, it is important to take the following steps before and during the training:

- **Clarify Roles and Responsibilities** – Clearly define the role of the accompanying person and the specific tasks they will carry out during the different phases of the training (preparation, implementation, and follow-up).

- **Provide Orientation** – Offer a briefing on the training venue, schedule, and content so that accompanying persons can guide trainers and participants effectively.
- **Involve Accompanying Persons in Preparation Meetings** – Include them in planning sessions to ensure they are familiar with the training content, methodologies, and logistics.
- **Share Materials in Advance** – Provide both participants and accompanying persons with key documents, training resources, and schedules ahead of time to allow sufficient preparation.
- **Emphasize Tailored Support Tasks** – Prepare accompanying persons to carry out tasks tailored to the needs of visually impaired trainers, including:
 - Offering guidance in unfamiliar spaces and rooms;
 - Supporting materials handling and space management during sessions;
 - Assisting during coffee breaks and meals when needed.

3.2.4. How to address individual inclusion needs in this specific group

When implementing individual activities, it is important to provide participants with visual impairments with a clear description of the environment, enabling them to independently choose their preferred location. Trainers and assistants should remain accessible, if requested, including through digital communication channels (e.g., WhatsApp), to offer support while maintaining a balance between autonomy and assistance.

In line with its mission and values, the VIEWS training team has been available from the outset to support participants as needed.

These actions have been implemented through the following approaches:

- **Individual and Group Emails** – Regular communication to keep participants informed and engaged.
- **Individual and Group Online Meetings** – Arranged upon request to address specific questions and provide tailored guidance.
- **Individual and Group Discussions** – Creating a safe and open environment where participants can freely express their needs and concerns.
- **In-Person Meetings** – Scheduled as needed to ensure a participant-centred approach that prioritizes attendees' requests and allows them to articulate their specific requirements.

For example, ahead of sessions where participants take on a trainer role, it can be helpful to facilitate preparatory discussions with those in supportive roles. These meetings can focus on key aspects such as material preparation, required assistance during the session, delivery of the training, and follow-up support. Additionally, it is important to allocate time and space for such discussions during the evaluation phase, ensuring a thorough and inclusive review process that reflects the experiences and feedback of all participants.

3.2.5. Inclusion in ETS competence model

In both online and offline training sessions, the VIEWS training team has implemented the agreed ETS (European Training Strategy) competence modules. Recognizing accessibility challenges, the team worked on improving the self-assessment tool, as its Excel format was

not fully compatible with screen readers and digital devices used by individuals with visual impairments. Additionally, its usability varied depending on participants' digital skills.

As previously discussed, the preferred tools are those that require no modifications to document structures for accessibility. Online forms, for example, can be adapted for visually impaired participants while retaining visual elements such as graphs and tables when necessary. To enhance accessibility, VIEWS developed an initial Microsoft Forms version featuring the first set of questions. Additionally, an alternative version was provided, including text-based documents and a Word file with detailed instructions on navigating the original Excel model using screen readers, along with specific guidelines to facilitate its use.

3.3 Persons with physical impairments

In order to ensure the creation of inclusive training spaces for people with physical impairment, choosing the space with the right characteristics to carry out the trainings is crucial, together with choosing the appropriate materials and tools for usage, according to their abilities. Flexibility on adjusting training methodologies on the fly is also very important when working with this target group, as well as taking into account the additional human resources that need to be included in the training sessions, in order to ensure equal active participation for everyone, as much as possible. It is important to remember that physical impairment means a wide and diverse spectrum of individuals that vary in their needs and preferences.

This section deals with different strategies that have proven to be effective and useful for trainers working with this particular target group, as well as for the participants belonging to this particular target group. Specifically, methodological strategies, related to materials or human resources, and in relation to specific needs are shown.

3.3.1. Specific methodologies and methods used (based on ETS model)

- **Spatial Awareness and Organization:** When working with physically impaired individuals it is important to choose and prepare the training space properly. The chosen space must be wheelchair accessible and big enough, so that people with different types of wheelchairs or other physical aids can move around. Usually, more space between objects is needed, ie. chairs, tables, wide enough corridors etc. Materials to use, foods and drinks need to be in reachable places - not too low or too high, not too far from the edge. Mainly tables are needed to put materials on, like markers, cards to choose, etc. For the centre of the circle a bit higher level can be used so that the wheelchair users can take a talking piece for example, but it still shouldn't be too high as they are not tall when sitting in a wheelchair. It is handy if the centre is movable so it can be moved around when needed. For the outdoor spaces, the surface materials and passages need to be checked in advance. Some grass, soil, sand are ok if solid enough. Passages might be tricky with width or inclination. Pay attention to the loudness of the sound, noises when talking in pairs or smaller groups. Some of the physically impaired might not be able to speak loud due to their diagnosis. Some may also be sensitive to cold or hot air, as they can't regulate body temperature well, so do check on this in advance as well.
- **Adapted methods which include physical activity:** When working with physically impaired individuals the choosing of methods and methodologies for the trainings mainly depends on how much they can move their bodies (hands, upper part of the body, in which direction they can move head, etc.) and how they can move their wheelchair (if they need one). If for example, they can't move their hands, we can go with "shake your head, move the wheelchair or make a beep" instead of "raise your hand", etc. Agreements on how somebody is most comfortable moving and expressing themselves physically is advised to be discussed with each individual ahead of the activity, which will also allow the trainer to incorporate diverse ways of movements at the same time.
- **Learning by example:** When a physically impaired individual is asked to do something that involves some kind of physical activity (a specific movement or a

drawing for example), it is advised that clear verbal instructions are combined with a given example of the expected end result for a better understanding. Sometimes you can also guide an individual's body through a specific movement for them to get a better sensation of what they are supposed to be doing. Before giving body guidance, ask for permission of course,

- **Using voice-activated, visual and breathing exercises:** When less mobility, methodologies with voices work well. Inner sensations of the body, connection with the body can still happen for most of the physically impaired individuals. We can always use breathing techniques, laughter yoga, visualisation, etc. during the activities. Of course, this depends on how much they are used to it, like with everybody else. If framed well by a trainer, it works well.
- **Teamwork:** Putting physically impaired individuals in groups during an activity is a good idea. That way they can help and support each other with their tasks, tools and usage of materials. For example, if we use a talking piece that is circling, the neighbours or assistants can help with passing the object.
- **Long enough breaks and reflection spaces:** Individuals with physical impairment need regular breaks during the activities, which give them time to relax a bit. To use the toilet when you are physically impaired usually takes some more time, so it is important to have long enough breaks, so that each individual has time to take care for his biological needs, like everybody else. If there are more wheelchair users, breaks need adaptation according to the number of available accessible toilets, the number and size of available elevators etc. Lunch break needs to be long enough especially when assistance is needed with eating. Regular reflection time that allows everyone to share their insights with peers and facilitators is also very important. Finally, the physically impaired might get tired a bit quicker, so shorter working days are advised.
- **Digitally accessible materials and resources:** Some physically impaired individuals might find it easier to collaborate and give their contributions using digital devices. Therefore, it is important to convert and share all important materials and resources in digital form as well, before, during or after each training session, depending on the context. Digital platform Google Suite (Drive, Docs, Forms, etc.) has shown itself to be the most useful and preferred platform when it comes to sharing, modifying or downloading accessible digital materials.

3.3.2. Suggested materials and need-oriented tools

To create an inclusive and accessible learning environment for participants with physical impairments it is essential to adapt both physical and digital materials to meet their specific needs. Below are some recommendations, based on effective practices during “The Big Thing” trainings:

- **If possible, use light objects, easy to move around:** When working with individuals with physical impairment, you might need to move objects around frequently in order to adjust the space properly for each activity. Therefore, we advise the use of light, movable objects, such as tables on wheels, portable circle centre and light chairs.
- **Usage of portable wheelchair ramps:** If needed, check where you could buy or rent portable wheelchair ramps. They can help a wheelchair user to overcome a small

number of steps or a small threshold and make an otherwise inaccessible space, accessible. But be careful with the inclination and width of the ramp – it mustn't be too steep or too narrow.

- **Use bigger and soft objects:** When physically impaired individuals pass or throw objects to each other during an activity, they can involuntarily drop them or throw them too hard, this is why it is important that these objects are unbreakable and soft, so that they can not hurt anyone. If they are a bit bigger it is also harder for them to slip out of hand.
- **Use more materials that require gross motor skills and less materials that require fine motor skills:** Most physically impaired individuals have difficulties performing precise movements and using materials that involve a precise grip, such as small post its, cubicles or pins – using materials like these requires a lot of energy from them and makes them get tired quicker. So instead use larger materials that are easier to grip and control, such as markers, flipcharts and painter's tape.
- **Use materials at a reachable height:** Especially when working with wheelchair users, it is important that used materials are put at a reachable level for their hands and eyes. This is why standard height tables are usually the best choice to put materials on and adjustable height white boards or portable flipcharts are the best choice to write things on.
- **Usage of digital tools and digital platforms for active participation and sharing materials:** Due to their mobility issues, some physically impaired individuals might prefer to use digital devices during an activity, as it allows them to participate more actively and contribute quicker. Enable this for them, by allowing sharing, modifying and downloading materials in digital platforms, such as Google Suite.
- **Allow assistance participation in activities:** Some physically impaired individuals might need additional support in carrying out an activity, in the form of personal assistance. Allow this support as it will enable this individual to participate fully within his abilities, without becoming frustrated or too tired. Also, calculate more time for the completion of activities that require physical effort.

3.3.3 Recommendations when working with human resources for this specific group

When it comes to individuals with physical impairment, their personal assistants can play a crucial role in ensuring that these individuals can fully participate in the training process, as well as that they are navigating their environmental challenges with confidence. The presence of a personal assistant can contribute for a physically impaired individual to have an overall smoother training experience, as assistants help to address specific accessibility needs and can offer practical support during training sessions, break time and meals. But the amount of time the presence of a personal assistant is needed is different with each physically impaired individual – some of them need personal assistance with them 24/7 for personal hygiene, feeding, changing body positions etc., while others may need personal assistance just with some particular activities, like handling project materials or navigating in dynamic group settings for example.

- This is why it is very important that **the roles and the responsibilities of a personal assistant are agreed on in advance:** Is the assistant going to be assisting full time? Is he going to be partly assisting and partly a participant in the activities? Is he not

going to be present at all when not needed? These are all important questions that need to be discussed in advance with all involved parties;

- When possible, it is advised to **include personal assistants in the preparatory meetings**: this will allow them to familiarize themselves with the program and its activities in advance, thus enabling them to anticipate when and how their presence is going to be needed;
- Because the need for personal assistance can vary from an individual to individual and from session to session, it is very important that **the trainer is aware of this in advance and stays flexible about the number of people present in each session**. It is advised that the number of people present is discussed before each session, so that the methodologies can be adapted accordingly;
- Because the training process is something that is changing constantly, **regular reflection sessions with all involved parties** are highly advised;
- It is good if the **physically impaired individual and his personal assistant already know each other and had been working together before entering a training process**: that brings a certain amount of ease and flexibility to the process, from both sites.

The role of a personal assistant when an individual with physical impairment is actually a trainer is still under exploration, but practical tasks during the TBT training sessions have helped us come to the following conclusions so far:

- When you are a trainer with a physical disability you need support for preparing the space before the session
- When you are a trainer with a physical disability you need support for handing out some of the materials during the session
- When you are a trainer with a physical disability you need support for preparing the coffee breaks in between sessions and for cleaning up the place after the session

Whatever their role, always treat assistants as part of the team and try to include them in the process as much as possible!

3.3.4 How to address individual inclusion needs in this specific group

When it comes to physically impaired individuals, they vary a lot in their abilities, specific needs and preferences, as already mentioned above.

This is why **it is of crucial importance to have individual online or in-person meetings with them in advance of the training**: this will enable you to get to know each member of the group, their needs and preferences, thus you can anticipate a certain group dynamic. **Especially when you have wheelchair users within the group it is important to ensure a space and materials appropriate for them to use during the training**: The space has to be big enough for everybody to be able to move around, with no stairs or equipped with big enough elevators, close to the accessible toilets. If needed, portable wheelchair ramps are useful for overcoming small steps and thresholds. Use chairs and tables that are easy to move around. The materials are advised to be softer and of the appropriate size, so that they are easy to hold and to pass around, without acquiring too many fine motor skills. They have to be put at a reachable height when sitting.

Calculate an appropriate length of the working day and breaks: Depending on their abilities, the number of accessible toilets and the number of elevators, physically impaired individuals might need longer break times to take care of their needs. It is the trainer's job to take this into account and to incorporate it within a working day time. Because physically impaired individuals might get tired quicker, shorter working days are also advised.

Be open to the presence of personal assistant(s) during a training session: Depending on their abilities, some physically impaired individuals might need personal assistant(s) with them to be able to participate within an activity. As a trainer, embrace that, and adapt the session accordingly.

Be open to the use of digital devices and digital platforms during training sessions: Depending on their abilities, some physically impaired individuals might prefer to use digital devices for writing, sharing and modifying materials, as it allows them to contribute quicker. As a trainer, be open to that and create training materials that can also be used in digital forms on digital platforms.

Be observant of participants' needs and ensure enough time for regular reflections: When it comes to people with physical impairment, their physical capacities and level of tiredness can vary from day to day, or from session to session. This is why as a trainer it is important to be observant of their needs and preferences at any given moment and adapt accordingly. In connection to that, it is also very important to ensure regular reflection time, where you can check on the well-being of your participants and see if any changes need to be done to the training process.

Stay open-minded and try not to assume: As a trainer, try to create a space for open communication with your participants. Have an open discussion about their abilities and if something is unclear, it is ok to ask. Do not automatically assume that they need support with something and if they decline support, respect this. Divide the roles within the group respectfully but not patronizingly – if something is out of their ability to do, the participants will tell you.

3.3.5. Inclusion in ETS competence model

When training future trainers with various types of physical disabilities within the TBT trainings, we tried to follow the ETS competence model as much as possible. The ETS competence model was introduced to the future trainers during the training sessions as well.

For the introduction of the ETS competence model, we used competence description cards (Hold your aces) as possible guidelines or inspiration. English descriptions worked fine for the group, and they were able to understand them.

There was much written, so not everyone was able to read all of them on the spot. The text on the cards was also quite small, so some of the physically impaired who also have partially impaired vision had trouble reading them. These two issues were solved by writing the text on the cards in a digital Word document and shared via Google Drive link where participants were able to read everything in peace in their preferable font and size. No further needs of adaptation for the better understanding and following of the ETS competences model were noticeable in relation to training future physically impaired trainers.

4. Some useful tips when collaborating with trainers with disabilities

Hiring a trainer with disabilities to deliver a course can bring strong added value. It is often more impactful when someone who has experienced exclusion speaks about inclusion. While not all persons with disabilities are inclusive by definition, certain environments benefit from the presence of someone with shared lived experience. When a specific disability is involved, this direct and practical knowledge is also key to understanding and addressing participants' access needs — for instance, quickly assessing whether a method or document is accessible.

However, having a disability does not automatically mean being inclusive. Not all persons with disabilities are informed or equipped to meet the inclusion requirements of a mixed audience. Specific combinations of disabilities may create additional challenges. As Belgian participants highlighted, working with deaf people can be especially complex for visually impaired trainers, who rely heavily on auditory input. Even with interpretation, it is difficult for them to read tone, energy, or personality cues. For every disability present in the room, trainers must be briefed on how it works and what accommodations are necessary to ensure equal participation.

When collaborating with a trainer with disabilities, it is useful to assign an accessibility focal point in the team. This person supports the trainer in adapting content and ensures access requirements are met. It is also advisable to provide (or fund) a personal assistant to help with communication. For example, a visually impaired trainer may need someone to relay participants' visual reactions, especially in dynamic or mixed group settings.

Support and complementarity are essential. A Belgian trainer shared that while she could run sessions independently with blind or visually impaired participants, mixed groups required more adjustments. Even though she preferred to facilitate activities alone to build rapport, she recognised that an assistant was crucial to bridge the gap in visual or synaesthetic input. This support enhanced her connection with the group and helped adapt methodologies to suit everyone's needs.

A strong co-trainer can also play a key role. They bring balance to the learning experience and enable the trainer with disabilities to fully perform. Ideally, the co-trainer's skills complement those of the main trainer. For example, if the trainer is blind, a co-trainer skilled in visual or graphic facilitation can ensure the group's diverse learning styles are supported.

In non-formal education, flexibility is essential but thorough planning is crucial. The trainer, co-trainer, and assistant should coordinate well in advance of the course to identify access needs and adjust methods accordingly. This preparation sets clear expectations and enables the team to adapt more easily to unforeseen changes. Effective communication is vital: clearly defining roles and responsibilities early on helps avoid disruptions and confusion. Additionally, any changes to the event schedule should be shared as early as

possible to give trainers adequate time to revise their approach and become familiar with new tasks.

It is also important for trainers with disabilities to familiarise themselves with the space ahead of time. Evaluating the lighting, acoustics, access routes, and overall layout can make a big difference in navigating the training environment. This is equally valuable for co-trainers without disabilities, as it sharpens spatial awareness and supports proactive responses to obstacles or changes.

A short summary for trainers

- Establish the presence of a personal assistant to support trainers with disabilities in their function
- Work on complementary skills and methodologies for mixed audiences
- Discuss in advance accessibility needs and adapted methodologies
- Dedicate time to get to know together participants and the environment where the event will take place
- Be aware of the surroundings during the training sessions to prevent unnecessary disruptions.

5. Conclusions

One main message stands out in this guide: inclusion does not happen by chance. It requires careful planning and adaptable tools selected from an understanding of multiple needs, coupled with a deep respect for the individual experiences and needs of each participant. In this context, it is increasingly important to have a wide range of methodologies and resources at the service of people with disabilities.

Disability is not a unique experience, and there is no universal solution. It is common that training methods, materials or communication styles that work well for one person may represent barriers for another. This is why a variety of tools, such as tactile objects, digital platforms, sensory-friendly materials, or adapted teamwork or space utilization strategies, are essential. Without them, even the best activities, with the best intentions, run the risk of excluding precisely those they are intended to engage.

On the other hand, inclusive tools tend to benefit a broad group of users, not just the target group for which they were designed. Clearer instructions, multiple ways to interact with the content, ample space and time for reflection, or accessible formats tend to enhance the learning experience for all. When we base our sessions on inclusive design principles, we not only address individual needs, but we enhance the richness of the learning environment and move closer to universal design.

The lack of tools reinforces inequalities and this extends beyond training. It can limit access to employment, civic participation and personal development. These guidelines seek to address this gap, offering practical advice and also encouraging a shift in thinking towards inclusion and universal design of learning contexts.

In short, this guide is a testament to the idea that effective training and facilitation requires a deep understanding and attention to the multiple needs of each participant. Adapting environments, activities, methodologies and materials is not a matter of regulatory compliance; it is critical to creating meaningful and successful learning experiences. And this applies not only to trainers, facilitators and educators, but also to social entities and public institutions that design and deliver these programs.

The final conclusion is a call to action: a commitment to build more inclusive environments in all areas of youth work and non-formal education.

This requires a shift in perspective toward recognizing the value of the active participation of people with disabilities in the design and implementation of learning activities, especially in non-formal education contexts.

By empowering people with diverse abilities to participate and lead, we can create a more equitable and enriching society for all. And here, institutions have a vital role to play in promoting this participation, ensuring that inclusion is a fundamental principle embedded in every stage of their work.

Inclusion is not about doing more for some, but about doing better for all.

6. Testimonials

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“When the TBT trainings first started, I thought that being a trainer in a non-formal environment is mostly fun and games. With the development of the trainings, I started to realize how much serious work and preparations actually is needed to become a trainer and to execute a training course. The TBT national and international trainings helped me to strengthen my social competences, meet new friends and possible business associates. They opened up new possibilities for me in the field of non formal education and helped me realize that physical disability is not really an obstacle, should I wish to be a trainer – with the right support and the understanding of the group there is no stopping me! :)”

Gal K. – Slovenia

“What inspired me the most during the process of national and international TBT trainings was seeing the wish for a positive change within society and within self in everyone involved in this process, especially in the area of open mindedness and inclusion! TBT trainings made me realize that to be a trainer is a never-ending process of evolving, which made me want to work on myself even more. In my opinion, the greatest strengths of trainers with disabilities are that we are used to constantly changing and having to adapt. Our own experiences may make us more sensitive to the needs of others and with our own example we can contribute to the destigmatization of the disabled within society.”

Martina S. – Slovenia

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The entire project is something I have I feel like I have needed for a long time now because I do want to make a living out of it, and I feel like it's going to be easier for me to follow future training courses, knowing that I already have this background, this experience that I have had opportunities to run some workshops, prepare stuff, make my experience working in a group better. I have never been good at working in a group, and I feel like it's only getting better.”

Anna C. - Belgium

“In the start, I absolutely had no idea what to expect, but we were asked to set up some goals for ourselves. Mine have changed during the project, but I've realized that this is absolutely no problem, because the whole project was one big process, and I've learned a lot from it. About two years ago, I tried to become a teacher and it failed tremendously, but now I wish I had this project before because I think I learned a lot out of it that I could have used to become a teacher, so maybe I should try it again now. It really helped me a lot to work in a group and to make the people pay attention to what you're saying or what you're trying to teach them. I've learned a lot of things about accessibility and the point of view of other people with disabilities and, in a way, about becoming a trainer and taking responsibility in these situations, about working with a group. I've learned a lot of things, and I'm very thankful for it.”

Ditmar G. - Belgium

“With The Big Thing I had strange expectations because I did not know how a training of these characteristics was going to be approached, but I was delighted with the way the coexistence sessions went, the contents we learned. In addition, meeting other people from other countries with different realities to mine and knowing that this training could be useful in the near future filled me with new illusions. The thing that I value the most of this experience is the caring and supportive community we had created between us.”

Mary M. – Spain

“Thanks to The Big Thing I have been able to discover for the first time how Erasmus+ works and live enriching experiences with people with similar realities and, at the same time, different from mine, which have helped me to acquire new perspectives.”

Alberto O. - Spain

7. Resources

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UNCRPD Implementation – European Union of the Deaf: Report of the European Union of the Deaf on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: https://www.eud.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/EUD_UNCRPD_IV.pdf

Guidelines for Erasmus + Coordinators on “Inclusion” in Erasmus + Projects: LTA Social Inclusion in Higher Education: https://www.erasmusplus.nl/sites/default/files/2025-01/LTA_Guidelines%20for%20Erasmus%2B%20Coordinators%20on%20inclusion%20in%20Erasmus%2B%20Projects.pdf