Inclusion of Young People with Disabilities in the Youth Activities of the Council of Europe.
Consultative Meeting Report

European Youth Centre Budapest, 29-31 May 2012

COUNCIL OF EUROPE   CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Consultative Meeting

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Report

by Karina Chupina, Peter Mucha and Menno Ettema

Executive Summary

The Consultative Meeting Inclusion of Young People with Disabilities in the Youth Activities of the Council of Europe was attended by 24 young people from 14 member states. Half of the participants were young people with physical, sensory or intellectual disabilities. There was a mixture of former participants of Council of Europe activities, youth organisation representatives, trainers, and governmental representatives on disabilities, including some from the Joint Council on Youth.

The activity aimed to develop a plan of action to ensure young people with disabilities can participate and be involved actively in all education and training activities of the Youth Department and, through their participation, develop in their role as multipliers for other young people with disabilities.

Some of the challenges in relation to inclusion of youth with disabilities that were identified are a lack of encouragement by youth organisations and parents to attend European non-formal educational activities, and negative attitudes or fear of working with people with disabilities from trainers and organisations. A general negative or non-interest by society overall for youth with disabilities and their contributions to the community, including participation through volunteer work, was noted. It was mentioned that these challenges combined often lead to a lack of self esteem among youth with disabilities, resulting in them not applying in the first place for generic non-formal education activities of the Council of Europe Youth Sector or other activities at international level.

The participants assessed the accessibility of the European Youth Centre Budapest, the administrative procedures and forms of communication with applicants. They also checked the websites of the Youth Department, Council of Europe and e-learning platforms as technical equipment also available for youth with disabilities at the Youth Centre. The accessibility audit produced a long list of suggestions for improvements and bottlenecks in the administrative procedures, including financial regulations for activities. The websites of the Youth Department and the e-learning sites prove to be especially difficult to access, most noticeably for users of screen readers.

The meeting outcome includes three lists of recommendations for human rights trainers and the Youth Department, and a fourth overall list of recommendations for the Council of Europe and its member states. The first set of recommendations addresses how to ensure youth with disabilities apply and attend European non-formal learning activities. The second set focuses on how trainers can best prepare and conduct activities attended by youth with disabilities, while the third focuses on how the Council of Europe can support participants with disabilities in their role as multipliers after the activity.
The forth list of recommendations addresses the challenges faced by youth with disabilities in general in Europe, and identify recommendations for action that will encourage their transition from child to adulthood. Their recommendations cover:

- the transition to independent living in their community
- the transition from education to employment
- the recognition of the value of non-formal learning experiences and contribution of volunteer work by disabled youth to society
- the promotion of a positive image of youth with disabilities in the community

- the support of active participation in public and political life and representative consultation process
- access to information
- access to appropriate healthcare services, regardless of their geographical location.

Following the Consultative Meeting, the draft recommendations and video were presented to the Committee of Experts on the Rights of People with Disabilities, the steering bodies of the Social Cohesion and Integration division of the Council of Europe, during their annual meeting in Strasbourg from 6 to 8 June 2012. The Committee of Experts took note of the Consultative Meeting and the recommendations it produced for its drafting of a Committee of Ministers' Recommendation on inclusion of children and youth with disabilities in social and political life, planned for the second half of 2012. The Committee of Experts appointed a drafting group for the recommendations and agreed to a written consultation process with relevant stakeholders during the drafting process, including liaising with the statutory bodies of the Youth Department.

Introduction – Rationale and Background of the Meeting

The youth sector of the Council of Europe has regularly been supporting the work of European networks and federations of young people with disabilities, notably through study sessions at the European Youth Centres. In addition, young people with disabilities were a thematic focus within the second European campaign All Different – All Equal, and the Enter! project on access to social rights for young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods. The Youth Centres in Strasbourg and Budapest have, since their renovations, been able to host many young people with a diversity of (dis)abilities.

Despite such successes, the Youth Department had to acknowledge, during the Human Rights Education Forum in 2009, that it does not yet have a coherent and consistent approach to secure the full and integrated participation of young people with disabilities in all its projects and activities. It was also recognised that specific measures for participation of youth with disabilities can be achieved only with the direct involvement of and consultation with youth with disabilities themselves – in the spirit of the "nothing about us without us" disability movement slogan.

Therefore, the consultative meeting aimed to develop a plan of action to ensure that young people with disabilities can participate and be involved actively in all education and training activities of the Youth Department and that they fully benefit from these activities, allowing them to be potential multipliers for other young people in their communities in general, and especially for young people with disabilities.

The Consultative Meeting Inclusion of Young People with Disabilities in the Youth Activities of the Council of Europe was attended by 24 young people from 14 member states. Half the participants were young people with physical, sensory or intellectual disabilities. The Consultative Meeting brought together representatives of European youth organisations (including European organisations with a focus on the participation of young people with disabilities), representatives of European disability organisations, youth workers working with young people with disabilities, human rights trainers, former participants of activities of the Youth Department, and members of the statutory bodies of the Youth Department and other divisions of the Council of Europe working on integration of people with disabilities.

Council of Europe's Work in the Field of Disability

The Council of Europe has been one of the leading human rights actors in the disability field. Its European Social Charter (1961) contains explicit provisions on the rights of people with disabilities to independence, social integration and participation in the life of the community. Article 15 in particular underlined the:

- necessary measures to provide persons with disabilities with guidance, education and vocational training
- promotion of access to employment through all measures tending to encourage employers to hire and keep in employment persons with disabilities in the

ordinary working environment and to adjust the working conditions to the needs of the disabled

- promotion of full social integration and participation in the life of the community, in particular through measures, including technical aids, aiming to overcome barriers to communication and mobility and enabling access to transport, housing, cultural activities and leisure.

As of 2001, the Parliamentary Assembly and the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe have been adopting new recommendations promoting a rights-based approach to disabilities in contrast to a medical approach. These adopted recommendations aim to ensure the full participation of people with disabilities in society. Most illustrative of the paradigm shift from a medical to the rights-based model is Recommendation 1592 (2003) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Towards Full Social Inclusion of People with Disabilities. The recommendation opens with the argument that people with disabilities are estimated to represent 10% to 15% of the total population in Europe and that 80 to 120 million European citizens have a form of disability [1]. Within three years after Recommendation 1592, the Committee of Ministers responded with the adoption of a Council of Europe Action Plan to promote the rights and full participation of people with disabilities in society: improving the quality of life of people with disabilities in Europe 2006-2015'[2].

Both the Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1592 and the Disability Action Plan 2006-2015 (Rec (2006)5) highlight that some of the fundamental rights contained in the European Convention on Human Rights and the Revised European Social Charter are inaccessible to many people with disabilities, such as the following: the right to education; to work; to private and family life; to protection of health and social security; to protection against poverty and social exclusion; to adequate housing, and so on. The Disability Action Plan 2006-2015 in addition seeks to translate the aims of the Council of Europe with regard to human rights, non-discrimination, equal opportunities, and full citizenship and participation of people into a European policy framework on disability for the next decade. In effect it aims to ensure the mainstreaming of people with disabilities in all policy areas.

The Council of Europe Disability Action Plan 2006-2015 includes 15 key action lines, including, amongst others, participation in political life, cultural life, education, employment, vocational guidance and training, social protection, and protection against violence and abuse. The Disability Action Plan also lists six cross-cutting aspects including women and girls with disabilities, people needing a high level of support, children and young people with disabilities, ageing and disabilities, and people with disabilities from minorities and migrants.

The Disability Action Plan makes clear that additional measures need to be taken to ensure young people with disabilities can equally access the provided services, enjoy fully their rights and can develop themselves as full members of their societies.

The work of the Youth Department on this Consultative Meeting fits within the framework of the work done by the Council of Europe Division on Integration of People with

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1 http://assembly.coe.int/main.asp?Link=/documents/adoptedtext/ta03/erec1592.htm
2
http://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=Rec(2006)5&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&Site=CM&BackColorInternet=9999
CC&BackColorIntranet=FFBB55&BackColorLogged=FFAC75

Disabilities, aiming to ensure more young people with disabilities can benefit from European Level youth work and become multipliers of non-formal human rights education in their communities. Close co-operation with the Social Cohesion and Integration Division of the Council of Europe, responsible for the implementation of the Council of Europe Disability Action Plan, was found for the implementation of the Consultative Meeting and its follow up. Most noticeably, the drafting of a 'Committee of Ministers recommendation on Children and Youth with Disabilities' was planned for the second half of 2012.

Aim and Objectives of the Consultative Meeting

The Consultative Meeting aimed to develop a plan of action to ensure young people with disabilities can participate and be involved actively in all education and training activities of the Youth Department and that they fully benefit from these activities, allowing them to be potential multipliers for other young people in their communities in general and especially for young people with disabilities.

In light of this aim the Consultative Meeting was intended to identify the major challenges faced during the process of organising a mixed-ability project in a non-formal educational environment and sought to explore the limits of full accessibility for people with mixed abilities. The consultative meeting in addition aimed to identify areas of improvement in the services and facilities provided by the European Youth Centre Budapest and the Youth Department to young people with disabilities.

Objectives:

Considering the aim of the Consultative Meeting the following objectives were identified:
- To identify existing tools and manuals for facilitation of non-formal educational activities attended by young people with and without disabilities jointly.
- To identify existing non-formal educational approaches that facilitate learning by young people with and without disabilities jointly, most noticeably approaches that are inclusive for youth with disabilities and ensure a positive experience of diversity by all participants within the group.
- To analyse and take note of the specific needs in training youth workers and trainers on disability issues, and the necessary competences for organising, developing and running educational activities for mixed ability / disability groups of young people.
- To identify accessible means of communication and distribution of information about the programme of the Youth Department and the call for participants among young people with disabilities who can be considered multipliers of the work of the Youth Department and its values.
- To develop key points for action and recommendations for the Youth Department that will secure the possibility for young people with disabilities to apply and to fully take part in all activities of the bi-annual programmes 2012-2013 and 2014-2015 of the Youth Department.
- To reflect on and analyse the pre-requisites for disability mainstreaming in the programmes and policies of the Youth Department.

- To develop minimum quality standards of services to be provided to participants with disabilities in all Youth Department activities in terms of content, accessibility and methodology.

Programme Flow

Welcome session, Tuesday 29 May 2012, 14.30 – 16.00

The Consultative Meeting Inclusion of Young People with Disabilities in the Youth Activities of the Council of Europe officially opened on an early Tuesday afternoon with a warm welcome speech by Mr. Olaf Köndgen, Executive Director of the European Youth Centre Budapest.

Mr. Köndgen's brief historical introduction of the European Youth Centre Budapest was followed by a short announcement about the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the Youth Sector of the Council of Europe in 2012. He highlighted that in 2009 the Youth Centre in Budapest played host to the Human Rights Youth Forum organised to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Council of Europe. It was during this event that a touching statement was made in the closing ceremony by a visually-impaired speaker: "Human rights affect everybody, and that the realisation of Human rights should be with us, not for us". Thus, Mr. Köndgen emphasised the significance of the Consultative Meeting taking place at the European Youth Centre Budapest as it also represents a response to that statement.

Shortly afterwards, the floor was given to Ms. Anna Maria Comito Fecchio, Italian representative of the European Steering Committee for Youth, working for the Youth Department in the Italian Ministry. The ministry facilitates a constant link between the government and young people with disabilities in order to identify the needs and joint solutions based on effective co-ordination of policies and programmes, as Ms. Fecchio illustrated in her talk. She continued by pointing out the alarming fact that young people with disabilities are once again affected by discrimination and face additional barriers in most areas of our society; therefore, their voices need to be heard in every area. She also explained that the specific outcomes of the Consultative Meeting will help government representatives better understand the needs of young people with disabilities in Europe today.

The welcome speeches were followed by the next elements in the programme:

- Introduction of the participants
- Introduction to the programme
- Introduction to the work of the Youth Department
- Introduction to the work of the Council of Europe on disabilities.

The first session aimed to lay down a trust base for sharing participants' experiences and knowledge for the following days of the meeting. The participants were expected to share individual experiences related to participation in a non-formal education activity as a disabled person or being a youth worker who works with disabled youth in non-formal education context. A presentation about the principles and characteristics of non-formal education was given by Karina Chupina, trainer of the Council of Europe, in order to establish a common understanding of non-formal education concepts and values amongst all participants.

Wednesday 30 May - Identifying challenges faced in mixed ability groups 09.30 – 13.00

The second day started with an introduction to the work of the Social Cohesion and Integration Division of the Council of Europe by Mr. Thorsten Afflerbach, Head of the Division. Mr. Afflerbach briefly talked about what 'social cohesion' implies for people with disabilities. He emphasised approaching disability issues from a human rights based perspective as an important element when disability policies, legislation on discrimination and equal opportunities are shaped. He continued by saying that democracy also means the participation of all, including people with disability in all aspects of public, social, and political life. Finally, participants were encouraged to keep in mind some of the key issues mentioned by Mr. Afflerbach for further debate and also to use them as guiding principles in their work in the future.

The concept of 'accessibility of built environment' was also drawn to participants' attention along with the idea of 'universal design', where usability is just as important as accessibility. For this very reason too, an important exercise, the disability access audit, would follow later on that day when feedback was collected by the staff of the European Youth Centre Budapest from users of the building with various disabilities.

The programme continued with an introduction of the Council of Europe's Disability Action Plan 2006-2015, presented by Mr. Menno Ettema, Educational Advisor of the European Youth Centre Budapest. The presentation covered Council of Europe activities and their relevance to the topic, achievements in the past (e.g. Council of Europe instruments such as the Human Rights Convention, and the European Social Charter), and the current position of the Council of Europe and the direction it is likely to take in the future. Subsequently, the focus was shifted from theoretical approaches and strategies towards practical methodology. Participants were reminded of the need to educate and train young people on how to participate actively in society. At the end of the presentation the following questions were raised, giving participants food for thought:

- Do we exercise inclusion in society?
- Does our (Youth Department) work and educational system fully support inclusion?
- What expectations do we have towards society regarding inclusion?
- How could we organise ourselves and our educational system so that it allows inclusive participation?

We ought to claim the right to be different, whenever equality is oppressing. We should claim to be different whenever equality is oppressing. *Boaventura Sousa Santos*

Wednesday 30 May - Accessibility of the EYCB and the Youth Department 14.30 - 16.00

After spending almost two days at the Youth Centre, participants had the opportunity to carry out an accessibility test of the European Youth Centre Budapest of the services of the Youth Department of the Council of Europe. The following groups were formed, each assessing different areas:
- Accessibility of the EYCB

- Administration of a Youth Department activity
- Technical aspects
- Websites of the Youth Department, European Youth Centre Budapest, Council of Europe and e-learning platforms.

Participants were encouraged to give personal feedback to the staff of the Centre regarding accessibility, user friendliness and possibilities for improvement. The activity also allowed participants to understand better the challenges and opportunities young people with disabilities have when attending activities at the Centre.

The information provided by the staff about the work of the Centre and Youth Department helped participants to formulate more concrete and realistic recommendations for the follow-up actions by the Youth Department on the last day of the meeting.

Wednesday 30 May - Identifying challenges faced in mixed ability groups, 16.30 - 17.30

The next step of the programme was conducted by Karina Chupina and aimed to identify the challenges faced in mixed ability settings: from the perspectives of youth and trainers working with youth with disabilities, and from the perspective of youth with disabilities themselves, in terms of:

- educational challenges (methodological, differing dynamics in the group, etc.)
- attitudinal challenges – fears, misconceptions, and so on
- financial / budgetary challenges
- technical and accessibility challenges.

Firstly, the participants engaged in an interactive group discussion using the fishbowl technique, which aims to manage the discussions while allowing everyone to participate. Following the group discussion, participants worked out, in sub-groups, a listing of challenges they often face in their work with youth with disabilities, and presented them in plenary.

These challenges are presented in the next chapter and will serve as the basis for participants' work on the recommendations and action plans for the Youth Department of the Council of Europe.

Wednesday 30 May - Examples of good practices: participation in mixed ability projects - Sharing 17.30 – 18.30

The next phase of the Consultative Meeting brought participants together to exchange best practices, experiences and ideas in order to come closer to identifying the solutions to improve accessibility and participation of youth with disabilities in mainstream settings. The following set of questions were presented to be covered by this session:

- How can the needs of youth with disabilities be heard and be made more visible?
- How can young people with disabilities be engaged in non-formal education?
- How can the skills they obtain be applicable afterwards for non-formal education activities by youth with disabilities?

- What good examples of practices can the Youth Department of the Council of Europe follow in their programme?
- What are the success factors of the non-formal education activities with mixed ability groups?

In groups of three or four, participants formulated recommendations and suggestions on how to realise the recommendations for the Youth Department. The drafting process of the participants built on these fruitful exchanges. The main objective here was to provide space to participants to present good practices, as well as for them to share the technical aids they use with each other. Participants had been asked in advance to bring materials (posters, leaflets, CDs, DVDs, etc.) about their projects and activities with mixed ability groups, or about partner projects . Six participants volunteered to present their projects and each one of them had approximately seven minutes to do so, while others were given some time to raise questions or comment afterwards. After this "fair", participants were invited to share their learning points in one plenary round, and to speak about the success factors for inclusive and efficient non-formal education activities in the mixed ability setting.

Thursday 31 May – Action for the future 9.00 – 17.30

The last day of the programme started with a presentation on the work of the Social Cohesion and Integration Division on the drafting process of a policy recommendation by the Committee of Ministers on Inclusion of Children and Youth with Disabilities in Social and Political Life by Mr. Thorsten Afflerbach. In his presentation Mr. Afflerbach covered the process of drafting policy recommendations, and existing mechanisms for involving youth with disabilities, along with their limitations when it comes to drafting and consultation with the Committee.

The presentation continued with an input session by Ms Zsuzsanna Igali, former representative of disability affairs in the Drafting Committee on protecting and promoting the rights of women and girls with disabilities. She introduced CAHPAH (European Co-ordination Forum for the Council of Europe Disability Action Plan), which, as part of its work, stands for the rights of women and girls with disabilities. Ms Igali also talked about those 10 new areas which had been identified by the delegates attending the CAHPAH meeting. At the end of her presentation she covered accessibility issues.

The final presentation of the morning gave a more in-depth explanation about the work of the Youth Department of the Council of Europe. Possibilities were explored where increasing participation of young people with disabilities in the youth programme could be possible and/or desirable.

Thursday 31 May - Work on recommendations 10.45 – 16.00

After the coffee break working groups were formed where participants were tasked with developing action plans and recommendations on how to increase participation of young people with disabilities within the education activities of the Youth Department. One sub-group of participants focused on developing ideas for the policy recommendations on inclusion of young people with disabilities in social and political life for the Committee of Experts on the Rights of People with Disabilities, the steering bodies of the Social Cohesion and Integration division of the Council of Europe, the meeting of which would be held in early June 2012 in Strasbourg.

While building on the experiences and knowledge shared during the precious two days of the meeting, participants were advised to keep in mind a practical and cost effective approach, and reminded that the aim of the meeting was to suggest specific measures which would help the Youth Department to ensure young people with disabilities can actively participate in all education and training activities of the Youth Department and to ensure that they fully benefit from them. After an initial period for drafting the recommendations, participants were asked to present their work in plenary. After the presentations, groups had a carousel of meetings allowing each group to provide feedback on the work done by the other groups. After this, each sub-group was given more time to finalise their draft recommendations before presenting the final product in plenary again.

At the end of the day participants were asked to present their recommendations and plans of action in plenary. These presentations were recorded on camera. The video presentations were edited after the Consultative Meeting and subtitled; sign interpretation that was present during the meeting was embedded[3]. The programme ended with the evaluation of the Consultative Meeting by participants. The Consultative Meeting officially closed on 31 May late afternoon and was followed by the closing reception.

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3 http://vimeo.com/youthdepartment

Participation barriers – what prevents youth with disabilities from taking part in non-formal education activities?

The mapping study of documents and reports on disability issues that was conducted before the Consultative Meeting provided indications of the major challenges faced by people with disabilities who want to take part in non-formal education. The outcomes of the Consultative Meeting confirmed the identified challenges and helped to further explore their implications for the work of youth work trainers and the Youth Sector of the Council of Europe. Participants, with and without disabilities, identified challenges faced by youth with disabilities on the bases of their personal and professional life experiences. It should be noted that the following lists are not exhaustive as they are based on the experiences of participants in the meeting only.

The various sub-chapters illustrate a range of challenges and their implications for the Inclusion of Young People with Disabilities in the Youth Activities of the Council of Europe. A few of the described challenges overlap with each other, as in many cases they address inter-related issues. Often we see an add-on effect, where the existence of one challenge directly or indirectly aggravates another challenge.

Examples of Challenges Faced by Youth with Disabilities in Non-Formal Education

Lack of Family and Community Support

Family and the community can create barriers adding more burden for participants and/or for trainers during training sessions, or prevent people with disabilities from participating in mixed ability projects abroad. The deconstruction of barriers created in the community depends on the level of support provided for young people with disabilities, on attitudes of the different parties involved, and on the level of effective co-operation among them. In the context of this Consultative Meeting, co-operation in the community includes the peers, youth with and without disabilities, NGOs, family, non-formal activity organisers, youth workers, trainers, funders and international organisations such as the Council of Europe. The nature and the level of support needed by youth with disabilities to attend non-formal learning activities can have many different dimensions, such as funding, moral support, and logistical issues through co-operation between family, youth workers and institutions. Support measures should respond to the needs reported by the young people with disabilities themselves, and require flexibility as well as a case-by-case individual approach.

Participants reported that too often parents were being overprotective, which on many occasions has hindered participation of young people with disabilities in non-formal learning activities (even when accessibility needs were taken into account). Disabled people are, therefore, denied the so-called risk-taking opportunity such as taking part in activities independently and travelling abroad. It is important to make parents understand that, through pushing young people's boundaries and taking a trial-and-error approach in

a safe educational / training environment, young people can learn and gain crucial life and social skills. Family can often have low expectations of their disabled children. This, in turn, complicates the work of a youth worker, particularly when he/she needs to gain approval of the family for the underage youth to take part while the family is sceptical about the abilities of their disabled child.

The youth worker also has to deal with parents of non-disabled people: some want to keep their children away from disabled youth as they question the possible negative impact they could have on their children. Participants of the Consultative Meeting felt that there is a significant need to secure community support, given that general public is either reluctant to help or does not have the necessary competences to provide efficient support.

Youth organisations sometimes fail to inform families and their respective communities about the benefits and values of non-formal education activities. This information barrier often prevents youth with disabilities from participating in youth-related activities in the first place.

The described specific challenges should be viewed within the overall setting in which youth with disabilities and their families live. In many countries there is a lack of community-based support schemes for people with disabilities. This general lack of state-organised support limits the successful transition of youth with disabilities to adulthood.
A number of participants shared personal negative experiences from their local realities that related to a lack of personal support for people with disabilities, families of people with disabilities often being discriminated against, and a lack of human resources (for example, not enough sign language interpreters in public services such as hospitals).

It was also emphasised that the overall low interest in or negative attitude of the society towards the well-being of youth with disabilities creates "learned helplessness" and lower self-esteem with young people with disabilities.

Lack of Social Skills, Low Self-Esteem and/or Self-Awareness with Young People with Disabilities

During the Consultative Meeting participants noted that young people's attitude and/or low self-esteem can hinder participation in non-formal education activities. Often, lack of assertiveness and the fear of failure among young people with disabilities are seen as the result of the prejudice, bias, exclusion and discrimination they have experienced. There is a tendency among youth with disabilities to perceive themselves as "unable" to participate in international youth projects. At times, young people with disabilities feel uncomfortable to be reminded always of their accessibility needs during training. On top of that, many are reluctant to rely on their peers' support in youth activities. Youth with disabilities often hold the assumption that they need to be very skilled, highly educated or an expert in order to participate.

Possible Lack of Understanding of Other Types of Disabilities and the Related Needs

A lack of awareness about different disabilities, for example, prejudice between blind people and deaf people that they cannot work together, or the attitude of people without disabilities towards disabled people, was also identified as a barrier for participation for youth with disabilities.

Lack of Human and Financial Resources

Participants in the Consultative Meeting identified that a good or positive attitude does not always sufficient, every so often it is a matter of available resources. There can be good will, but involving disabled young people is generally perceived as more costly due to special provisions, so a lack of resources often creates a burden for organisers and hinders participation of youth with disabilities in mixed ability activities. More information on support by NGOs and donors is included in the chapter 'Multipliers effects'.

Language and Communication Barriers

Communication problems have also been the subject of discussion among participants covering a number of different competences. Firstly, candidates' eligibility for participation in non-formal activities at the Council of Europe strongly depends on their language competence. As indicated in the preliminary mapping study, poor command of the working language can restrain people with and without disability in their participation in European non-formal learning activities or may even prevent them from applying to take part in international activities. The experience at a study session of the International Federation of Hard of Hearing of Young People, where the lack of participants' command of English created a "double disability," is just one of the many examples relevant to the language barrier issue.[4] It was noted that for hard of hearing, deaf and intellectually disabled people, it is often a challenge to learn the foreign language. For deaf people, sign language can be their first language and the spoken language their second. The need to seek and hire sign language interpreters for the events (International Sign Language interpreters in case of an international event) is an extra barrier for participation for deaf people relying on signs. For hard of hearing people, the strain of listening to and communicating in a foreign language as well as a necessity to lipread also aggravates their full participation.

Communicating Accessibility needs to the Organisers of Non-Formal Education Activities

Another issue for participants and trainers in terms of communication is when participants fail to communicate their various needs in the application process, which then creates problems at a later stage during the implementation of activities. Or, in case of necessity to remind relevant staff about their accessibility or communication needs,

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[4] http://youth-partnership-eu.coe.int/youth-partnership/documents/Publications/Coyote/8/incl_disabilities.pdf

participants feel shy or intimidated to talk about these needs over and again (this relates, for example, to hard of hearing young people). People with intellectual disabilities also face communication challenges, especially when it comes to obtaining information. Apart from external support from organisers, youth with disabilities need to learn how to tackle the problems themselves and gain the support of their peers; they also need to be able to express their needs explicitly.

Examples of Challenges encountered by Trainers and Participants in Mixed Ability Settings

Attitudinal Barriers

From a general point of view, ensuring quality standards in education and training activities should not pose a significant challenge for trainers when working with youth with disabilities.

However, trainers can encounter challenges when they lack knowledge on the subject of disability, lack experience of working with people with disabilities – or a disability topic – and therefore, do not have a full understanding of the underlying complexity of this work.

The lack of knowledge often leads to trainers' fears of working with people with disabilities. Lack of awareness of disability issues among trainers is a relevant concern which often manifests itself in a lack of empathy, a lack of understanding people with disabilities, and/or of not being open-minded. Such attitudes that may stem from lack of knowledge and experience also tend to lower trainers' expectations about the capacities of youth with disabilities. Trainers may have low expectations and hold the assumption that people with disabilities will not reach the level of people without disabilities. Inexperienced trainers tend to focus too much on the disability, which results in not seeing the ability in the person.

Those trainers not familiar with working with people with disabilities are in a difficult position since there is a lack of trainers with a disability with whom they can co-operate or consult on issues relevant in the field. The Council of Europe has only one trainer with a disability (who also has expertise in training youth with disabilities) in the Pool of Trainers.

Inclusive Methodology

It was noted that trainers have concerns about the methodological challenges. For example, finding the appropriate training method and approach that will match participants' different needs at the same time is a headache for many trainers. For instance, a visually- or hearing-impaired person may need more light while the autistic participant with hypersensitivity to light may be disturbed by it.

Many trainers find it hard to adapt existing programmes and activities to the needs of participants and find the right balance. For this reason, as it was suggested, trainers should learn to develop programmes while keeping in mind different abilities from the

very start, and not adapting them later on. This is potentially the best way to include people with disabilities in the activity: thinking of the specific needs in the early stages of the planning process.

Participants also expressed that breaks between activities are often too short for wheelchair users, and organisers usually do not take this problem into account. It is also difficult for trainers to create accessible events due to budget constraints; this particular point will be developed further in the following chapter.

As mentioned previously, some participants fail to express their needs in advance, and, often as a result, trainers find it hard to adjust to these needs at the last minute. Good and open communication with an attitude of inclusion is therefore essential between trainers, organisers and participants from the very start of a project.

Participants of the consultative meeting reflected that trainers do not need extraordinary competences. However, trainers working with youth with disabilities need, like any other trainer, an open-minded attitude, an aptitude to see the abilities of the participants, open communication, and have overall good trainer skills to work with a group.

Examples of Challenges Faced by Young People with Disabilities in Multiplying

The Council of Europe's Youth department works with multipliers, that is, youth who come back to local realities to multiply their developed skills and knowledge, and train more young people in turn. They become empowered for active participation in society. Participants in the Youth Department activities serve therefore as a "bridge" between the local and European level. One of the challenges in this respect comes from the lack of support of certain NGOs working on disabilities and the lack of co-ordination between different disability organisations. According to the participants, in many cases NGOs do not have special budget allocations for either mixed ability activities and/or projects where there is the possibility of participation of people with disabilities. Sometimes limited resources, and the lack of possibilities by the donor to increase the funding of a project or activity, do not allow the participation of youth with disabilities. The administration of donors and NGOs often fails to provide flexible budgets which could accommodate access needs of youth with disabilities if they are required. In many cases the situation turns into a dispute among NGOs, donors and organisers about who should cover the bill. Some participants also mentioned that in the application forms of donors and organisers there is a lack of knowledge about disability and what questions to pose.

In all these cases there is an apparent lack of inclusive measures. This lack of an inclusive approach not only effects youth with disabilities but also different other groups who have no, or limited access to youth activities are not included, for example, rural youth, or youth from disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Thorsten Afflerbach's presentation pointed out another important fact affecting an inclusive approach. There is a legal distinction between child and adult, but the transition phase is often forgotten. Even experts tend to focus on children, thus leaving out the transition phase that applies to youth. Additionally, in most policies covering disabilities, people from minorities, immigrants, migrants, refugees, and those from other backgrounds are often forgotten as well.

Examples of Challenges Related to Accessibility of Activities of the Youth Sector of the Council of Europe

Both the Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1592 and the Disability Action Plan 2006-2015 (Rec(2006)5) highlight that some of the fundamental rights contained in the European Convention on Human Rights and the Revised European Social Charter are inaccessible to many people with disabilities, such as the right to education.

Inaccessibility of facilities is considered one of the major issues when it comes to organising a mixed ability project. In reality, there are only a small number of venues which are 'fully' accessible for people with disability. However, such venues still might not be really accessible or reachable due to the lack of accessible public services outside the venue, such as transport, health facilities, and so on.

Accessibility of the European Youth Centre Budapest

This section incorporates the main challenges relating to the full accessibility for people with various abilities and beyond in non-formal educational activities. The participants assessed the accessibility of the European Youth Centre Budapest, the administrative procedures which are followed, and the standard communication with participants. They also checked the websites of the Youth Department, Council of Europe and e-learning platforms, as well as available technical equipment for youth with disabilities at the Youth Centre.

Accessibility of the Venue / Physical, Sensory and Technical Equipment Aspects

The EYCB is generally regarded as one of the most accessible venues for organising mixed ability youth projects and for accommodating people with a wide range of disabilities. However, there is always room for improvement. Although it does not exactly fall under the competence of the Council of Europe, participants mentioned transport in Budapest as an important issue. The transport system in Budapest needs to be improved in order to become more inclusive towards and more accessible for people with disabilities. Participants also mentioned that the nearest bus stop to the EYCB is not indicated well and that there is no clear direction to the venue, that is, no signposting. Participants felt that the adapted transport was very good from the airport to the venue, but that there was not any meeting point arranged, and staff of the adapted transport did not have the required language competence in English.

In some cases participants use their own means of transportation, which can be a barrier as only one parking space is allocated for wheelchair users at the EYCB premises. As a matter of fact, not many venues can handle more than two or three wheelchair users. The EYCB's building was not designed to accommodate more than three wheelchair users and some rooms would have to be entirely re-designed in order to become suitable for them. Similarly, as one of the participants remarked, health and fire regulations in the UK often restrict the number of wheelchair users who may participate in activities.

Other challenges or deficiencies met by wheelchair users during the EYCB's accessibility testing include:

- High doorsteps (balcony and basement) make it difficult to access certain areas and rooms.
- Telephones are placed too high, and are impossible to reach.
- The reception desk, the table football, and the buttons in the elevator are too high.

Challenges faced by blind participants:
- Computers are not equipped with document-reading software or headphones, and speakers are missing.
- Emergency information is not available in Braille, neither is information on available services for disabled people.
- A special map of the building in Braille is missing, including Braille numbers on doors.
- A leading special line in the middle of all common places for the "cane" and visual help are not in place.

Challenges faced by deaf and hard of hearing people:

- Weak or inconsistent coverage of the induction loops in some plenary sessions, and no coverage at the reception.
- Blurry sound of the handheld microphone.
- The background noise in the restaurant is unbearable.

Difficulties faced by people with autism:

- Noise in bathrooms.
- 'Easy to read' texts along with pictograms are missing.
- Emergency buttons are missing, which may cause difficulties for everyone.
- Curtains do not block the light enough, which is disturbing.

Problems with cables lying on the floor, mainly in the plenary rooms, have been regarded as a general hazard to people with and without disabilities. The cause of the problem stems from the inappropriate placement of power outlets.

Accessibility of Administrative Procedures

Points of discussion were based on the specific example of the Consultative Meeting, but observations could be expanded to other activities as well. One of the first issues addressed was that not many young people with a disability would have had the chance to see the call to the Meeting because it was distributed through professional networks. Often youth with disabilities are not connected with youth organisations at local or national level, let alone with international youth organisations and youth work. The limited time between the launch and the deadline for applications was problematic because of several considerations: the distribution time, the actual completion time that people with different disabilities might need (i.e. some need to complete with assistance - for writing), and the complexity of the application form.

Participants found the rationale and description of the call quite long and challenging: it was very academic, using "specialised" language which for some caused difficulties in comprehensions and response. People using a text-to-voice service struggled to navigate through the application form and the rationale description. The application form did not include a clear indication of what is considered a disability. Neither did it contain information about the accessibility of the venue, whether there are ramps for wheelchair users, induction loops for hard of hearing, Braille computer keyboards for blind people, audio-tape, large print, easy-to-read materials, and so on, or the provision to support the personal assistant. The preparation documents sent to participants were satisfactory, but many participants felt intimidated by the very formal language used.

Accessibility of Information Provided by the Youth Sector

As already stated in the preliminary mapping study, accessibility to information and communication is one of the most common challenges for participation of disabled youth in mixed ability projects and/or in any form of non-formal education activity. Access to resources such as information, communication and educational tools is an important aspect for participation in society. For many people with disabilities, information continues to be largely inaccessible. For instance, *Compass - a manual on human rights education for young people*, which is a frequently-used resource by youth workers engaged in human rights education, is not accessible for young people with a range of disabilities.

Firstly, the lack of advertisement via newsletters, and websites on youth activities, prevents people from knowing or being aware of what is out there for them; for example, people often do not know that a training course is being organised. In some cases information is accessible only to partners of a specific network. Sometimes there is lack of information on the educational value of the programme, which hinders the possible interest of the general public and engagement of families. Even if there is information, sometimes young people do not know how or where to find it.

Participants noticed that a lot of documents in PDF format are either inaccessible or impossible for blind people to fill out online. The insufficient amount of easy-to-read versions often denies deaf people and people with intellectual problems from accessing important documents. Some questionnaires and other documents have logos and graphics that have disturbing effects on people with certain types of autism. Inaccessible websites also contain graphic links without description, and disturbing music for blind people as they cannot hear their speech synthesizers, and many websites lack the option to adjust the size of characters.

Website Accessibility

Digital content, when developed, needs to take into account the needs of people with the following types of disabilities: hearing, sensory, motor, and cognitive.

During the EYCB accessibility testing the participants, blind and visually-impaired people in particular, found it difficult to navigate through web pages for mainly technical reasons. The following points cover the most common challenges or deficiencies

identified when visiting the Youth Department websites, which include the Youth, EYCB, Application and e-learning websites. A more detailed list is available in the Appendices, where the functionality of each website has been scrutinised by the participants.

Common challenges are:

- Content / layout:

    - Unclear structure: no clear hierarchy of the site, titles of different information elements are randomly mixed; therefore some websites have no clear tagging.
    - Too much text in general.
    - Lack of easy-to-read text.
    - Complex questions in the questionnaire: very formal language used, which causes difficulties for mentally impaired people; in some cases applicants felt that the required information was repetitive.

- General graphic design issues:

    - Confusion between links and images: the Youth Department logo seems to be a picture which is actually a link, so some blind participants accidentally navigated away from the e-learning website.
    - Difficultly in navigating through e-learning and Youth applications – blind participants were unable to use screen readers since it did not find the difference between links and pictures.
    - Colour contrasts used on the Youth Department website do not enhance visibility.
    - Flash animation on the Youth Department's website does not contain any description.
    - Difficultly in finding PDF documents, which are often not readable when downloaded because they are saved as image files instead of text files.

When participants looked at the Youth Department's website, they also noticed that the website contains too many links and menus which can be confusing and disturbing for some. More information on the website accessibility can be found in Appendix 4.

Recommendations

The Consultative Meeting aimed to develop a plan of action to ensure young people with disabilities can participate and be involved actively in all education and training activities of the Youth Department and that they fully benefit from these activities. The participants of the meeting therefore set out to develop recommendations for the Youth sector of the Council of Europe, the European Youth Centres, Human Rights trainers and the Council of Europe as a whole.

It is important to ensure the participation of the young people with disabilities in the Youth Department activities starts with accessibility of the information about its programmes and the European Youth Centres themselves. Participants provided feedback on the existing administrative procedures of the Youth Department, its websites and the Youth Centre facilities based on their own empirical findings in applying for and attending the Consultative Meeting as participants. The feedback is listed as the first set of recommendations addressing accessibility.

The participants also developed four additional sets of recommendations that go further than accessibility alone, for example looking into how to address attitudes, secure proper training for trainers and support for participants in their role as multipliers and ensuring follow-up.

The second set of recommendations addresses how to ensure youth with disabilities apply and attend European non-formal learning activities. The third set focuses on how trainers can best prepare and conduct activities attended by youth with disabilities while the fourth focuses on how the Council of Europe can support participants with disabilities in their role as multipliers after the activity.

The fifth and final list of recommendations addresses the challenges faced by youth with disabilities in general in Europe and identifies recommendations for action that will encourage their transition from child to adulthood. Their recommendations cover:

- the transition to independent living in their community
- the transition from education to employment
- recognition of the value of non-formal learning experiences and contribution of volunteer work by disabled youth to society
- the promotion of a positive image of youth with disabilities in the community
- the support of active participation in public and political life and representative consultation processes
- access to information
- access to appropriate healthcare services, regardless of their geographical location.

The recommendations drafted by the participants were presented during the final session of the Consultative Meeting and filmed. The documented presentation has been complemented with subtitles and the image of the sign interpretation which was present during the meeting. Links to the videos can be found on the vimeo account of the Youth Department: http://vimeo.com/youthdepartment

Recommendations for Improving Accessibility of Information concerning the Youth Sectors Activities and its European Youth Centres

This set of recommendations was developed by the staff of the European Youth Centre Budapest based on the feedback they received during a 90-minute accessibility testing session conducted by the staff, together with the participants of the Consultative Meeting. The feedback received was complimented with some of the outcomes of an accessibility audit conducted by an engineer using a wheelchair. This second audit report (in Hungarian) is available with the Secretariat of the European Youth Centre Budapest.

Accessibility of the Facilities:

Computer Room 401:

- Computer equipped for the visually impaired guests: document-reading software and headphones / speakers.
- Braille printer and keyboard for reading and writing documents from screen and for real printouts.
- Webcams for sign language users.
- Video screen should be big enough for sign language.
- Voice recognition software for guests who cannot write a lot.
- The light in the computer room should be adjustable and sunlight reflection on the screens prevented for people sensitive to light stimulus.
- Background noise due to air-conditioning should be reduced for guests who are audio-sensitive or find it difficult to focus their attention, for example.

Bedrooms:

- Black-out or darker curtains are needed for light-sensitive guests.
- An emergency button or string should be available in the bedrooms occupied by a guest with limitations means of mobility, accessibility or communication.
- Braille: full English version, no abbreviations, Braille numbers on doors, and a Braille map of the building should be available.
- Guests with a hearing impairment could receive a video phone at reception to be plugged into the room,
- Fire alarm, incoming phone calls and door bells should be made accessible through a vibrating and light flashing device,for example a vibration in the pillow, together with general lights and special lights indicating the source of information.
- Noise in bathrooms causes a problem for autistic-sensitive persons. Two buttons, one for the light, and one for ventilation, would be good in bathrooms to allow for regulating the noise levels.

Reception:

- Reception should provide information on available services at the EYCB and in the city of Budapest for people with disabilities.
- Welcome video in sign language with subtitles.

- Easy-to-read information (welcome) brochures with pictograms for rooms, switches, and basic information for guests.
- Staff should have a basic knowledge of sign language.
- Braille map of the building should be available.
- A video phone should be available to call rooms of participants and the common rooms with a video phone.
- Induction loop and microphone for hard-of-hearing guests should be present at the reception.

Restaurant:

- Specific service for guests with disabilities should be made available in English and sign language.
- Ensure designated staff of the restaurant have time to focus on guests with disabilities.
- Tables for guests using a wheelchair or a guide-dog should be reserved.
- Good quality, light plastic trays are needed for reducing sound made by the metal service trays.
- For audio-sensitive guests, special permission should be given for taking their food to their rooms.

Conference rooms:

- Ensure a strong signal for induction loops.
- Minimise cables on the floor to enhance safety and mobility for guests using a wheelchair or who are visually impaired.
- Plan the room beforehand, together with the users with disability, their personal assistance and the service providers, such as sign interpreters. Ensure the technical team is present in the room at the start of the activity for last minute adjustments.

General recommendations for the building:

- Full WIFI coverage is also important for guests with disabilities.
- Staircase: a second handrail on the other side of the wall should be installed.
- Yellow step markers on the staircase would be advisable.
- All information documents for guests of the EYCB should also prepared in Braille.
- Easy-to-read information brochures with pictograms for rooms, switches, doors, and commonly-used technical equipment should be made available.
- Special phones in all common areas and some for rooms available at the reception: special phones should be video, keyboard and audio accessible for all disabilities; internal phones should be video-phones for guests with hearing impairment.
- On arrival of guests and onwards, security staff, the EYCB technical staff and on-site team leaders of service companies (in the field of work) should be able to give detailed information on available possibilities for people with different disabilities.
- Set up a "library of technologies" for helping people with disability to find solutions and to raise awareness.

- Consult specialised organisations about the necessary services for participants: set up a database of services and continue to update it. Make these services available for all activities and organisations using the EYCB facilities and their guests.
- With the accessible transport (Angyalkerék) the EYCB should arrange a meeting point at the airport and also a written sign with the name of the passenger.

Specific recommendations on accessibility for guests using wheelchairs:

- To be able to roll: doorsteps throughout the building should be lower; this especially relates to the accessibility of the balconies and rooms in the basement. Small steps in the building should be bridged with professional ramps.
- To be able to use electronic door openers.
- To be able to reach devises: the height and distance of devices should be adjustable (e.g. the handles, switches, phones, taps, AC, hangers, cupboards, special handrails on toilets, and a few tables in the conference rooms).
- To have appropriate heating regulators or systems in rooms, bathrooms and plenary rooms (larger radiators, electronic heating add-ons, and electronic heating blankets).
- To have the option of having meals in rooms in order for wheelchair users to be able to rest their backs in breaks; a hospital style rolling table over the bed should be available.
- Public toilets should have the possibility to close from the inside and outside.
- If there is toilet-seat disinfectant, it should be an automatic device for wheelchair users.
- Installing a metal toilet-seat holder system (plastic breaks when sliding over).
- The possibility to lower or adjust the height of the toilet seats.
- Installing a metal horizontal bar (help-handle) inside on the door.
- For drivers: the possibility of at least two parking slots of the right size and with signs painted on the floor.
- Lowering the buttons in the lift, and lowering the height of wall telephones.
- Installing a professional accident-proof ramp over the stairs at reception .

Specific recommendations on accessibility for visually impaired guests:

- To have all common information available in Braille.
- To have an English and Hungarian voice indicating the floors in the lift.
- To explore the possibility of placing relief strips on the floor in and around the EYCB building for blind guests using a walking cane.
- First and last stairs and steps should be marked with fluorescent yellow or white line.
- Special light-contrasted painted frames for commonly used doors, corners and possible obstacles.
- Braille stickers for electric key cards for the guest rooms and plenary rooms, vending machines, and switches.
- To have a less reflective environment for guests with light sensitivity, e.g. spot lights.

Specific recommendations on accessibility for hard-of-hearing guests:

- Ensure visual feedback possibilities, for example, displays on telephones, video and/or text in lifts.
- Less background noise required for using hearing aid devices; portable FM systems for hard-of-hearing people for group work, mainly for rooms without an induction loop.
- An induction loop and microphone at the reception.
- Better coverage of the induction loops and more connectivity covering more users. In some rooms, bells should also be fitted with light signalling for deaf participants.

Specific recommendations on accessibility for intellectually challenged guests:

- Pictograms for all publicly-available information.
- Easy-to-read texts.

Accessibility of the Call for Participants for Activities:

Call for participants, the outreach:

- To encourage people with disabilities to connect to the European Disability Forum and other European networks in order to stay informed about opportunities.
- Send out the call through the networks of the (Youth) European Disability Forum and other European networks working with/for youth with disabilities.
- To allow time for the call to be sent to grass root organisations.
- To allow time for participants to respond to the call, as some young people with disabilities require assistance with filling forms.
- To always have an easy-to-read version of the call for potential applicants with intellectual challenges, including a version with images to illustrate the questions.
- The call should not be too long, for example two pages, and it should clearly state in the description that the building is accessible for disabled people, and that support is provided for the personal assistant.
- For distributing calls and other information, it is best to work with disability partner organisations who can forward the information in their networks. It should be taken into consideration that the present websites of the Youth Department are not very accessible.
- To find out through what media disabled people could be informed regularly about the Youth Department activities and programmes.
- Facebook is a tool that reaches many youth with disabilities, including visually impaired. Activities could be linked to the Disability Forum page / Facebook page.

General rules for application forms:

- Use a word format, as it allows for easy print and large print; do not protect (block) the document, and leave more space for answering questions.

- Avoid using tables in the document which are not easy to navigate for text-to-voice software.
- Avoid linking the call to the application form; this makes it more difficult to navigate a document for text-to-voice software.
- Avoid using sophisticated language, for example, instead of "please provide details about your experience", write "what is your experience"; if there are questions such as, "Have you applied for and attended any other activities of the Council of Europe?", if the answer determines the selection then we should write the consequences in the Call. If the question has only an administrative role we should put it at the end of the questions.
- Do not ask data about the assistant in the application form (most people would have 3-4 people as assistants, so it could cause complications; this should be a question for after selection).

Accessibility of the Youth Sector Websites

For the EYCB and Youth websites some significant barriers were identified limiting their accessibility for users with different types of disabilities. It was noted by participants that writers of website text should ensure the text is easy to understand and not too long. Checking tools for text exist that gives the writer feedback on the length and the complexity of the language used. Testing of accessibility of the websites should be done by professionals; feedback of these participants is limited, based on the equipment they use and their impairments. Software tools can help make an accessibility report of a website; professional companies can do an assessment and give tips on how to make improvements.

Based on the findings the following general recommendations were formulated:

- Minimise text on the front page, and provide a clear structure, as, for example, dyslectic people will find it difficult to find the information they need and focus their search; include a clearly structured calendar function clearly indicating what is happening when.

- Provide stronger contrast colours between text and background, for example the blue-green contrast used on the website does not enhance visibility.

Specific recommendations on accessibility for text-to-voice users:

- Provide a clear hierarchy on the site:

    - For example, the titles of different information elements should be clear, well structured and logically arranged.
    - It must be clear what the title is, and where the main body of the text is.

- Flash animation on the website must include a clear description of what it is and what it shows.
- Images on the site must have a clear descriptive title.

- PDF documents that should be downloaded must be easily found by clearly indicating them; for example, for a text-to-voice reader it should be clear if it is a clickable link.
- PDF documents on the website should be readable after downloading.
- the PDF document must be saved as a text image instead of an image page which would make it non readable for text-to-voice reader.

The website used for applying for an activity (Youthapplications.coe.int) is accessible for text-to-voice software and, despite small improvements that need to be made, user-friendly for youth with different types of disabilities. Nonetheless, it is suggested that participants be given an option. Some prefer working with a word document, while for others it would work best on a screen using HTML format; it depends on the type of screen reader that is used and the accessibility of the website with its HTML coding.

Based on the findings the following general recommendations were formulated:

- A clear path to the registration section of the site should be available and it should be clear and explained in simple terms how to register;

    - for example, there is currently only one route to register that works on the website. Other sections with links to the registration page do not work and it makes it difficult to find the registration page

- The explanation on how to upload a support letter must be improved and kept simple to understand.

    - for example, the explanation provided now has images that are too small, and the layout of the description is confusing.

- Steps after registration should be simple and focus on the essentials, while the option to complete your profile should be made less distracting.

    - for example, you are prompted to edit your profile with a big red sign which is distracting as it is not essential for filling in the form.

- The questions in the application form should be easy to follow and to complete, and should avoid repetition.

Specific recommendations on accessibility for text-to-voice users:

- Overall the website is accessible for screen readers.
- It needs a bit of searching to register for the first time.
- The applications forms themselves are very accessible and possible to fill in.

More and more training projects of the Youth Department make use of distance learning through the e-learning website http://e-learning4youth.coe.int/. This e-learning platform is based on Moodle. The participants found the website user-friendly after investing some time into getting to know it. Sadly the site is totally inaccessible for users of text-to-voice readers.

The feedback from the participants included the following:

- It is good that the menu on the main page does not provide too many choices, thus making it easy to navigate.
- Within a course the right hand side bar gives a table of content which helps navigation.
- Overall the website is clear, although at first it is not always clear where information can be found.

Specific recommendations on accessibility for text-to-voice users:

- The difference between a logo (picture) and a clickable link must be made clear.
    - for example, the Youth Department logo seems to be a picture but is a link and therefore the blind participant navigates away from the e-learning website accidentally.

- The website should use clear tags to distinguish between an image, link and main text and sub-texts, and include a clear hierarchy. At present the website could not be navigated by a user of a text-to-voice reader.

    - For example, the side menu with courses cannot be found.
    - On the main page with the course categories the screen reader cannot find any of the course categories.
    - The blind participant was not able to go further than logging into the e-learning website. All steps afterwards could not be followed because the screen reader cannot find a link or does not know what is what, whether it's a picture, or a link, and so on.

Recommendations for Ensuring that Young People with Disabilities Apply for Youth Activities of the Council of Europe

As described in the challenges section of this report, too often young people with disabilities are uncertain about applying for international non-formal youth activities, lacking support from their surrounding, restrained by lack of self-esteem and uncertain about the accessibility of such activities. Too often these youth believe that these international activities are not intended for them. To overcome these perceived barriers and ensure that young people with disabilities are interested in and apply for youth activities of the Council of Europe,

It is recommended that the Youth Sector of the Council of Europe:

- Underline in accessible application forms and announcements that:

  - people with any kind of disability – including non-visible disabilities – are welcome to apply and to take part in the event
  - facilities, materials and programmes are also accessible to people with disabilities
  - staff members are willing to support the participation of people with disabilities.

- Invite people with any kind of disability – including non-visible disabilities – to describe their needs in the application form, especially relating to the kind of assistance they should need (including language support).
- Disseminate information about youth activities through specific newsletters and the website, which should respect accessibility international standards (ex. W3C).
- When doing so, consult experts and people with disabilities about the level of accessibility of the website, application forms and communication tools.
- Encourage relevant stakeholders (Governments, NGOs, etc.) to disseminate information about youth activities through, for example, local, national and international media (including websites, social networks, radio, TV, etc.) which spread information specifically designed for youth with disabilities.
- Improve the accessibility of its buildings and provide appropriate technological equipment, in order to facilitate the participation of people with disabilities.
- Ensure flexibility at every step of the organisation of its events, in relation to the needs of people with disabilities.
- Produce and disseminate informative materials (audio, video, texts, publications, etc.), specifically designed for people with different disabilities through national organisations and multipliers – the young people who have participated in its activities before.
- Encourage international youth organisations to inform and to recruit participants with disabilities in all kinds of events organised at the Youth Centres, related to any topic.
- Facilitate co-operation among different youth umbrella organisations (referring to people with or without disabilities).
- Organise activities for relevant stakeholders on how to develop accessible websites, application forms and communication tools.

- Provide the staff with relevant knowledge about working and communicating with people with disability (e.g. through training courses, codes of conduct, etc.).

Social Support

A major barrier for young people with disabilities identified by participants is the lack of support for their application from their surroundings, which can include peers, family, support organisations or institutions.

To support disabled youth, it is recommended that the Youth Sector of the Council of Europe:

- Enforce international youth organisations to inform and recruit participants with disabilities in all kinds of events, related to any topic.

    - For example, co-operation among different youth umbrella organisations (referring to people with or without disability) has to be developed.

- Promote accessibility and usability – 'Universal Design'

    - For example, understanding usability of procedures is a very important issue that needs to be promoted by the Youth Department among international youth organisations and within the Council of Europe.

- Encourage Youth workers to reach many different people with various disabilities to participate in youth activities and to inform families about the benefits of non-formal education activities for their children with or without disability.

- Encourage and support (financially and technically) organisers to make activities accessible.

    - For example, to have brail signs and documents.
    - Provide organisers with tools to make an inaccessible building as accessible as possible.
    - Find alternative ways that do not have a cost impact, for example, a buddy system to alert deaf people to a fire alarm where there is no visible system in place.

- Alert international youth organisations, organisers and youth workers to the importance of talking to the participants about their needs, not talking to others about participants' needs.

    - For example, encouraging the use of an access form that should be filled out by everyone, including staff. These forms should include very narrow questions, such as "Do you need a hearing loop?" and so on, but also broader questions, as well as "What do you require in order to feel included?".

- Emphasise among organisers of events and youth workers that support should be identified with the person, not for the person with a disability.

    - For example, this means that a young disabled person is able to decide when and how he or she wants support. There needs to be a concerted effort to instigate encouragement by non-formal activity organisers, as well as family, youth workers and disabled people who have already done that.

- Encourage the visibility of role models.

    - Role models can form an encouragement for youth with disabilities to apply to International Youth Activities.
    - Role models can also influence the attitudes of people without disability; if people are in touch with people with disabilities from an early age onwards, they can develop an attitude that is more open towards including people with disabilities.
    - Role models should not be limited to that one lucky example. Non-formal education can do a lot in this respect, showing and letting people experience and learn about people with disabilities.

- Promote mixed ability activities as a good opportunity to broaden the perspective of participants on various issues related to human rights, social inclusion and so on.

    - Remember that disabilities as a topic is most often not incorporated into mainstream educational activities; therefore mixed ability activities are a great learning opportunity for seeing, for example, social cohesion or intercultural communications from different angles and abilities.

Donors

International Youth Organisations willing to commit themselves to the inclusion of young people with disabilities in their international non-formal youth activities, however, encounter additional barriers.
Therefore the Youth sector of the Council of Europe should encourage donors or funders of non-formal education activities to:
- Plan their policy and budget to allow for the allocation of part of it for mixed ability projects or activities.
- Allocate a reserve on the yearly donor budget that can be provided to the applicant as an add-on to their original budget plan in case people with disability decide to participate in the applicants' activity.
- Provide application forms that can incorporate and reflect the special needs of youth with disabilities and provide training on how to write an application form that incorporates and reflects the needs of different groups; this includes youth with disabilities but also rural youth, people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods, and so on.
- Welcome applications from youth groups that have fewer opportunities to attend non-formal youth activities, such as youth with disabilities, rural youth, and people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

Recommendations for Trainers Willing to Conduct Non-Formal Learning Activities Attended by Youth with Disabilities

Trainers willing to conduct non-formal activities attended by youth with disabilities do not need exceptional competences. However, relevant knowledge, good organisation and facilitation skills, some creativity and an open-minded attitude are necessary. To be able to meet the quality standards for Human Rights Educational activities organised by the Youth Department of the Council of Europe,

It is recommended that trainers:

Planning and Preparation

- Ensure, themselves, that the call put out for participants includes a paragraph which stresses the importance of expressing the needs and requirements for participation.
- Ask for the information provided in the application forms, which should include a set of clear questions to clarify the most common adaptations or adjustments.

    - For example, formats of working materials (audio, electronic, large print – font size and type, personal assistance, sign language interpreters, palantypist, video captions, etc.) with enough space to fill in information.

- Consult participants on potential obstacles in participating in an activity concerning his or her disability, including email correspondence, meetings and/or testing.
- Pay attention to planning enough breaks and ensure their length is suitable for participants.
- Room setups: rehearse well before an activity starts to accommodate all needs.

Training Design

- Ensure that adaptations of training design are in accordance with the background of the group and the way participants' function.

    - For example, consider the following: dividing the activities into smaller sessions with more breaks, including longer lunch or resting break; giving additional attention to "group agreement", or the rules of working in a group, in order to provide participants with the opportunity to fully understand the importance of following some of the "rules", for participants with disabilities to be included in activities.

- Be flexible in time management should, but also plan in additional time for certain activities.

    - For example, moving and arranging work in small groups or pairs might require some extra time. In addition, it should be taken into consideration

that some people with certain types of disabilities might need more time to express themselves (people with speech impairment, users of sign language interpretation, etc.)

- For training courses that do not address disabilities as a topic, trainers should consider how many youth with disabilities, and how many different types of disabilities could attend a group activity.

  - For example, it could prove to be difficult for participants without disability to adapt to too many special needs, particularly for those who do not have any experience with people with disabilities.
  - Moreover, disabled people shouldn't spend time and work only with other disabled people, but be provided with the possibility to integrate.
  - However, putting together too many disabled participants, with different needs and expectations, could cause conflicts. For instance, the sound of a palantype machine could disturb an autistic person's hypersensitivity.

- Trainers should encourage all participants to inform the group about their special needs and disabilities, explaining that it will make overall communication easier.

  - For example, all participants should be multipliers; it would be very useful for them to have the possibility to ask people with disabilities some questions, in order to learn to work together and then use this information in their organisations.

- For blind people it is very important to know what the disability of other participants is because they cannot see; for example, hearing aids, because they would not know that this person is hard of hearing and may therefore need a different means of communication.

Knowledge

- Be aware that it is possible to have participants with disabilities at any training course, regardless of the topic.

  - This does mean that the trainer should accept that it might involve changes in the regular work patterns and training designs.
  - The trainer should attend to individual assessment of learning and other needs of participants.

- Trainers should extend their knowledge about different needs and potential benefits for participants when using additional technologies and assistance.

  - For example, a palantypist could assist both people with hearing impairment as well as those with a short attention span, or difficulties in concentration, as well as youth having difficulties to work in the language spoken.

Attitudes

- Focus on abilities while keeping in mind limitations of participants.

  - For example, encouraging a "can-do attitude" among participants and fellow trainers, when confronted with an "it's not possible" comment: is it really not possible, or is it just difficult?
  - One way to reach something is to focus on the desired outcome, rather than on the method; if you know the outcome you can adapt the appropriate methodology.
  - Not to limit people as a trainer because of your low expectations of their abilities.
  - Disabled people can do the same as non-disabled with the right support and approach.

- Have a positive, human rights and inclusive approach. This is essential.

  - For example, do not focus on one type of disability but be as inclusive as possible and create a positive atmosphere, and a safe and secure space.

- Continuously develop, as a trainer, constructive attitudes for working in diverse groups.

  - For example, flexibility, openness, and someone who tries out new methodologies and combines educational approaches and learning styles (Visual, Auditory and Kinaesthetic).
  - Work without generalising the needs of people with certain types of disability (e.g. if you have worked with blind young people, it doesn't mean you know how to work with all blind people).
  - Show confidence, even if you don't know everything; a trainer should gain the trust of participants.
  - Ensure participants feel safe and acceptance for making mistakes, thus creating a safe environment, allowing everyone to be more open towards others.
  - As a trainer do not worry solely about access, but push participants further and ensure that people feel safe and are part of the group.

Additional Resources

To assist the trainers of non-formal educational activities, the Youth sector of the Council of Europe can provide important support,

It is recommended that the Youth Sector of the Council of Europe

- Create supplements to *Compass* and other resources with guidelines or directions on how to modify activities to accommodate the mixed ability in participant's context.

- Produce handbooks and manuals on how to carry out activities, and methods.

    - This should include examples of ways of adapting, and training modules, as well as resources about working with youth with certain types of disabilities (in co-operation with relevant youth organisations); knowing how to keep language as simple as possible.

- Make available handbooks and manuals on working with disabilities! Thus it makes sense to use a wider range of trainers, and support translation to local languages.
- Create a pool of experts, trainers and resource people for disability issues that can be consulted by a trainer's team.

Recommendations to Support Participants with Disabilities in their Role as Multipliers

The recommendations drafted by the participants in the consultative meeting on how to support young people in their role as multipliers are helpful for all participants of Council of Europe activities, but they are specifically helpful for disabled participants with a range of access needs.

It is important to keep in mind that not all young people in the role of multiplier are members of an NGO because of:

- lack of opportunities available to them
- differences in the national culture of organising youth activities.

Therefore, it is recommended that the Council of Europe support young people, especially youth with disabilities, who want to establish, or become members of, NGOs.

To support young people with disabilities who act as multipliers and role models, it is recommended that the Youth sector of the Council of Europe:

- Establish a systematic use of social media[5] to spread information useful for multipliers, including training calls, manuals and funding opportunities, and so on.
- Support Facebook groups or similar groups and mailing lists for participants to connect both before and after an activity.
- Organise webcasting of events of interest for young people who may not be able to attend due to their accessibility needs.
- Establish an interactive database where participants can share examples of activities.
- Prepare an overview of reports to share in multiple and accessible formats.
- Develop video reports with subtitles on the main topics discussed in an activity.
- Follow up participants within a 3- to 6-month period, focusing especially on areas where they can assist.
- Establish a policy to address multipliers' needs after the event.
- Assists participants who want to follow up on specific topics after the conference / session / meeting.
- Offer budget support for participants who want to arrange a follow-up session.

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5   It is important to use platforms that are accessible for everyone as far as possible, independent of their disabilities.

Recommendations Allowing Youth with Disabilities to be Active Members of the Society

Participants of the consultative meeting noted that youth with disabilities are currently under-represented in the policy making process. To ensure that youth with disabilities are active members of their society, it is recommended that governments:

- Mainstream disability issues in youth policies: include, support and acknowledge youth with disabilities in policy-making processes, and at all levels (national, regional and local) involve disabled organisations and disabled youth organisations.
- Ensure that the consultation process with youth with disabilities is a long-term process

  - by engaging, supporting and capacity-building youth with disabilities to share their views; this could be done by supporting and communicating with local, regional and national organisations who work with youth with disabilities.

- Ratify and fully implement the UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its optional protocol.
- Support, promote and encourage leadership and peer support opportunities among young people with disabilities, as they are important for motivation, self-confidence, aspiration and inspirations.

  - This support should be through financial support, resources and training youth disability organisations to assist them in creating these opportunities; provide access for youth with disabilities to educational opportunities of their choice.

- Provide information and access to non-formal learning, volunteer opportunities and internships.

  - These methods of gaining experience are valuable and enriching for young people with disabilities.

- Recognise the value of non-formal learning, volunteer opportunities and internships in government policy and practice.
- Encourage staff who work with young people with disabilities to use non-formal education activities.
- Provide training and information for staff who work with young people with disabilities in order to fulfil their job appropriately.
- Support employability, long-term economic involvement and the transition from education to employment for youth with disabilities:

  - through life-long learning opportunities, careers advice, internships, vocational trainings directly linked to entry in the workforce
  - through financial incentives to employers

- offering disabled youth the necessary tailored support, as they experience additional barriers around entering the labour market.
- Raise awareness of and give value to alternative ways in which disabled youth can contribute to society other than through paid work.

    - This could be achieved through highlighting alternative means of contributing to society during compulsory education as well using the media.

- Ensure that all information for young people is available to young people with disabilities in accessible and alternative formats, including sign languages.
- Make accessible online information to disabled young people, including those who use assistive technology tools.
- Promote and increase visibility of young people with disabilities in the mainstream media and make the media accessible to young people with disabilities.

    - This should be done by consulting with youth with disabilities.

- Empower young people with disabilities to live independent lives and facilitate de-institutionalisation:

    - This can be done through supporting independent living mechanisms and centres for independent living.

- Ensure economic support in order to increase access to services for youth with disabilities.
- Support the de-institutionalisation process for youth and children with disabilities, according to the Council of Europe Recommendation.

    - Giving them the choice between mainstream education and special schools which can be a better solution for some young people.
    - Ensure youth with disabilities have access to services, including assistance and accessible public transport, regardless of whether they are in a rural or urban setting.

- Give information and support to families of children and young people with disabilities to ensure that their children have access to independence, which helps to promote the quality of life of the whole family.
- Protect the right of the individual not to be dependent on their families for support.
- Enable young people with disabilities and their families to be active members of their societies through providing resources in government frameworks and budgets.
- Support access to relevant health services and health education that can improve the life of people with disabilities.

Conclusions

"Nothing About Us Without Us"

Disability is always a sensitive issue to deal with as it touches upon aspects such as vulnerability, stigma, mixed feelings and discomfort, controversies and power relations. For some people, it is a reminder of the "imperfection" of human beings and life. For a part of youth workers and young activists with disabilities, dealing with disability issues is an integral – and challenging – part of their mission.

Speaking up about these challenges in an honest and straightforward way and addressing the solutions and sharing odds of inaccessibility with humour were a valuable achievement of the participants of the Consultative Meeting. It was the first time that such a meeting – on inclusion of youth with disabilities – had been held by the Council of Europe.

Within the two and half days of discussions, the key idea of the meeting was fully achieved. In fact, an action plan was developed and recommendations were given to the Youth Department of the Council of Europe on the specific measures to ensure inclusion of youth with disabilities in the Youth Department programmes. Furthermore, participants suggested specific contents for the future Council of Europe Recommendation on Children and Young People with Disabilities as well as cross-cutting policy actions to tackle the challenges of inclusive participation of youth with disabilities, including those beyond the youth field. The discussions in the meeting often raised highly polemic issues and evoked more questions than answers, a good sign that the work is highly necessary and its progress is continuing in a consistent way.

According to the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF), disability is the "result of dynamic interaction between health conditions and contextual factors, both personal and environmental". Environmental factors include knowledge and attitudes, technology, natural or built environment, services, systems, policies, and support. In line with this notion, it was environmental as well as social factors that drew the attention of the Consultative Meeting participants. From identifying the challenges within the group of factors, the participants moved on to elaborating comprehensive recommendations as outlined in this report.

The work in the meeting has emphasised the importance of dealing with attitudinal barriers towards a disability, and increasing awareness and understanding of the varying needs that youth with disabilities has. It was agreed that lack of information leads to prejudices, while low level of public awareness produces insufficient implementation of existing laws, and attitudinal barriers lead to structural barriers. Disability should be mainstreamed both as an issue / content in the Youth Department educational activities, and as a target group participating in the Youth Department activities at large. To date, disability as a concept and disabled people as a group have often been generalised. Often certain groups of people with certain disabilities are under-represented within the common denominator "people with disabilities" and they should be paid special attention to.

One of the most important outcomes of the seminar discussions is the realisation of the complexity of working with disability issues, and the necessity to develop a strong commitment amongst all stakeholders towards inclusion of youth with disabilities, as well as partnerships between relevant actors to bring about practical solutions. Over the course of one meeting, very clear directions were established towards improving (inclusive) participation of youth with disabilities in the Council of Europe Youth Sector activities.

Towards Inclusive Participation in Youth Activities

When speaking of the challenges related to participation in non-formal education, as well as mixed ability activities and the recommendations stemming from them, the following interconnected issues should be highlighted:

- Concerted support of the family, peers, community, youth workers, activity organisers and peer participants is needed for preparing young people's effective involvement in non-formal education activities, including international activities. To this end, (re-)training of health, social, education and youth workers is opportune.

- The need for more training, change in attitudes and improving knowledge of disability amongst the community and in the families of youth with disabilities, diminishing the trends of overprotection (while it can be understandable from the side of parents), a patronising attitude and overly excessive care.

- Development of self-advocacy skills is very much needed with youth with disabilities; at times, they do not express their accessibility needs explicitly enough (e.g. before and during the meetings) due to lack of self-esteem, self-awareness and confidence.

- Support should be identified with the person, not for a person, with a disability. No generalising of the needs of people with disabilities should be made: each person, even with the same type of a disability, may have different needs and coping strategies. An individual-based approach is therefore crucial.

- In mixed ability settings, there is a risk for youth with disabilities (usually subconsciously) of setting hierarchies or prejudices towards different disabilities; assisting participants to put their disability in perspective is needed.

- In terms of content, accessibility and methodology choices, no pre-assumptions should be made about, and low expectations formed towards, youth with disabilities on the part of both trainers and participants. "Learned helplessness", which could have been acquired from an overprotective family, should not be fed. As a group developing recommendations for trainers working with youth with disabilities put it, "Ask the young person – is it really not possible or is it just difficult?"

Language in regard to disability has always been a precarious and moving field. Proper use of terminology in working with youth with disabilities, whether on a level of training or policy discussions, captured participants' undivided attention. Participants of this meeting, as well as of previous disability-related activities of the Youth Department, suggested avoiding using the term 'special needs'. This term is believed to be counterproductive as a loaded descriptor that reinforces pity and which may lead to segregation rather than improve perceptions. 'Accessibility needs' was suggested instead. The bottom line is that youth with disabilities should be consulted about the terms they feel most comfortable to use.

Being fully included means that youth with disabilities are recognised and valued as equal participants. When one speaks of equal access, what is meant is good and meaningful access. Inclusion *doesn't mean equalisation of all people*, but respect for the individual needs of every person. In inclusive society, the needs of people with disabilities are understood as integral to the social and economic order and not identified as "special".

Another specific conclusion that can be drawn from the reflections is that work on disability issues and with youth with disabilities is not "attractive". Activities with, by and for youth with disabilities are not considered "sexy". Having to worry about accessibility for wheelchair users or informing deaf people is less attractive than organising a visit of an international youth group to your community. To this end, more motivation and stimulating measures are needed to encourage youth workers to engage with disabled youngsters in their communities and organisations. There could be a certain weariness of perceiving youth with disabilities as a "vulnerable group" amongst NGOs and funding agencies. To counteract this attitude, promoting a positive, dynamic image of a young person with a disability through social and public media could be one of the steps; another one could be the continued exposure to the issue on a regular basis, such as in intercultural learning and human rights education training courses.

Is Full Accessibility Ever Achievable?

Accessibility in its different forms – accessibility of environment, information and communication, activity application and selection procedures, methods and methodologies, and travel – was a common thread running through the meeting discussions. To ensure active participation of youth with disabilities in training programmes, all aspects of the design, implementation and follow-up to the training activities must be fully accessible. Moreover, in case of participation in activities abroad, accessibility becomes a series of barriers for youth with disabilities, as the entire travel chain to the event needs to be accessible.

Evidently, accessibility is important from the human rights and ethical perspective, but is also a purely pragmatic need for strengthening youth participation in the world where one billion people have a disability. The affordability of accessibility measures is an important underlying objective across the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to ensure that assistive technologies are not priced out of reach for people with disabilities. This is the ideal that still needs to be reached. In the light of this, the recommendations for the Council of Europe and youth programme funding agencies were particularly notable in order to develop flexible budgets, including budget

allocations for accessibility needs or arranging for a reserve as an add-on that can be provided to cover specific needs of young applicants with disabilities. On the other hand, it was emphasised that the funding alone or provided accessibility are not the recipe for inclusion; sometimes attitudes and behaviour prove to be the hardest obstacle (for instance, due to a negative attitude, a lecturer may refuse to use assistive technologies that are necessary for a disabled participant). Moreover, at times the constraints of resources such as money, time and capacity can be perceived rather than real. For instance, staff awareness raising does not have to cost (a lot of) money at all.

As advised by the participants, open and constructive questions about accessibility needs should be included in all application calls and a clearly thought-through approach is needed. What is accessible for one person might cause difficulties or inaccessibility for another person, for example, the noise of palantype machine for a person with Asperger's Syndrome. In due course, further work also needs to be done to promote the understanding and the use of informed, flexible and universal accessibility solutions for different disabilities. As an example, text-on-screen helps not only hard of hearing people, but those with learning disabilities, in noisy environments, and young people who lack foreign language skills.

The combination of these challenges may seem insurmountable, but, as the World Report on Disability suggests, it is better to continually expand the scope of accessibility rather than try to make everything accessible at once. It would be desirable to see a development of clear accessibility policy of the Youth Department to include, but not be limited to:

- Strategic planning, including strategies for effective use of limited resources
- More resources allocation
- Co-ordinating body for better co-ordination between relevant actors involved in providing and monitoring accessibility measures
- Continued efforts in learning about various disability-specific needs
- Targeting low-cost programmes
- Drawing on international co-operation
- Including people with disabilities in all stages.

Accessibility testing of the European Youth Centre Budapest identified necessary adjustments for various types of disabilities and brought out extremely useful suggestions which must be carried out by the technical staff of the Centres. Furthermore, the accessibility testing was a very good way to inform the management, educational advisors and the staff about existing accessibility issues which could not be conceived before. The next step will be the completion of an access audit with the help of experts and people with disabilities, as it was not possible to finalise it entirely during the limited duration of the Consultative Meeting. The second step would be to put an access audit report into action by seeking solutions to problems and outlining relative costs. This work usually focuses around the following aspects:

- Work of a relatively minor nature or adjustment to working practices or management, at low cost.
- Adaptations which can be carried out as part of ongoing maintenance, redecoration and refurbishment.
- Major capital items which may need to be budgeted for.

The adaptation work should fully respond to the principle of 'reasonable accommodation', as outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Reasonable adjustment means carrying out, when necessary, "appropriate modifications and adjustments, which do not impose a disproportionate or undue burden, so that persons with disabilities can enjoy their human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with others".

The findings from the access audit should be used in developing the clear *indicators* and standards of accessibility for the European Youth Centres. Without them, it is not possible to understand which approach works best. Finally, the monitoring of the accessibility measures should be carried out with the involvement of youth with disabilities.

Demystifying Disability in Training Courses

"First see the person, not a disability. Show respect, not pity. Discuss the accessibility needs." This was the focus of the key suggestions about a trainer's attitude towards participants with disabilities. In the spirit of Helen Keller, who disliked the hypocrisy of the people "who try to talk down to your understanding […] when walking with you try to shorten their steps to suit yours", disability should be approached in an open and constructive manner (although a person can discuss their disabilty confidentially if desired).

As discussed at the meeting, training work with disabled youth requires knowledge, empathy, experience (when in possession of it), an open mind, flexibility, common sense, patience and resistance to generalisations / jumping to conclusions about participants with disabilities. It is important for a trainer to be always self-aware – aware of his/her own actions and their implications for participants with different disabilities. This work calls for multi-responsiveness and being always alert, which requires a very high level of concentration and energy from a trainer. It may happen that people with disabilities do not always assess their productivity or accessibility needs realistically enough. This is something that can be kept in mind by the trainers, although without lowering expectations. A careful balance between declared expectations and work output is needed; preparation in the process, continuous adjustment and adaptation on the side of both trainers and participants with a disability are a must.

Follow-up Measures: Including Youth with Disabilities in the Activities of the Council of Europe Youth Department

The aims and objectives of the meeting were mostly met. It can be said that some objectives were ambitious and gave a very good direction of thought at the meeting, even though they were not explicitly addressed, such as the objective to analyse pre-requisites for disability mainstreaming[6] in the programmes and policies of the Youth Department. The meeting served the purpose of exploring these pre-requisites and settled ground for the mainstreaming work that is yet to be reached through the follow-up

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[6] Mainstreaming disability is a process in which development policy and programmes, designed to benefit everyone in a specific geographical area, explicitly include people with disabilities in their design, taking into account their specific needs at all relevant levels.

tasks. Mainstreaming is a deed in process as most of the Council of Europe Member states signed or ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which commits the States to mainstreaming disability in all programmes. This approach is very different from the disability-specific approach, in which people with a disability are put in a programme specially designed for them. At this stage, the Council of Europe Youth Sector can mostly apply efforts to:

- address disability-specific needs in the Youth Department programmes in accordance with the recommendations
- introduce disability as a cross-cutting issue in the programmes
- promote participation of youth with disabilities in generic programmes and involving them
- increase the number of disability-specific events since they provide the basis which enables disabled people to take part in mainstream society.

Mainstreaming disability and youth with disabilities is the ideal; but support is needed to achieve parity. This is why a twin-track approach is needed: on the one hand, supporting empowerment of youth with disabilities; on the other, addressing inequalities between non-disabled and disabled actors involved in Youth Department programmes. The steps taken now will be a good starting point for mainstreaming youth with disabilities in future Youth Department programmes. Programme mainstreaming is a long, slow process – it is justifiable to start small and work on easy changes to gradually build confidence and move forward.

Recommendations from the meeting should serve as a basis for the youth workers, trainers and staff of the Youth Department of the Council of Europe in planning and organising generic activities that may involve disabled participants. Greater attention should be paid to a proactive approach in this regard, as the information about available accessibility measures in the European Youth Centres should be available for consultation on the websites, in all Participation Calls, study sessions, and Administrative Arrangements. They should also outline the accessibility tools amongst the list of available equipment in the Centres and other preliminary information necessary for applying for the Youth Department activities. Moreover, youth with disabilities should be involved as resource people in planning and organising disability-related activities or activities with disabled participants.

It seems opportune to use the findings from the meeting in order to conduct a SWOT analysis of inclusion of youth with disabilities in the programmes of the Youth Department, which enables the situation to be viewed in its complexity, and provide space for constructive criticism. The results can feed into the follow-up actions to the meeting. In addition, action plans and recommendations by the participants, as well as accessibility requests for the European Youth Centre Budapest, could be updated as more information on how the UN CRPD Convention will impact on Member States comes to light, as the UN CRPD has started to influence the EU and the Council of Europe mechanisms and institutions.

A reasonable approach to tackling the issue of participation of youth with disabilities in non-formal education activities would be for the Council of Europe to develop the manual (as a supplement to *Compass,* or separately) on working with youth with disabilities and adapting the training activities for mixed ability groups, as was advised in the meeting.

Three thematic strands can be kept in mind in this work: Social inclusion (attitudinal barriers), Participation (institutional barriers) and Access for all (environmental barriers). From the part of NGOs and disability activists, an implementation of a large share of the recommendations could require, at times, more creativity and resourcefulness than funding.

Follow-up Measures: Policy Work and Participation of Youth with Disabilities in Society

The challenges identified at the meeting can only be mediated by strong alliances between disability organisations, youth disability organisations and networks, generic youth organisations and the Council of Europe Youth Department and Department on Social Cohesion working on policies related to integration of people with disabilities.
As remarked in the report, youth in transition to adulthood have been often left out of policy discussions on disability due to legal distinctions between a child and an adult where anyone above 18 is classified as adult. There has been a tendency to forget the transition phase between childhood and adulthood, and between education and employment. The adoption of the expected recommendation on children and youth with disabilities could be one of the most important steps in filling this policy gap.

In June 2012, Menno Ettema, the Educational Advisor of the Youth Department of the Council of Europe, attended the meeting of the Committee of Experts on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CS-RPD), in order to present the recommendations of the Consultative Meeting and a video message. During the expert meeting it was agreed that the recommendation on inclusion of children and youth with disabilities would be drafted. The Committee of Experts appointed a drafting group for the recommendations and agreed to a written consultation process with relevant stakeholders during the drafting process, including consultation with the statutory bodies of the Youth Department.

From 15 to 17 November 2012, the Senior Trainer of the meeting, Karina Chupina, presented in her speech at the Council of Europe Regional Seminar on "Participation of people with disabilities in political and public life" in Zagreb, Croatia, the participants' recommendations and drew attention to the need to involve youth with disabilities in formulating policies

It became clear to all participants, staff of the Youth Centre and the Youth Department, that the effective and inclusive participation of youth with disabilities in youth work will be possible once the initial enthusiasm and goodwill showed at the Consultative Meeting is transformed through the difficult task of putting into place practical solutions for the challenges.

Evaluation

Accommodation and meal services

Half of the participants expressed their full satisfaction in this area, while the other half identified areas to improve in. One of the participants complained about a strange noise on the second floor at 6am. Someone suggested having a bigger bed for their Personal Assistant in one of the special rooms. Some felt that the portion size of the food served was unsettlingly oversized. According to one individual, sometimes too much salad was served and a suggestion was made to serve more traditional Hungarian food. On the other hand, vegetarians were completely satisfied with the options that the canteen had on offer. Staff assistance was well appreciated by showing participants the canteen.

Preparation and information before the start of the Meeting

A modest reaction could be seen from participants when it came to the evaluation in this field. Some participants appreciated receiving information beforehand, especially regarding the accessibility of the venue. However, some noted that the name of the bus stop was missing and suggested adding a small map, which could be printed. One of the participants remarked that flight ticket reimbursements were only given after the return journey, which can be inconvenient for people outside the Euro-zone as some would have been charged by their banks. Furthermore, the same people lose money on exchange after they are reimbursed for the return taxi ride. Many people were not informed about the reception party at the end, which resulted in a lot of people leaving too early. Many of them also missed out on exchanging contact details.

"The Meeting addressed everything I hoped it would."

The group shared mixed feelings while evaluating participants' expectations. Some participants had no significant expectations prior to the course as they did not know what to expect from it. One of the participants felt that by the end of the course "everything had a meaning" and that there was an important learning value added. Another individual thought that the presence of a wider range of people with disabilities could have been more beneficial in order to learn more on different types of disabilities and the challenges related to them. Some thought that, considering the meeting was held in a non-formal education context, it was still rather a formal environment and some people found it difficult to express themselves. In relation to this thought, a suggestion was made to do more energisers in the future. Another point a few participants made was about the insufficient time-frame given for the meeting. Thus, many important issues / parts had to be left out due to time constraints. On the other hand, many appreciated the work and efforts of the Council of Europe, *inter alia,* in organising the Consultative Meeting.

"The group of participants in this meeting made the Meeting a success"

The overall impression about the group turned out to be very positive.

"The facilitators of the Meeting did a very good job"

The vast majority appreciated the input and work of the facilitators. More thought on the amount of time given to certain activities and having a set of rules or a structure on how mini groups operate were among additional suggestions.

"I feel happy about the result of this meeting"

Participants had various views on the actual outcome of the meeting. Some thought that they only touched upon issues that had been addressed during those two and a half days, and that more time was required to further develop ideas and to go more deeply into certain areas. At the same time many were excited to see the follow-up of the programme in the future.

Appendices

List of Presenters and Their Projects / Organisations

Mr Antonio Saccone – Giovani Per Giovani (Youth for Youth)
Ms Hanna Pasterny – Centrum Rozwoju Inicjatyw Spolecznych (CRIS) (Centre for the Development of Collective Initiatives)
Ms Zara Todd – ALLFIE
Ms Delphine le Maire and Ms Popescu Raluca Ioana – European Union of the Deaf Youth (EUDY) and CevaDespus
Ms Laura Scholler – International Federation of Hard of Hearing Young People
Mr Bojan Stanojlovic – Association of Students with Disabilities

Summary of Presentations Made During the Consultative Meeting

Mr Antonio Saccone - Giovani Per Giovani (Youth for Youth)

The aim of the organisation is to promote social inclusion, European awareness, and intercultural dialogue and to facilitate the international exchange of good practices in social inclusion. Youth for Youth organise an annual sports event for students with and without disabilities in Milan. Normally, before the event, workshops are set up to educate pupils about the concept of sport, while including ability and disability issues. Students are asked to prepare materials such as banners before the event. The athletes are people with different disabilities – physical, sensorial and mental – and the supporters are pupils without disability. The party is followed by music and dance. Prizes are given to every athlete, and also to the most creative students. The objective here is to use universal language in the form of music and sports. The general idea is to gather pupils together to have a direct experience of a mixed ability group, regardless of their abilities or disabilities. Currently, the organisation has been trying to create a network of organisations which share similar interests and have similar goals. In future events, they plan to invite delegations of foreign athletes and they also want to facilitate the possibility for Italians with disability to participate in international sport events.

Ms Hanna Pasterny – Centrum Rozwoju Inicjatyw Spolecznych (CRIS)

The first project Hanna got involved with was to set up workshops and individual training courses for people with disabilities. The biggest challenge Hanna and the team faced was to change the mentality of parents and of people working in centres for people with disabilities. The workshops aimed to develop practical skills for people with disabilities, such as cooking or language learning. The idea is to prepare and empower people with disabilities for employment.

In the second project Hanna and her association acted as a local partner at an international conference about technologies, supporting technologies for blind people, deaf-blind and for deaf people. The special arrangement they had to make was to find international sign language interpreters and someone who wrote everything on the

computer so that hard of hearing people could follow. Some blind people did presentations, some of them had material in Braille, others had headphones with tapes and material recorded on it, and so they could present their materials in different ways. The notes taken from the Braille equipment to the computer turned out to be annoying because it could not keep up with the flow of information.

The third project Hanna is involved in is associated with a non-profit organisation in Poland. Next year they will organise workshops for people interested in learning how to help blind people during sports activities. They also want to make similar arrangements for people with different types of autism. In this case they will have to make arrangements to meet the needs of people with autism, such as making more breaks for those who do not like to spend much time in crowds, and so on.

Finally, Hanna has written a book, *Tandem on the Scottish Background* (in English), which tells the story of a professor with Asperger's syndrome and her inventions for people with disability. Some already consider this book as a good tool for parents of people with autism and apparently it helps them to understand and deal with sensory issues of people with Asperger's syndrome or even other types of autism.

Ms Zara Todd – ALLFIE

ALLFIE supports a group of sixteen people with various disabilities aged between 12 and 26. The group call themselves VIPERS, which stands for voice, inclusion, participation, empowerment and research. One of the challenges this group had to deal with was the inaccessibility of traditional documents. As a solution, they hired a graphic designer who records minutes through cartoons and visual representations which are later explained to those with visual impairment. The people in the group are being trained to become researchers; therefore they often interview project managers and young people with disability as well. During the group sessions all learning is done through games and activities. The group members are paid in high street vouchers.

One of the biggest challenges for them stems from the reliance on their parents to facilitate their children to come to meetings which usually take place in different locations in the UK. Thus, they are dependent on parents' willingness to support this project. The project also involves three other organisations which do not have any prior experience of working with young people. The group is keen on evaluation, which is carried out after each session. Another problem is that they work with academic researchers who use complicated language which is not always accessible for some members of the group. For this reason, they had to teach researchers what accessible language is and how to use it in certain cases.

Zara is involved in another project as well, where a group of young people make films. One of them aims to challenge attitudes towards young people with disability in the UK. The group picked the subject and did the filming as well, which was presented in the media, on Channel 4.

Both projects aim to develop an action plan for each individual which aims to identify the possibilities of making use of the skills once they leave the project.

Ms Delphine le Maire and Ms Popescu Raluca Ioana – European Union of the Deaf Youth (EUDY) and CevaDespus

Delphine and Raluca talked about a study session with OBESSU (Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions) which took place in March 2012 at the EYCB. One of the aims of the project was to raise awareness of disabilities in study sessions, so they invited people with disability to take part and share their experiences.

Topics during the sessions included special needs, education, participation and social inclusion. Activities were enriched by games, group work, role-plays, debates and discussions. Often the group of 30-35 people was divided into small groups to collect ideas on certain issues and put them on flipcharts, and then one representative of each group presented them to everyone during plenary sessions.

According to Ms. Delphine, who was one of the facilitators, communication was accessible to everyone thanks to sign language interpreters and a palantypist on topics such as inclusion. Raluca, as a person with disability, shared her positive experiences on the study session, as she felt included and people made her feel accepted and welcome during the meeting. People also had the chance to share different cultural experiences, ideas and values during the so-called "cultural evenings".

The positive impact and the follow-up of this session have lead to a campaign which looks at the accessibility of schools in general. The study session also demonstrated how mixed ability projects in NFE can adapt to the needs of participants by using a variety of methods. Everyone felt included, while some were able to experience working with people with disability, and the latter gained more confidence being in a mixed ability group, so it turned out to be a beneficial project for everyone.

Ms Laura Scholler – International Federation of Hard of Hearing Young People

Laura mainly talked about the most common challenges hard of hearing people face in everyday life. Firstly, hard of hearing is considered as an invisible disability; therefore people often forget that they are talking to someone who cannot hear very well. However, as Laura explained, it is mostly the responsibility of hard of hearing people to inform people about their condition so as to avoid misunderstandings and confusion. It is also important for them to explain what FM-systems are and why they wear them, to make people aware of the situation. The bottom line, unfortunately, is that hard of hearing people have to be open and feel confident in talking about their specific communication needs, such as seeing someone's face when that person is talking; there is a tendency among hard of hearing people to have low self-esteem and lack of confidence when talking about these issues. Many of them try to hide their condition, even at places of work, in order to avoid discrimination.

Bojan Stanojlovic – Association of Students with Disabilities

The organisation that Bojan was representing at the meeting is the first cross-disability organisation in Serbia, as he explained, which means that its members are people with various disabilities. The organisation provides assistance in higher education for people with hidden or invisible types of disability such as haemophilia. Projects launched by the

organisation include Inclusion and another recent one called Independently Towards Graduation. Challenges came during the application process since people are not used to expressing their needs on these application forms; therefore it was difficult to make arrangements in advance. Thus it was hard to adjust the programme setting according to the participants' needs without having the necessary information. On the application form, people were asked whether they need personal assistants; however at the end, it turned out that some people needed some assistance in certain activities, yet they had failed to communicate this through the application form. Another big, if not the biggest, challenge for the organisation was the preparation of a project. 15% of the budget of both projects went on arranging personal assistance, sign language interpreters, printing material in Braille and other adaptations.

During mixed ability projects people with disability had the opportunity to freely express themselves, which was highly appreciated in the evaluation of the programme. Some people said that this was the first time anybody had given them the opportunity to freely speak and that others would actually try to capture what that person had to say. Usually, training courses were organised with topics including anti-discrimination, human rights, youth participation, training, and so on.

Presentation of Thorsten Afflerbach

This presentation aimed to point out issues concerning young people with disability within the processes of policy, and recommendation making.

Mr Afflerbach's statement (summary)

Whenever we devise disability policies, or recommendations at the Council of Europe, we very often speak about people with disabilities, or persons with disabilities, but we do not necessarily specify the age group. Sometimes we specify the gender, and we think about young people as children. We tend to forget young people. So you have an example of text, of a recommendation we have on de-institutionalisation, we talked about that yesterday. It says the following: de-institutionalisation, or community living of children with disabilities. Obviously we have a problem from the legal point of view. A child is anybody under 18, and above 18 is classified as adults. We have a legal distinction between child and adult. Often we tend to forget the transition phase between childhood and adulthood, and between education and employment. And we do not always take account of youth, of young people. Even experts tend to think more of children, and they think of education, inclusive education in mainstream schools, and tend to forget about the transition time and period and the issue of young people, of youth. So in order to help them keep in mind the particular interests and also requirements of young people, it would be a very good idea if you could produce your views.

Not all recommendations or all ideas are acceptable to all member states. This is why the whole process (a) takes a long time, and (b) the result at the end never looks like the first draft at the beginning, because there is this negotiation process.

Best practices in general (mentioned during the presentation)

The Council of Europe has published a little handbook, an internal guide, called "Dispelling preconceptions about people with disabilities" for welcoming disabled clients, which could apply to visitors or experts or participants, or to disabled guests at the Council of Europe premises. The provision of information in alternative formats: DAP is available in Braille, and easy-to-read formats (simple sentences in English with illustrations) for people with mental impairments.

We often forget the transition phase when we talk about people with disabilities at the Council of Europe – the youth, young people 16 – 18 years old. The Social Cohesion and Integration Division, in 2009, came up with a recommendation on the social inclusion of children and young people with autism spectrum disorders, where a distinction is made, and children and young people are explicitly mentioned.

A draft recommendation is under negotiation where there is an explicit reference to women and girls with disabilities; the text has not yet been adopted by the Committee of Ministers; it should be adopted by 13 June 2012.
Living on the Edge (Edge Ryders in short) project co-operation of Council of Europe and The EU Commission also addresses the transition phase of youth, it aims to 'facilitating the transition of youth to an independent active life' and focused a lot on the transition from education to employment. The project is an internet-based project, many hundreds of participants use this interactive online platform to share their experience, ideas, and so.

Presentation of Zsuzsanna Igali (former representative of disability affairs in the Drafting Committee on protecting and promoting the rights of women and girls with disabilities)

Ms Igali briefly introduced the CAHPAH Committee and talked about a number of new areas of interest. The CAHPAH Committee met last year and worked on important documents, including discrimination against women with disabilities. CAHPAH focused on participation of women and girls with disabilities. Delegates attending the meeting were asked to write a report in those areas.

Equality and non-discrimination: this principle is stated in the constitution in most countries but without giving special attention to double discrimination except for a few positive exceptions (e.g. Finland).
Research, data and statistics: in certain countries research data on disability and gender is lacking because it has not been collected in a consistent way.

Participation in political life: the objectives here have been based on promoting an environment where disabled people can participate in political life. The following two good examples were mentioned by Ms Igali: regulations of accessibility at polling stations and electoral desks in Spain; in Latvia, those with health conditions have the opportunity to vote at their place of living.

Inclusive education: schools should accommodate all conditions but the problem is that not all pupils with special needs attend special schools.

Employment and economic situation: preliminary recommendation identified that legislation has been improving. Now is the time to focus on implementation.

Health care and rehabilitation: people with disabilities should have the same rights to govern their own lives. The objectives are to provide access to health education and health campaigns, to provide advice for people with disability and to train health care professionals in a way that would instil disability awareness together with proficiency and matters for specific needs of persons with disabilities. It is important to have access for all types of disabilities at hospitals; for example, often sign language interpreters are not provided at healthcare centres.

Social protection and community-based services: to enable people with disabilities to plan their lives and live independently in their community and to allow the freedom of choice by providing quality support services. Special attention should be paid to the situation of families with children with disabilities and advocate an approach by training for parents, in childcare and education tasks.

Reproductive and sexual rights: three main issues must be addressed and highlighted:

1. Forced sterilisation and abortion should be forbidden as is already the case in Latvia and Serbia)
2. Give support to families with disability
3. Avoid the institutionalisation of people with a disability

Access to justice and protection: disability should be included in all material including reports in order to make violence against women with disability more visible.

Right for sport, culture and leisure: sometimes not all venues are accessible. The most important issues here concern the inaccessibility of venues. This recommendation states that women, men and children have the right to have access to all venues. The creativity of women with disability can be used as a role model for self-fulfilment.

These are no official recommendations as these are yet to be improved by official bodies.

All member states submitted their reports so that the Committee could analyse them and give suggestions to member state governments on how to improve the lives of women with disability in all those areas mentioned above. There are still some gaps which need to be addressed in the future.

List of the Participants

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European Union of the Deaf Youth (EUDY)

Irene BERTANA
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VIEWS France

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Laura SCHOLLER
International Federation of Hard Of Hearing Young People

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NORWAY

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Challenges Related to Web Access

During the accessibility audit, participants, blind and visually impaired people in particular, found it difficult to navigate through web pages for the following reasons:

- menus did not come up
- many pages could not be opened
- readability: some pages contain too much text; sometimes there is a lack of easy to read texts
- those with visual impairment had difficulties with some colours on the website
- some graphic links are not well textualised
- e-learning is difficult to navigate through.

EYCB Website / Youth Department Website

- Too much text on the front page, which is not clearly structured. For example, dyslectic people will find it difficult to find the information they need and focus their search.
- The blue-green contrast used on the website does not enhance visibility.
- A suggestion was made to include a clearly structured calendar function, clearly indicating what is happening when.

According to the feedback from visually impaired people, the following points illustrate the difficulties when moving around within the site using a screen reader:

- There is no clear hierarchy on the site; the titles of different information elements are not clear, and are randomly mixed. It is not clear overall what the title is and what the main body of the text is.
- Flash animation on the website is not described properly.
- Images on the site have no clear descriptive title.
- PDF documents that should be downloaded cannot be clearly found; it is not clear from the reader if it is a clickable link.
- PDF documents on the website are not readable after downloading. It could be that the PDF document is saved as an image page instead of the text page which would make it non readable.

The same issues appeared when participants looked at the Youth Department's website; they also noticed that the website has too many links and menus on the right hand side of the page.

Council of Europe Website

Feedback from visually impaired:

- Most elements have clearly tagged titles; the news section, in particular, is clear.
- The website itself has a strange name: the screen reader reads out 47 Countries, 800 million people and only at the end mentions the Council of Europe, which is confusing.
- Overall the French version is better tagged and structured, and the website title clearly indicates the name of the Council of Europe.

Youthapplications.coe.int

- Only one route works on the website to register for the application while most of the text which is provided on different pages with several links to register does not work. Overall, it is confusing how to get to the registration page.
- The explanation about how to upload a support letter has images that are too small and the layout of the description is confusing.
- After registering for the first time you are prompted to edit your profile; the big red sign is distracting because there is no need to make a full profile.
- The questionnaires for activities are very demanding, questions are complex and the writer feels in some cases that information is asked for twice.

Feedback from visually impaired participants:

- Overall the website is accessible for screen readers.
- It needs a bit of searching to register for the first time.
- The application forms themselves are very accessible and easy to fill in.

E-learning Website: http://e-learning4youth.coe.int

- It is good that the menu on the main page does not provide too many choices, making it easy to navigate.
- Within a course the right hand side bar gives a table of content which helps the user navigate.
- Overall the website is clear, although at first it is not always clear where information can be found.

Feedback from visually impaired:

- The difference between a logo (picture) and a clickable link is not clear. The Youth Department logo seems to be a picture but is a link and therefore the blind participant navigates away form the e-learning website accidentally.
- The side menu with courses cannot be found.
- On the main page with the course categories the screen reader cannot find any of the course categories.
- The blind participant was not able to go further then logging into the e-learning website. All steps afterwards could not be followed because the screen reader cannot find a link or does not know what is what, a picture, or a link, and so on.

Recommendations on Improving Web Accessibility

Youthapplications.coe.int

It is suggested that participants are given an option. Some prefer working with a word document, while for others it would work best to work on a screen using HTML format. It depends on the type of screen reader that is used and the accessibility of the website with its HTML coding.

Channels of communication with participants and young people

For distributing calls and other information it is best to work with disability partner organisations who can forward the information in their networks. Facebook is a tool that reaches many youth with disabilities, including visually impaired. Activities could be linked to the Disability Forum page / Facebook page.
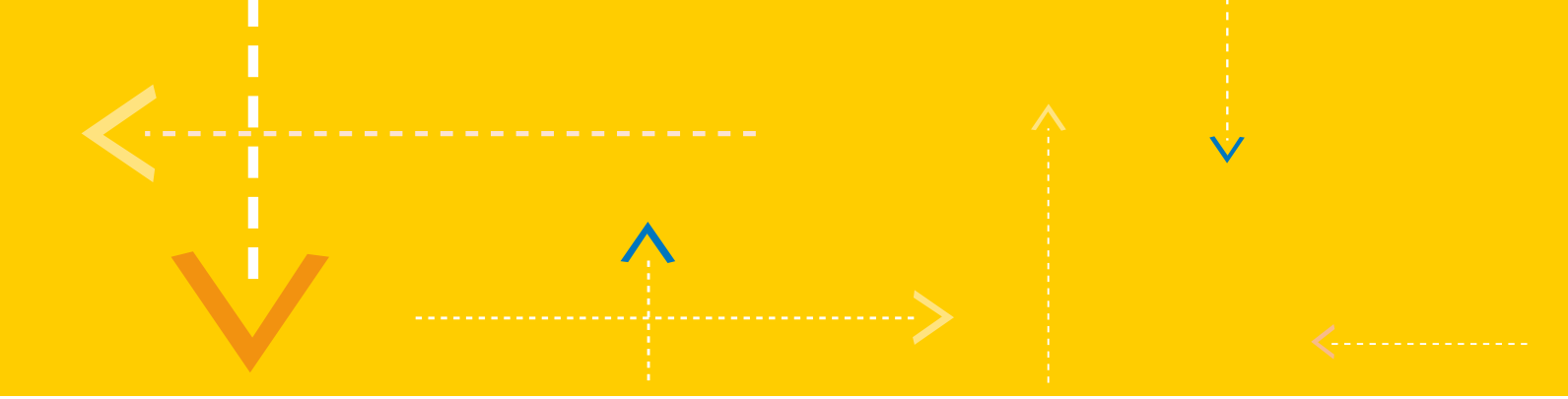
Further suggestions include:

- Testing of accessibility of the websites should be done by professionals; feedback from these participants is limited, based on the equipment they use and their impairments. Software tools can help make an accessibility report of a website; professional companies can do an assessment and give tips on how to make improvements.
- PDF documents that are scanned from paper normally become image files and therefore are not readable by screen readers. PDF files made with PDF makers need to have the right setting to ensure that the PDF becomes a text file and not an image file.
- Only little information should be included on the opening page; most of the information should be available through the menus, but they need to be edited and grouped into a maximum of 4 to 5 menu items for a better overview.
- Information on the sites has to be structured into hierarchy making use of tagging, so that different types of software for blind people can recognise the titles, menus, pictures, and texts. For example use the W3C system.
- Pictures always have to be named.
- A significant contrast between the background colour and text colour is important.
- Find out through what media disabled people could be informed regularly about our activities and programmes.
- Writers of website texts should ensure that the text is easy to understand and not too long. Checking tools for text exist which give the writer feedback on the length and the complexity of the language used.

Additional sources:

Links to the Video presentations of the Recommendations:
In Non-Formal Education every Learner is Unique, recommendations on making activities inclusive for youth with disabilities: http://vimeo.com/43934505
Nothing for us, without us! Recommendations of young people with disabilities for the Council of Europe and its member states: http://vimeo.com/43637110

The consultative meeting "Inclusion of Young People with Disabilities in the Youth Activities of the Council of Europe" was attended by 24 young people from 14 member states. Half of the participants were young people with physical, sensory or intellectual disabilities.

The meeting aimed to develop a plan of action to ensure that young people with disabilities may participate and be involved actively in all education and training activities of the Youth Department of the Council of Europe, and through their participation develop in their role as multipliers for other young people with disabilities. Participants drafted recommendations for human rights trainers, the Council of Europe and its member states. The recommendations provide measures to enable youth with disabilities to benefit from non-formal learning activities and ensure their social inclusion in European society.

Since 2001 the Council of Europe has been promoting a rights-based approach to disabilities. It is estimated that people with disabilities represent 10 to 15% of the total population in Europe and for many of them the fundamental rights contained in the European Convention on Human Rights and the Revised European Social Charter are inaccessible. The consultative meeting aimed to respond to this situation through the strengthening of non formal human rights education addressing disability and social inclusion and by providing an input to the 'Committee of Ministers recommendation on Children and Youth with Disabilities' drafted in 2012.

COUNCIL OF EUROPE   CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

The Council of Europe has 47 member states, covering virtually the entire continent of Europe. It seeks to develop common democratic and legal principles based on the European Convention on Human Rights and other reference texts on the protection of individuals. Ever since it was founded in 1949, in the aftermath of the Second World War, the Council of Europe has symbolised reconciliation.

Youth – Jeunesse

Youth Department of the Council of Europe
www.coe.int/youth