



HIDDEN DIMENSIONS

**Hidden Dimensions of
Inclusion in Youth Sector**

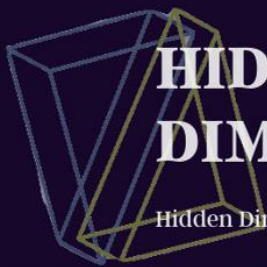
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Greece

United Societies of Balkans

Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union





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This document was created within the frameworks of the 'Hidden Dimensions' project implemented by Együttható Egyesület, Association Nevo Parudimos and United Societies of Balkans. The project was supported by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union. Project number: 2020-1-HU01-KA205-078586. This document does not necessarily reflect the official views of the European Commission, the European Union or the organisations co-operating with them.

Published by United Societies of Balkans

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INTRODUCTION

In today's world, where diversity and inclusivity are increasingly valued, the Erasmus+ program, an initiative of the European Union (EU), shines as a beacon of hope and progress. It spans a wide spectrum, from education and training to youth engagement and sports, with an unwavering commitment to fostering equal opportunities, accessibility, inclusivity, and diversity across all its endeavors. To support these goals, the program provides essential mechanisms and resources for organizations, encouraging them to adopt an inclusive perspective, ensuring that their initiatives are accessible and appealing to a broad spectrum of participants.

The profound value of inclusion cannot be overstated. Inclusive Erasmus+ programs possess the potential not only to enrich the lives of young people with disabilities but also to contribute to the broader societal aim of creating a more equitable and accessible world. Aligned with this overarching priority, the "Hidden Dimensions" project, funded by the European Union (EU), is dedicated to identifying and mitigating the barriers that may hinder the active involvement of individuals with disabilities. The project's overarching objective is to cultivate an environment wherein every participant can not only engage but also flourish through learning and collaboration.

To raise awareness on this vital issue, the project adopted a multifaceted strategy, rooted in three key hypotheses. These hypotheses formed the foundation for the project's investigation into the challenges surrounding the involvement of young people with disabilities in Erasmus+ projects, encompassing factors like the lack of preparedness among youth workers, resource limitations within youth organizations, and the dearth of experience and knowledge among youth workers regarding young people with disabilities.

To lay a robust groundwork, the project initiated a comprehensive literature review that delved into the current landscape of disability, drawing from the World Health Organization's definition, offering a nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities. Furthermore, the project zoomed in on the specific context of Greece, providing an insightful overview of social inclusion within the country, including prevailing attitudes towards people with physical disabilities and an exploration of societal perceptions and potential biases. Parallely, the review assessed the landscape of youth work in Greece, evaluating its role and capacity while also



examining the intersection of youth work and people with disabilities, yielding a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities within this domain.

To gain deeper insights into the challenges faced by young people with disabilities in Erasmus+ projects, a comprehensive study was conducted in Greece. The study aimed to uncover potential barriers that youth workers within Greek organizations might encounter when striving to ensure the effective inclusion of young people with disabilities in Erasmus+ initiatives. To accomplish this, an exhaustive analysis was carried out using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), focusing on data derived from a meticulously designed questionnaire distributed to Greek organizations. This methodical approach sought to illuminate the specific obstacles and opportunities related to the integration of young people with disabilities into Erasmus+ projects in Greece.

In parallel, a document analysis was employed, focusing on 20 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) engaged in Erasmus+ youth projects. The primary aim of this analysis was to illuminate the level of dedication these organizations have toward fostering inclusion and accessibility for disabled youth within the framework of Erasmus+ initiatives. The findings from this document analysis is expected to pinpoint areas in need of improvement in the execution of Erasmus+ youth projects, thereby enhancing our understanding of the program's inclusivity and guiding enhancements in this critical domain.

Ultimately, the overarching goal of this collective effort was to compile a set of policy recommendations that specifically address the identified issues. These proposals not only promote the inclusion of young people with disabilities in Erasmus+ projects but also offer practical measures to enhance their participation in the program and improve their overall experience. In sum, this multifaceted initiative embodies the spirit of Erasmus+ and its commitment to fostering inclusivity and accessibility for all young people, regardless of ability, on their journey toward personal growth, learning, and collaboration.

LITERATURE REVIEW



Disability Definitions: The concept of disability has evolved over time, with early definitions often rooted in medical perspectives that highlighted individual deviations from the norm without considering social factors. The World Health Organization (WHO) significantly contributed to this discourse in 1980 by offering a scientifically validated definition: individuals with disabilities have severe handicaps stemming from physical or mental impairments, which hinder self-sufficiency and societal participation. This led to the International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities, and Handicaps (ICIDH), which divided disability into impairment, disability, and handicap. In 2001, the WHO replaced ICIDH with the International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF), adapting to feedback and acknowledging that disability is an experience anyone might undergo. Terminology shifted, replacing disability and impairment with activity limitation and participation restriction. The new model embraced a multifactorial view, recognizing contextual influences such as environment and individual factors. The current WHO perspective defines disability as a consequence of organic or environmental factors that create barriers in crucial life domains, such as self-care, employment, education, recreation, and social engagement.

Social Inclusion in Greece: Greek Law No. 4019/2011 defines "inclusion" as integrating vulnerable individuals into society, primarily by aiding their employment. Vulnerable groups face barriers in social and economic engagement due to various challenges impacting the local economy. These groups are divided into "special vulnerable groups," including people with disabilities, and "special populations," such as unemployed youth and women, struggling to enter the job market due to financial, social, or cultural reasons. "Social welfare" encompasses tailored goods, health services, and support for specific social groups like the elderly, children, people with disabilities, and chronic illness sufferers.

Attitudes Towards Disability in Greece: In Greece, attitudes towards people with physical disabilities were generally unfavorable but somewhat better among those with medical knowledge or practical experience in this area. Regarding intellectual disabilities, nursing students showed slightly less favorable attitudes toward "similarity" but more favorable attitudes toward "protection." Previous work experience and direct interaction with people with intellectual disabilities correlated with better attitudes toward "protection," while older age was associated with lower favorable attitudes toward both "similarity" and "protection." Male respondents had higher scores, indicating stronger exclusionary tendencies. Additionally, those who were familiar



with intellectual disabilities showed fewer positive attitudes toward empowerment, while higher knowledge of intellectual disabilities was associated with more positive attitudes on all four dimensions.

Youth Work in Greece: Youth workers in Greece primarily engage with individuals aged 15 to 25, though there are instances where they may work with those as young as 13 or as old as 30. Youth services in the country typically offer a combination of "open" youth work, which is aimed at all young people in a given area, and targeted youth work that focuses on specific groups, often those facing disadvantages or social exclusion (Bohn and Stallmann 2007).

Unlike some countries, Greece does not have nationally recognized qualifications or a dedicated formal education system for youth work. However, individuals interested in working with young people or becoming youth workers can pursue relevant professional qualifications. They can obtain higher education degrees in fields such as social work, social sciences (including sociology, psychology, social policy, social administration, and social anthropology), or educational sciences and pedagogy (including primary education, early childhood education, special education, social pedagogy, etc.) (Bohn and Stallmann 2007).

Youth Work and People with Disabilities in Greece: In Greece, there is no specific education and training for youth work (in other words, there are no nationally recognised qualifications). However, people who wish to work with young people or become youth workers can acquire some relevant professional qualifications. In particular, one can obtain a higher education degree in social work, social sciences (sociology, psychology, social policy, social administration, social anthropology, etc.), or educational sciences and pedagogy (primary education, early childhood education, special education, social pedagogy, etc.) (Bohn and Stallmann 2007).

In Greece, youth workers play a diverse role, but it remains unclear whether they receive specialized training to work effectively with people with disabilities. The absence of tailored training and state-recognized qualifications raises concerns about their readiness to address the needs of this group. While youth workers may obtain professional qualifications in related fields, these may lack disability-specific approaches. Non-governmental organizations and associations provide training for youth volunteers that may enhance skills relevant to working with people with disabilities. The Erasmus+ program in Greece emphasizes inclusion and diversity and promotes equal opportunities for all, including people with disabilities. However, there appears to be a need



for further training and support in the area of inclusion of people with disabilities to enhance the effectiveness of youth work in this regard.

METHODS

Three hypotheses established to conduct an empirical research and formulating policy recommendations.

Hypothesis 1: Youth workers may not be adequately prepared to involve young people with disabilities in Erasmus+ projects due to the inaccessibility of their daily youth services, potentially hindering the integration of disabled youth into such initiatives.

Hypothesis 2: Youth organizations might face resource constraints that limit their ability to ensure accessibility, thereby creating a barrier to the participation of young people with disabilities in their services and Erasmus+ projects.

Hypothesis 3: The lack of experience and knowledge among youth workers concerning young people with disabilities could negatively influence their attitudes toward inclusivity and their active engagement in Erasmus+ programs.

Three types of methods have been used

Anonym online questionnaire: In the research, 93 people took part, including men and women, regardless of age, marital and economic status, and regardless of levels of work experience. Of the 93 participants, 38.71% of the participants work in organizations that target youth groups, while 24.73% work in organizations that also include such programs. In contrast, 38.56% of participants do not work in an organization aimed at young people. Of the participants, 48.39% work for non-governmental organizations, 22.58% work for public organizations, 20.43% work in the private sector, while 3.23% work for local organizations and 5.36% does not know in which field they work. Of the 93 participants, 21.51% work in the Central Greece Region and 78.49% work in the Attica Region.

In depth interviews: The purpose of the research was to investigate a series of questions concerning the participation of young disabled people in European programs, through the experience of professionals who hold jobs in institutions dealing with Erasmus+ programs. A total



of 20 participants were interviewed online. The sample of institutions was found as requested from a relevant list of institutions that have received European programs. The order of communication was followed by serial number, while cooperation was ensured both through telephone contact and email. It is noted that the details of the persons are confidential as they were guaranteed and as they requested. As far as the results of the research are concerned, they are in line with the experience of the partners, as there appears to be little participation of young disabled people in Erasmus+ programs. Main reasons could be stated as lack of accessibility, the lack of training of the bodies by European and national bodies as well as the lack of initiative for participation by the disabled people themselves. Below a more depth analysis is tried to be offered in order to be taken into account for any future actions regarding disability, accessibility and young people.

Document analysis has been used as a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents—both printed and electronic material. Like other analytical methods in qualitative research, document analysis requires that data be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge. This research conducted a document analysis of 20 Greek NGOs involved in Erasmus+ youth projects, aiming to shed light on the extent to which these organizations are truly committed to promoting inclusion and accessibility for disabled youth, and to identify areas for improvement in the implementation of Erasmus+ youth projects.

Specifically, the analysis is based on the organizations' founding documents, yearly public benefit reports, Facebook page/instapage/tiktok, home page, and details about their E+ youth projects to assess their inclusiveness toward young disabled people. As regards the founding documents, state's electronic platforms of GEMH, the Greek Registry of Commercial Publicity, as defined in European company law directives. (Directive 2009/101/EC) was used, if and as long they were not available in the respective organizations' websites.

RESULTS

Based on the SPSS analysis, the organizations do not have the resources to form special access structures for people with disabilities, while, at the same time, they do not receive the necessary state funding for the formation of these structures, as a result of which participation is prevented of disabled people in E+ programs. As for the workers in these programs, in many cases they lack



the necessary knowledge, as a result of which they form negative attitudes towards people with disabilities, towards the support of these people, as well as how to manage the conditions related to these people. In addition, if we take into account the results of the research, the absence of special access structures, the absence of expertise in people with disabilities, as well as the absence of knowledge of the people working in the organizations lead to reduced access and participation of people in E+ programs.

The document analysis of the examined organizations demonstrates varying degrees of transparency and inclusivity in their approaches to engaging young people with disabilities in their activities. Several organizations lack comprehensive reports or details specifically addressing the inclusion of young individuals with disabilities, both in their activities and in their financial allocations. Accessibility gaps are also evident on their websites, hindering engagement for individuals with disabilities. Moreover, while some organizations maintain an active online presence through social media, they often fall short in providing detailed annual reports, leaving a gap in understanding their historical work and project funding sources.

The interviews yielded several important insights into the issue of disability inclusion within organizations and Erasmus+ programs. A prevailing concern is the lack of knowledge and education surrounding disabilities, which is seen as a significant factor contributing to societal exclusion and the perpetuation of stereotypes, even among well-meaning individuals working within these organizations. Participants expressed deep reservations about the limited accessibility of Erasmus+ programs for disabled individuals, attributing this to apathy regarding disability issues. To address these challenges, there is a resounding call for inclusive policies to be embedded in early education and sustained throughout one's life, with a particular emphasis on training and seminars for employers to effectively integrate disabled employees and challenge stereotypes.

Furthermore, the interviews underscore the crucial role of governmental support in removing barriers to disability inclusion, both in organizations and society at large. Changing the narrative about disability is viewed as essential, with organizations involved in Erasmus+ programs urged to play an active role in fostering equality. Participants also stressed the importance of supporting organizations through simplified procedures for obtaining maintenance funds from EU institutions, additional training and webinars, and measures to enhance physical accessibility. In summary, the interviews highlight the need for a concerted effort to promote inclusivity and dismantle barriers



faced by disabled individuals, with organizations being pivotal agents of change that require adequate support to create a more inclusive world.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings from the empirical study offer important perspectives on the barriers youth organizations face in their efforts to create inclusive spaces for people with disabilities and the resulting implications for their participation in Erasmus+ initiatives. The analysis revealed several noteworthy findings:

The research revealed that youth organizations face insufficient resources and financial support to create tailored infrastructure for people with disabilities. This scarcity hinders the ability of organizations to create an inclusive environment, thus preventing the participation of young people with disabilities in Erasmus+ programs.

An equally important observation is that professionals involved in these programs often lack the necessary experience and knowledge to effectively support people with disabilities. This lack of knowledge could lead to negative attitudes towards people with disabilities and a lack of understanding of how to deal with the specific conditions associated with these people.

The combined effect of limited resources, funding constraints, and the lack of expertise significantly impacts access and participation in Erasmus+ programs. Young people with disabilities face barriers that prevent them from fully engaging with the opportunities and benefits these programs offer.

The absence of special access structures, lack of expertise, and negative attitudes within youth organizations have a direct influence on inclusivity. The reduced accessibility and participation of individuals with disabilities undermine the core principles of Erasmus+ programs, which aim to foster diversity, empowerment, and mutual understanding.

Policy Recommendations

- It is essential to formulate explicit program goals that prioritize and emphasize the promotion of inclusion and accessibility for individuals with disabilities. These goals



should set the foundation for creating an environment that allows for active participation and holistic development for all participants, irrespective of their abilities.

- Building alliances with disability associations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and professionals is crucial. These collaborations can serve as facilitators of insights and expertise, enriching the elaboration of inclusive activities and ensuring that programs comprehensively address diverse needs.
- Conducting comprehensive accessibility assessments of all program components, including physical locations, accommodations, transportation, and digital platforms, is paramount. These assessments should result in the implementation of necessary modifications and accommodations that guarantee the unimpeded participation of people with disabilities.
- Adequately preparing all participants for program engagement is vital. This preparation should encompass disability awareness, etiquette, and the importance of fostering an all-inclusive and supportive environment that respects individual differences.
- Providing tailored support services for participants with disabilities is essential. These services may include accessible resources, sign language interpreters, and assistive technology. They should be seamlessly accessible throughout the duration of the program to ensure equitable participation.
- Offering a diverse range of activities and workshops that prioritize inclusion and accessibility for individuals with different abilities is crucial. This approach encourages proactive engagement and participation by all participants, creating an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding.
- Empower participants with disabilities by providing opportunities for them to take leadership roles and actively contribute to the program's design and implementation. This empowerment should extend to advocating for disability inclusion during and after the program.
- Establishing an ongoing monitoring and evaluation process that includes input from all stakeholders and highlights the experiences and issues of people with disabilities is essential. The insights gained from this process should be used to iteratively refine the program and enhance its inclusivity.



- Hosting events and workshops that raise awareness, counter stereotypes, and promote a culture of inclusion for people with disabilities is critical. These initiatives should encourage open conversations and education about disability rights and accessibility.
- Designing programs with a focus on sustainable impacts on participants with disabilities is essential. Offering post-program support and resources to promote participants' personal and professional development ensures that the benefits extend beyond the program's duration.
- Sharing the achievements and exemplary practices of inclusive Erasmus+ programs with other agencies and institutions is key. This dissemination should encourage the adoption of inclusive practices in other mobility and exchange initiatives.
- Fostering long-term skills and networks by emphasizing enduring skills such as effective communication, problem-solving, and intercultural competence is important. Contacts made during the program should be nurtured, enabling ongoing collaboration, mutual support, and knowledge sharing.
- Recognizing that completing an Erasmus+ program is a milestone, not the end of the journey, is crucial. Providing post-program support with dedicated resources, mentoring opportunities, and tailored follow-up initiatives is essential to continue participants' personal and professional development.
- Empowering former program participants to become catalysts for change in their communities, workplaces, and educational institutions is essential. Encouraging them to promote inclusive practices and influence policies, practices, and mindsets in broader societal contexts can amplify the impact of Erasmus+ programs and contribute to a more inclusive and equitable society.



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