European Commission

MAKING CONSULTATIONS AND DIALOGUES INCLUSIVE AND ACCESSIBLE FOR ALL
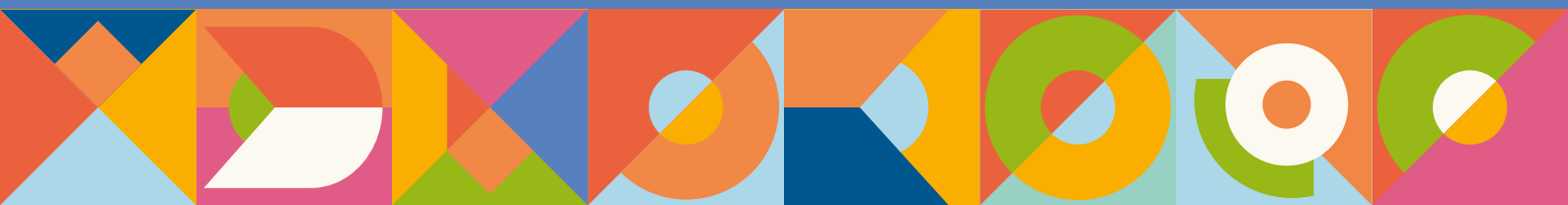
PRACTICE NOTE

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ABOUT THIS NOTE

This note provides practical suggestions for EU Delegations (EUD) and services to engage and consult with the diversity of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), and particularly those CSOs and individuals that represent marginalized and often excluded groups, such as persons with disabilities and their representative organisations.

Organisations of persons with disabilities' (OPDs) participation and input into EUD programming and beyond are essential to ensure that EU's support and funding equally benefit everyone. It is also an obligation of the EU to involve OPDs, being signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities[1]. Involving OPDs partners from the development of a new policy or strategy all the way through to its implementation, monitoring and evaluation requires that the entire process is fully accessible and inclusive.

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1 CRPD article 4.3: "In the development and implementation of legislation and policies to implement the present Convention, and in other decision-making processes concerning issues relating to persons with disabilities, States Parties shall closely consult with and actively involve persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities, through their representative organizations.

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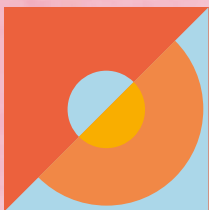
1 DISABILITY INCLUSIVE ENGAGEMENT AND DIALOGUES

Sustainable dialogues should be built between EU Delegations and OPDs to ensure their engagement across programming, implementation and review.

A key message of the 'Thematic guidance note on mainstreaming civil society engagement into EU cooperation and external relations' is to **systematically involve and consult civil society in all sectors of support interventions as well as policy and public-private dialogue.** It broadens civil society engagement from traditional areas, such as governance or human rights, to all sectors, such as energy and climate change, employment and sustainable growth and investment, nutrition, migration or health, to mention a few.

Persons with disabilities are equally affected and are among the groups at risk of being left behind in development work, and thus specific support should be provided to ensure they can meaningfully engage in all five EU priority areas of programming[2].

For example, the digital data and technologies sector can bring important life changing opportunities for persons with disabilities, and is today fundamental for learning and improving access to work and livelihood opportunities. Accessibility and universal design are areas where OPDs can provide guidance on digital data and technology, and they should also be strengthened in their capacity to monitor that standards and commitments are fulfilled.

Keep in mind that consultation on programming for some 'non-traditional disability sectors' might require EU Delegations and services to prepare background documents and notes, or to organize preparatory session with OPDs and other marginalized groups who might be less familiar with EUs policies and programming processes, to allow them to meaningfully participate to the consultation.

Consider also **making budgetary provisions** for involvement of OPDs in consultation and meaningful participation of projects. Investing is vital. This includes budgets to be available for accessibility and reasonable accommodation[3].

Who are organisations of persons with disabilities?

Organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) are civil society organisations representing persons with disabilities that are rooted, committed to and fully respect the principles and rights recognised in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). OPDs are representative of persons with disabilities at global, regional, national or local levels. Generally, the main common feature is that their membership comprises, and they are run by and for, persons with disabilities (**CRPD General Comment N°7, para.11**). OPDs might represent one particular impairment group of persons with disabilities or various types of disabilities. Either way, they consist of members with lived experience and expertise on how to best provide support for persons with disabilities.

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2 See further the Thematic Guidance Note Civil Society Organisations and the key messages of mainstreaming engagement with civil society across all priority sectors: Green Deals; Digital and Data Technologies; Alliances for Sustainable Jobs and Growth; Migration and Partnerships; Governance, Peace and Security.

3 Reasonable accommodation is support or practical changes necessary and appropriate that should be made for persons with disabilities so they can access or participate alongside others, that should be respectful of people and do not be very difficult or really too expensive for the company, organisation or person that have to do it. Exact definition is available in the CRPD Article 2.
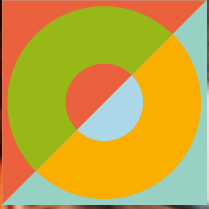
2 IDENTIFYING AND ENGAGING WITH OPDS

- **Make your engagement with OPDs strategic,** not a one off to 'tick the box'. This might require some initial efforts, resources and adaptation of processes. Involving OPDs solely for consultation and without the opportunity to engage concretely in activities does not constitute meaningful involvement.

- Most countries have a national alliance/federation or network of OPDs that can be contacted. They would usually be registered with the relevant national NGO registry.

- Information and contact details of national and regional OPDs can also be found at the International Disability Alliance **regional members**.

- **International NGOs** working on disability inclusive development programmes might already be among your partners, and they often work with OPDs and can provide contacts.

- Not all national networks of OPDs are fully representative of the diverse movement of persons with disabilities; reach out pro-actively to under-represented groups of persons with disabilities such as women with disabilities' organisations or groups, children with disabilities and/or their families, persons that are deaf or hard of hearing, and persons with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities. OPDs outside of capitals and large cities should also be consulted. Try to reach beyond the usual-suspects.

- Appoint a staff member, or the disability focal point to maintain contact with OPDs.

- Organize a sensitization session with EUD staff on disability inclusion, in collaboration with OPDs.

DISABILITY INCLUSION | Technical Facility

3 ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Meaningful engagement and consultation require that CSOs, including OPDs can access timely, comprehensive and objective information enabling them to understand the policy issue, the challenges and opportunities.

- Make sure that information relevant to programming and dialogues shared on EUD website, over e-mailings lists (make sure OPDs are included in mailing lists), or social media is accessible[4].

- Consider also other ways to reach out with information, such as conveying information over the phone, or invite OPDs for an information sharing session, either face-to-face or online.

- If information is shared through a video, make sure it has subtitles, and where possible, sign language interpretation. This also raises awareness among other civil society actors.

Quick tips for accessible word documents[5]

1. Include alternative text with all visuals and tables[6];
2. Add meaningful hyperlink text and ScreenTips;
3. Use sufficient contrast for text and background colours;
4. Use built-in headings and style – this makes easier navigation of documents;
5. The core accessibility features of Microsoft Word are present in all Windows versions as far back as Word 2003;
6. Test documents with the **built-in accessibility checker**;
7. PDF documents can be accessible, see how you can convert a word document **here**[7].

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4 Accessible formats are for example: Braille, tactile graphics, large print, text-to-speech, oral presentation, electronic files compatible with screen readers, captioned or signed video for persons with hearing impairments, or icons and animations, 3D models for persons with cognitive disabilities, easy-to-read text etc.

5 CBM Digital accessibility toolkit chapter, chapter 3: **https://www.cbm.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Publications/CBM-Digital-Accessibility-Toolkit.pdf**

6 Alternative (or Alt) text: text for all non-text content, including photos, graphs, tables, so that both their content and function can be accessed by screen readers.

7 **https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/create-accessible-pdfs-064625e0-56ea-4e16-ad71-3aa33bb-4b7ed?ui=en-us&rs=en-us&ad=us**

4 INCLUSIVE CONSULTATION MECHANISMS

Online consultation[8]

- **Consult with OPDs before designing the online consultation** to understand which platforms they are more familiar with and are most accessible. Zoom has proven to be widely used as it provides easy access to incorporate sign language interpreter or captioning. It also has automatic captioning. Microsoft Teams also support automatic captioning but is less easy to use with sign language interpretation.

- **Make sure information about the consultation and relevant background documents are shared** in advance, in accessible format[9], with OPDs.

- In the invitation for the online consultation, **ask if participants have any accessibility requirements** and have a budget available to cover for these requirements, which can be sign language interpretation (not all deaf persons know sign language) and live captioning.

- **Consider conducting smaller online sessions** as well to capture the inputs of diverse groups of persons with disabilities, or one-to-one interviews.

- During the consultation, **avoid jargon and abbreviations**, many OPDs might be new to this type of consultations and could be intimidated by the more experienced CSO actors or the processes and concepts used. Encourage everyone to engage.

Online surveys of feedback

- **SurveyMonkey, Google Forms** and **Alchemer** (previously Gizmo) are among some of the platforms that are widely used and accessible to most persons with disabilities.

- Online surveys might not reach the most marginalized groups so efforts to conduct complementary interviews during field visits or over the phone should be considered.

- If asking for feedback on policy papers or programming over EUD website, make sure that the feedback format is accessible.

Face-to-face consultation

There is an abundance of guidance on how to make events or meetings fully accessible and inclusive. Most effective is to engage and consult with OPDs when preparing the event, why not hire them as an advisory service or ask them to assess your consultation plans. Here are a few, though not exhaustive, suggestions and guidance to more detailed resources:

- Identify an accessible venue – if possible visit the venue to check accessibility using this **accessibility checklist for events**[10]. Make sure the venue can be reached easily by accessible public transport, though in many countries, persons with disabilities might need private/adapted transportation to reach the venue, which should be compensated.

- At the time of registration, **ask whether participants have any specific accessibility requirements,** and whether they travel with a personal assistant or their own sign language interpreters. Make sure everyone can use the registration format, or allow for different ways to register.

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8 https://accessibility.jiscinvolve.org/wp/2016/09/12/webinars/

9 Read an easy guide to UK Government standards to publish documents: **https://www.gov.uk/guidance/publishing-accessible-documents**

10 International Disability and Development Consortium Accessibility Check list for events (page 11).

What are some of the main characteristics of an accessible venue?

1 **Entrance wide enough** for all people to enter, including those using wheelchairs or other mobility aids. Entrance should be step-free or, if not possible, adapt with a temporary ramp.
2 The room should be wide enough to accommodate not only the expected number of attendants, but also interpreters, personal assistants, guide/assistance dogs. The **space for wheelchairs** is always bigger than a common seat.
3 Toilets and catering areas should be fully accessible as well. High cocktail tables for example should be avoided.
4 The venue should include visible, legible and understandable signage to facilitate the attendants' movement (entrance, meeting room, lunch room, emergency exits, etc.), using large print, contrasting colour, supported by images and symbols.
5 Before starting the meeting, indicate clearly emergency doors and exits,
6 remind the meeting schedule, restrooms and refreshment areas.
7 Reserve seats for persons with reduced mobility near the doors and seats for
8 persons with hearing and visual
9 impairment at the front, close to the speaker.[11]

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11 The following guides provide comprehensive information and checklists of ensuring a meeting and venue is accessible and inclusive:

• European Disability Forum.
  Guide for accessible meetings
• World Blind Union and CBM Global:
  Accessibility GO, Commitment 6.
• Bridging the Gap: Inclusive and Accessible Communication and Events. Check List. August 2020
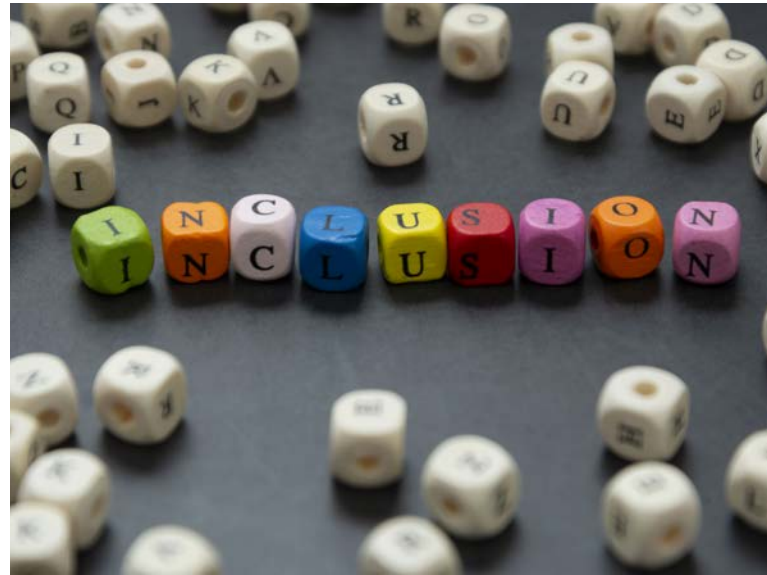
Tips to make inclusive online or face-to-face meetings

1 An inclusive meeting is one where every attendee feels comfortable to participate in their preferred way, so it is important to create a safe, respectful and open space for people to contribute.
2 When starting the session, kindly remind people not to speak too fast (for sign language interpreters to keep up and to ease everyone's understanding), and to state their names before speaking.
3 Describe visuals of presentations or videos and diagrams for persons who cannot see the presentation.
4 During Q&A sessions, allow some time for everyone to pose their questions or make a comment. Particularly if you are asking people to pose questions in chat boxes and similar.