

# **ENLIGHT Guide to Inclusive and Accessible Activities**

**ENLIGHT Diversity and Inclusion Network**

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## Part One: Introduction

ENLIGHT is committed to ensuring that each stage of our organised events and conferences is designed with inclusivity and accessibility at their core. ENLIGHT is dedicated to upholding principles of inclusion and accessibility, and we expect all participants to share in this responsibility. We have therefore developed a guide which outlines our expectations for event organisers and committees to ensure an inclusive, supportive, and accessible experience for all participants.

The Guide aligns with the European Commission's policies to "strengthen Europe's commitment to equality" which incorporates a gender equality strategy, an antiracism action plan, a Roma strategic framework, a strategy for the rights of LGBTQIA+ persons and a strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities. It also aligns with two of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Reduced Inequalities and Gender Equality.

According to the United Nations, social inclusion is defined as "the process of improving the terms of participation in society for people who are disadvantaged on the basis of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, or economic or other status, through enhanced opportunities, access to resources, voice and respect for rights" (*Welcome to the United Nations*).<sup>1</sup>

And according to the United Nations Global Compact, "Full inclusion happens when individuals experience a balance between belonging with others at work – feeling they are part of the whole enterprise – as well as being seen, understood, and valued as an individual, with a unique identity, skills, and experience".

The ENLIGHT Diversity & Inclusion Network translates the United Nations and European Commission policies to the context of ENLIGHT universities. Its vision is centred on promoting equal opportunities and ensuring freedom from discrimination. This commitment extends to all members of the university community – students, staff, and academics – spanning the entire student life cycle, teaching and learning environments, and the broader institutional work culture.

The network recognises that each university is at a different stage in its journey toward greater inclusion, with unique priorities and challenges. These guidelines serve as aspirational recommendations, rather than a binding legal framework, encouraging institutions to continually advance their inclusivity efforts.

This Guide should be consulted when organising in-person events for the ENLIGHT community, including conferences (e.g. student conferences, Teaching & Learning conference) and General Meetings, to ensure they are as inclusive as possible. The guide builds on work completed by other higher education institutions and professional associations mentioned in the references.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/rwss/2016/chapter1.pdf>

## Part Two: Implementation

This Guide is designed for ENLIGHT staff and students organising events (e.g., conferences) rather than participants. Organisers are responsible for communicating ENLIGHT's vision and commitment to inclusivity to all attendees. Since points of contact may vary depending on the event's location and the organising team or university, specific contact information for participants is not included in this guide and lies with the respective organisers.

We recommend that the organisers include a statement like the following in their communications:

*ENLIGHT is dedicated to creating an inclusive and accessible environment at every stage of our activities. We invite all participants to actively embrace these principles and share in this commitment. Our aim is to provide an enriching experience free from discrimination for everyone, regardless of sex, gender identity and expression, age, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance, race, ethnicity, nationality, language, religion, social background, marital status, or caregiving responsibilities. To ensure a safe and positive environment, any form of discriminatory behaviour will not be tolerated. Should you witness or experience any issues or have any concerns, please feel encouraged to reach out to the Inclusion and Accessibility Coordinator [insert name/email] before, during, or after the event. You can do so in writing or by approaching them in person during the event, whichever is more comfortable for you.*

- To facilitate this inclusive atmosphere, during the event, it is important to establish a clear process and contact points for reporting incidents of discrimination or harassment (e.g. the inclusion and accessibility coordinator or a different point of contact). Multiple reporting options should be available for attendees, such as via email or in person, to ensure that everyone feels comfortable coming forward.
- If any discriminatory behaviour occurs, it is essential to address them promptly and effectively. If an individual engages in discriminatory or harassing behaviour, the event organisers should be prepared to take appropriate action, which may include issuing a warning or expelling the individual from the event.
- Regarding the role of the Inclusion and Accessibility Coordinator mentioned above, some partner institutions may not have a dedicated inclusion officer. It is recommended that each organising team designate a colleague to familiarise themselves with the guide and serve as a contact point for participants.

Beyond communicating the vision of inclusion to attendees and fostering an inclusive atmosphere during the event, implementing this guide also involves considering how to design activities with inclusivity and accessibility at their core. This will be explained in more detail in the following sections of this document.

## Part Three: Inclusive by Design

Adhere to “Inclusive by Design” approach:

- To ensure events are inclusive and accessible to all, it is important that they are *designed* with inclusivity and accessibility at their core. This includes thinking of diversity not only in the variety of participants involved in events, whether as speakers, organisers or audience members, but also in terms of the ability of all attendees to participate meaningfully in the event and benefit from it.
- Therefore, it is necessary to proactively organise the event in such a way that everyone is able to participate. An inclusive, accessible and non-discriminatory design from the outset can reduce the number of reasonable accommodations and make the implementation qualitatively easier. Even if it initially appears more time-consuming, the development of inclusive, accessible and non-discriminatory structures is often the less laborious solution in the long term.
- It is helpful to think of the inclusivity and accessibility of the event as key criteria against which to evaluate its success.

To support this approach, the following section provides a detailed checklist of considerations to keep in mind before, during, and after the events.

## Part Four: Inclusive and Accessible Events-Checklist

### *A. Prior to the Event*

When planning an event, think about the widest range of individuals who might attend. Considering access and inclusion throughout your planning process will help ensure all participants have a positive experience.

#### **Taking participants into account:**

- Are the organisers a diverse group? Strive to include individuals with a variety of identities on the event planning committee. Panels and speakers often reflect the teams that create and invite them. Begin with an inclusive team to foster the creation of an inclusive event.
- People from ethnic minority groups and women are often underrepresented as speakers in high-level roles, particularly as keynote speakers. Consider inviting multiple keynote speakers to amplify diverse voices.
- Commit to promoting gender, dis-/ability and ethnic or racial diversity on all panels. Keep track of the representation among all speaking roles: keynotes, session chairs, panellists, parallel session speakers, and poster presentations.
- Evaluate whether panels and individual presenters reflect the community for which the event is organised. If not, explore ways to improve representation, such as reaching out to external organisations or representative groups to encourage participation from specific communities.
- Additionally, plan a briefing for all chairs and presenters to ensure that accessibility and inclusivity are prioritised throughout the event.

These recommendations aim to foster inclusivity, acknowledging that while they may not always be fully achievable, they can guide organisers in creating a more equitable environment.

#### **Thematic focus and scheduling**

- Consider how themes, calls for papers and invitations to participate are presented. Ensure that the wording and themes appeal to a range of potential participants and perspectives. Themes are not "diversity neutral"; certain themes are more likely to attract specific groups. Therefore, before finalising a theme, reflect on whether it is likely to engage a diverse audience.
- Consider the potential for negative resonance that may arise from the choice of topics.
- When selecting topics, it is important to avoid reinforcing stereotypes and making sexist, racist, anti-Semitic, ableist, or classist attributions. Careful consideration of these factors is essential.
- Choose event dates that do not conflict with key religious or national holidays, particularly for the target audience. Refer to an interfaith calendar, as the dates for some festivals may vary each year.
- When selecting the date and time for your event, consider family-friendly hours and the needs of part-time students.
- Promote the event and send invitations at least a month in advance to allow time for accessibility requests. Early announcements enable attendees, especially those with caregiving responsibilities or disabilities, to arrange for assistance or childcare.

- Schedule at least one short break for events longer than two hours.
- Allow sufficient transition time between sessions, especially for participants with mobility needs, to ensure they can move comfortably between locations.
- Consider security aspects for evening/weekend events in attendance, e.g. adequate lighting when choosing premises or the possibility of emergency escorts by security staff.

### **Choosing a venue**

- Ensure the venue is as accessible as possible for participants with restricted mobility, hearing, and vision. Provide information about available facilities, such as reserved parking, wheelchair access, hearing loops, and quiet rooms, to those who may need them.
- Consider provisionally booking communication support, organising live-captioning and making transcripts of papers available on the day, to enable full participation for people who may have difficulty following oral presentations.
- Ensure there is sufficient space in the event area for wheelchairs to navigate aisles and access seating.
- For larger events (30+ people), ensure a microphone system is available that is compatible with hearing devices.
- Accessibility should be included in emergency planning.
- If the speaking area is elevated, check if there is a ramp to allow access for the speakers, presenters, and/or Sign Language Interpreters. Make sure that a height-adjustable speakers' desk is available.
- If the lights are dimmed during the presentation, ensure that the audience can see the Sign Language Interpreters by providing a spotlight on the interpreters. Direct line-of-sight seating should be available to those who need to see the interpreters.
- Electrical outlets should be available in accessible seating areas to accommodate devices, laptops, etc.
- Chairs without armrests are important for accommodating people of all sizes and facilitating the use of Sign Language.
- For certain events where incidents may be more likely (e.g. thematic reasons), consider whether a "safety plan" is necessary, and ensure all staff have been properly briefed.

### **Public relations**

- Is the (figurative) language used in event materials diversity-sensitive and non-discriminatory?
- How are discriminatory statements managed in the context of event applications or on social media?

### **Event Invitation/ Registration**

- Ensure all invitations, registration forms, websites, emails, printed materials, posters, and other promotional content follow accessibility guidelines. Key principles include using a minimum text size of 14 points, opting for sans serif fonts like Arial, and avoiding small, italic, or decorative scripts. High-contrast colours, such as dark text on a light background, should be used. Essential

information (e.g., event name, date, time, and location) should not be embedded in graphics, as these are often inaccessible to screen readers used by individuals with visual disabilities.

- Include a note on accommodations in the event invitation or registration, for example: “We strive to host inclusive, accessible events that enable full participation. Please inform us by [date] if you have any specific requirements, such as religious or medical dietary needs, early access to presentation materials, alternative formats (e.g., Braille or large print), or accessibility needs such as wheelchair access or hearing loops”. Ensure that the accommodations requested during the registration process are taken into account in the next steps (e.g. ordering the catering).
- Consider appointing an “Inclusion and Accessibility Coordinator” to handle accommodation requests. If appointed, include their name, phone number, and email address in all event communications.
- Provide maps, directions, and information on hotel accessibility, as well as accessible travel options.
- Design name badges to be accessible to all, ensuring appropriate font size and various options for display. Offer the option to include preferred pronouns or forms of address.

### **Catering Considerations**

- If offering a buffet, the food is at a height accessible to wheelchair users and that staff are available to assist guests as needed.
- Consider providing a mix of seating options (standing and seated) during coffee breaks and catering, with accessible seating to wheelchair users.
- Clearly label food with allergen information, ingredients, and dietary options such as gluten-free, vegan, vegetarian, or halal.
- If catering is limited or unavailable, provide a list of nearby accessible restaurants that offer vegetarian, vegan, kosher, halal, and gluten-free options.

### *B. Day of the Event:*

#### **Setting up the location**

- Signpost the seats reserved for people using communication support and their providers.
- Consult part “Prior to the event”

#### **Awareness**

- Are the organisers adequately prepared to address group-related misanthropy or discriminatory statements from the audience?
- How is the safety of attendees ensured in the event of disruptions to the event by external, e.g. extremist groups?
- Should an awareness team be established, providing participants with a contact point if they experience or witness discriminatory or abusive behaviour during the event?

#### **Briefing of anyone chairing or presenting**

##### *Chairperson briefing*

The chair should be selected thoughtfully and briefed to ensure all panel members have equal opportunities to speak:

- The chair should strive to create an environment where less vocal speakers can share their research, views, or opinions.
- If there is only one person of colour or one person with a disability on a panel, organisers should ensure that they are not consistently last to speak.
- Where panellists or speakers will not be presenting in their first language, the chair may help rephrase audience questions that use complex or convoluted language.
- Encourage the chair to engage a diverse range of audience members when taking questions.
- Event organisers and chairs should respect titles, names, and pronouns. If uncertain about the pronunciation of an individual's name, the chair should confirm it with the individual before making introductions.

### *Presenters' briefing*

Provide presenters with a checklist for inclusion, accessibility, and non-discriminatory considerations:

- Agree on deadlines for materials with presenters so they can be made accessible (if necessary) and distributed digitally to individuals who may have difficulty viewing screens or other visually presented materials. Original file formats (Powerpoint/ Word) are preferred over PDF.
- If providing printed materials, ensure they are accessible and available in alternative formats (digital, large print).
- During the presentation, keep the following in mind:
  - Verbally describe visual materials (slides, charts, pictures, etc.) and read aloud any substantive text content.
  - Explain acronyms and jargon.
  - Repeat audience questions before responding.
  - Always use a microphone and encourage all participants to do the same when asking questions.
  - Allow time for Sign Language Interpreters and/ or technical support as needed.

### **Introducing the Code of Conduct for inclusive and accessible events**

- At the beginning of the event, present a clear equality and diversity statement, highlighting the efforts toward inclusivity and referencing this Code of Conduct and ENLIGHT's initiatives. Encourage attendees to support these efforts.
- All participants should know how to report any concerns.

### *C. Following an Event*

- Collect feedback from participants on the event's inclusivity and accessibility, and share the findings with event organisers to inform future planning.
- Ensure that files are available online in accessible formats after the event, if not before.

These guidelines are not exhaustive; you likely know your target audience best, so be sure to consider their specific needs.

## References

Institute of English Studies/School of Advanced Study University of London. "Best Practice Guide for Inclusive Events"

<https://ies.sas.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Best%20Practice%20Guide%20for%20Inclusive%20Events.pdf>

British Academy of Management. "All Welcome: A Guide to Inclusive, Accessible and Sustainable Events"

<https://www.bam.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/inclusive-accessible-and-sustainable-events.html>

Colgate University. "Accessible and Inclusive Event Planning Checklist"

<https://www.colgate.edu/about/campus-services-and-resources/its-event-and-av-support/accessible-and-inclusive-event>

Universität Mainz: Diskriminierungssensible Veranstaltungsplanung, <https://gleichstellung.uni-mainz.de/diskriminierungssensible-veranstaltungsplanung/>

If you have any questions about the terms used in this guide, please refer to the [DEI glossary](#).