

D3.3 Report

Pilot training on Involving People with Disabilities as Volunteers

24 - 26 September 2023
Venice & Padova, Italy



On **24-26 September 2023**, in Padova and Venice (Italy), CEV held the pilot training session on “Involving People with Disabilities as Volunteers”, in the context of a 4-year framework agreement grant under the European Union “Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values” fund (CERV) - “VERA” (Volunteering, Equality, Rights and Action). The training pilot, aimed at presenting the planned materials, (training manual, and training slides) to be rolled out across Europe as a full training package in 2024. The event collected input and feedback from participants on the content, specifically drawing together participants with disabilities and volunteer managers who could give valuable input based on their own concrete, lived experiences.

Through the pilot training, **27 participants** were brought together and contributed feedback on the materials, **including 12 women and 15 men**, from 9 countries: Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Hungary, Malta, Italy, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain.

The training, delivered by **Gabriella Civico, CEV Director**, opened with a round of introductions and an icebreaker activity to establish the tone and collaboration between participants. It was emphasised that the training must be a welcoming and safe environment for participants to openly speak about their experiences, as well as their reactions and thoughts on the training materials.



Manuel Corchado Gonzalez, CEV Volunteer, who had previously, with the support of CEV and CEV partner COCEMFE Sevilla, performed a focus group and survey to gather information which would contribute towards developing the training materials. As a volunteer with a disability himself, the contributions of Manuel through his presentation of the research results provided useful insight and served as an example of how organisations could engage people with disabilities as volunteers.

The training material was then presented by **Gabriella Civico**, and participants shared their reactions and relevant experiences as the materials were showcased. To build upon these discussions, specific break out groups were created which looked at the different groupings of barriers for participation among people with disabilities, this allowed participants in smaller groups to go much more in depth, and share openly their experiences, before feeding back to the wider group. These groupings, identified in the training material, included: **Barriers in outreach, Barriers in activity/project design, Barriers from organisational structures, and Personal barriers.**



The feedback collected highlighted many disparities across Europe, in some cases/countries, **it was expressed that the general conditions for volunteers are good and well established, however there exists a lack of training and resources to engage people with disabilities, while in other cases it was expressed that the legislative framework specifically hinders people with disabilities from participating in volunteering**, especially when considered in the context of welfare payments.

However, it was a shared sentiment that the dissemination of success stories, best practices, and doing so in new ways (such as through video testimonials), presented a strong method for organisations to combat negative stereotypes and highlight to organisations that they can, and should, engage people with disabilities as volunteers.



The role of mentoring was also one which **was highlighted as a strong potential method for engaging the target group**, as the one on one, personal contact between a potential volunteer and the organisation through a mentor, helps to establish a link between the person and their activities, while providing an avenue for support as needed.

The second half of the activity involved a practical exercise to the city of Venice, located 30 minutes away from Padova, with the aim of experiencing first hand the challenges faced by people with disabilities in everyday life, particularly concerning the accessibility (or lack thereof) within our cities, public transport, hotel and catering sectors as well as experiencing public attitudes. Venice, a highlight for tourism in the region, is also largely inaccessible to many people with disabilities due to the terrain, lack of accessibility for people with mobility issues, and the issues presented by such large groups in narrow spaces which can be particularly difficult for people with some intellectual disabilities - for these reasons it presented a strong opportunity to gain real experiences of these issues. Indeed while everything from buying the tickets to arrive in Venice, navigating the trains, and the city itself, was made more difficult for people with disabilities, it was by no means impossible with the

correct planning, adjustments, and utilising all of the tools available. This included travelling within Venice by ferry, to avoid inaccessible bridges, and grouping participants with a supporting person whom they feel comfortable with to assist if any emotionally strenuous situations arise.

This experience highlighted the necessity of correct planning and understanding from an organisation's side if they are, as they should, engaging volunteers with disabilities, in order to work around and adapt to environmental inaccessibility which is sometimes largely out of the organisation's control.

The feedback collected will contribute towards improving and refining the training materials, to be built into a full training delivered by CEV throughout 2024 as part of the VERA 2024 CERV grant. Read more about the pilot training and VERA project [here](#) and [here](#). You can find the presentation [here](#).

ANNEX 1 AGENDA

Day 1 - 24/09/2023 - Arrival Day - Sunday

Day 2 - 25/09/2023 - Monday

9.00 - 10.00	Introductions from each participant and ice-breaking activity
10.00 - 10.10	Presenting the VERA project and Reasons for the Training (Learning Objectives, Outcomes and Training Materials)
10:10 - 10.30	Concept and framework (establish definitions)
10.30 - 11.35	Presentation of Survey Results and Focus Group Research Presented by CEV Volunteer Manuel Corchado Gonzalez
10.35 - 10.55	Presentation of the Draft Training Module
10.55 - 11.10	Coffee Break
11.10 - 11.30	Identify different strands/sources (Organisational, societal, personal) and discussion within the groups regarding the Draft Training Module Division in focus groups divided in: Organisational, Societal, Personal
11.30 - 11.50	Discussion and feedback What is missing? What should be strengthened/corrected?
11.50 - 12.00	Conclusions
12:00 - 13:30	Lunch
13:30 - 15:30	Departure & travel to Venice
15:30 - 19:00	Afternoon in Venice: "Experiencing Accessibility for Volunteers"
19:00 - 20:00	Travel back to Padova - Sharing of the QR Code for the Event Evaluation
20:00	Dinner