



**Capacity Building  
Guide. Support to youth  
workers and  
educational  
professionals  
Development, testing  
and anchoring educational  
and participation offers  
tailored to disadvantaged  
youth**

The logo for 'access', with the word in a bold, blue, lowercase sans-serif font. A red arrow points to the right from the 'a'.



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# Introduction

## Who is this document for?

This guide is aimed at the following readers:

- teachers and trainers of non-formal, informal and formal education;
- youth workers, social workers and educators;
- professional from other fields (including cultural and creative actors) interested in developing skills, or design joint education programs for disadvantaged youth

### The Guide: a tool that reflects European core values and addresses the EU Youth Strategy

The way we practice youth work, regardless of the geographical or disciplinary context in which we anchor it (within a youth organisation, a youth centre or any other social structure or institution), contributes to shape the society we value and we want to live in. This guide is designed in line with the values, and principles of the Europe Youth Strategy with the primary goal is to contribute achieving youth greater participation to and shaping a democratic society that leaves no one behind, by tackling the wishes and potentials of all young Europeans in many different ways, in a way to embrace diversity, fostering individual freedom and self-determination for a common well-being and flourishing.

The organisations part of the Access consortium are committed to promote core European and universal values with a particular focus on young people in a NEET situation - and beyond, and stand for:

- respect of human rights and rights of the youth, dignity of young people with fewer opportunities;
- promotion of active participation to democratic life for all disadvantaged young people;
- strengthening social cohesion between disadvantaged young people and their peer-group and society at large; and make tangible social justice for all;
- embracing and experiencing principles of gender equality within disadvantaged young people (and their peer-groups);
- cherishing (cultural) diversity and plurality of identities among disadvantaged young people as a chance for mutual enrichment and development;
- supporting inclusive and progressively diverse societies where diversity is vehicular to social and economic development and flourishing;
- promotion of civil engagement against racism and xenophobia and empathy for those young people victims of discrimination and stigmatization;
- striving to shape better cities and the social spaces for all young people with fewer opportunities.

The Access team considers as core mission of youth work the **empowerment of disadvantaged young people** to become active citizens and to **enable practitioners**, their institutions and organisations to operate the necessary shift in perspective for guiding them to play a key role in our societies. This guide strives to contributing to:

- disadvantaged young people's flourishing and well-being (mentally, physically, economically);
- boost disadvantaged young people skills and competences by providing adequate and tailored learning opportunities (informal, non-formal, formal);
- connect disadvantaged young people who are eager to take active role in countering social exclusion (e.g., integration into society through employment, education, etc.) and guiding them to build strengths and experience sense of belonging;

## Purpose and overview

The guide is opened with some **conceptual clarifications on the social space-oriented approach** and an introduction to a set of key **framework conditions, including challenges and barriers**, that need to be considered when assessing the possibility to adopt the intervention models for social space orientation to the work with disadvantaged young people. In a second section the guide explores the **implications** of, the **role and value of youth work and social work for societies**, and presents the benefit in operating a shift in perspective emerging from the social space-oriented approach. This is built upon description of a range of approaches, tool and methodologies, enabling youth and social work practitioners to **develop their skills and competences**, correctly **address challenges and risks**, and enabling them to **transfer their knowledge further** to other practitioners or within their organisation. The core of this document is structured around the presentation of **good practices** emerging from European and local experiences. Through practical examples and exercises the competences presented within the guide can be applied in the practice, within models presented by Acces experts and beyond the mentioned fields of actions, as add-ons to own practices. The guide is concluded with a distillation of practical **recommendations for further development of practices** in the social space.

## Why is Access guide important today?

If the guide is to be used in non-formal education contexts and be adopted in non-formal and informal education practices in youth training, being it within the contexts of youth centres, socio-cultural centres, youth clubs, and beyond in formal classrooms, it is important to present the potential of **educator as enabler of long-term and transformative impacts in the life and life path of young people**. Awareness of and process orientation within social-spaces ensure for the youth workers, social educators and trainers to **gain practical understanding** and become proficient in a set of (praxis- lead) **methods and tools to address young people in a NEET situation**. This guide emerged as highly relevant as it provides vital information in a way that **it can be tested on the ground** in the everyday practice, and enable the **youth-centred participatory approach** to emerge as underpinning element of every activity (in line with the global citizenship education principles). The learning process of trainers, educators and non-formal teachers is facilitated by the compact, visually appealing and easy to read set of materials. In addition, **self-reflection and self-assessment exercises** ensure significant anchoring of the information learnt onto the educators and youth workers practices, ensuring greater **self-development and advancement**. The time for self-reflection and self-assessment is particular

important for an effective practice with disadvantaged young people, leading to fostering empowerment, contentedness and sense of purpose within society, strengthening participation and sense of belonging and inclusion.

The Access guide contributes to anchoring social-space education practices for **guiding youth workers and social actors working with disadvantaged young people** in the choice of suitable approaches and methods to remain relevant for their target group and clients. The competences and skills acquired throughout this guide, ensure a deep understanding on participation and social-space-oriented methods, the latter are compatible with a variety of teaching and learning methods, and in a time of rising extremism and social exclusion, it contributes to **foster democratic participation and activation of young people with fewer opportunities**, strengthening tolerance and valuing diversity and respect for human and youth rights. The **practical exercises and self-reflection methods** drive youth workers and educators' attention to valuing and validating young people 's perspectives, world visions and potentials, treasuring young people's personal integrity, individual and group values and potentials for **mutual enrichment between youth workers and young people**.

The **social-space-oriented-approach (SSOA)** can be understood as a **transversal concern integrated into the youth work and learning processes** unfolding in non-formal education settings, in the social space(s), in public spaces, within a framework of **shared responsibility**. The shared responsibility for learning from one another (educators or social workers and learners- young people) implies that the **young people in NEET situations** determine **what is relevant and interesting for them to learn about** and which skills and knowledge can be capitalised upon or further developed. It is important to work in team and **involve many stakeholders to achieve the common goal** (e.g. together with agents in the social space, of individuals or groups of the **circles of support**). Working together with parents, education institutions, civil society and young people with fewer opportunities themselves it will be possible to co-determine and **identifying values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and critical understandings that are the most relevant** to fulfil the young people visions of future at a given time.

The social-space oriented approaches outlined in the Access guide aim at creating **enjoyable and safe learning environments**, where intergenerational conflicts, day-to-day-struggles, violence and discrimination experiences are addressed within a **safe and emphatic setting**. Emerging from the youth work and youth social work practices, the social-space oriented approach can be **adopted successfully within formal education settings**. Here teachers may adopt the social-space-orientation to better connect their practices to the values and visions of the young people, in a way to avoid adopting top-down or pre-conceived methods and to address instead the young people evolving **interests and untackled potentials in a given point in time**. The SSOA may contribute to **raise awareness on prejudices and biases directed towards young individual** by grasping a different, more situated understanding of the fragile learners living environment.

## Self-reflection and Self-evaluation

Youth workers and youth social workers (together with all other relevant stakeholders of the circle of support) can benefit from adopting these SSOA approaches to **self-evaluate their daily educational practice**:

- evaluate to which level they allow the shift in perspective, placing the **young people at the centre**;
- identify to which degree **participatory (youth lead) practices** are implemented and where barriers still exist to reach full participation;
- reflect on how the **diversity of young people** contributes to individual and group mutual enrichment and development;
- focus on **young people untapped potentials**, their **skills** for future to be acquired or improved.

The following questions can guide **reflection** on how to organise the learning processes in the social space, allowing for flexibility to address the youth with fewer opportunities where they are at the moment:

- To what extent your teaching contributes towards young people **active participation** to society/engagement for respect of **human and children rights**, and rights of young person with disabilities?
- To what extent and how often the young people are called to **express their ideas** and to **listen to different views** of other young people, reflect on commonalities and their differences?
- How often are topics relevant to children and **youth rights, active participation to social and democratic life, access to equal opportunities** (e.g. access to employment, further education, social welfare, etc.) are addressed in the learning environment?
- How far is your training practice facilitating the development of **intellectual, personal and social skills** to empower learners with fewer opportunities to become active citizens?
- Are learners encouraged to listen and to co-operate with each other and developing **social skills and competences**?
- To which extend your practice includes **practical activities** and fosters **experiential approaches**?
- Do you capitalise on learners' previous experience and skills in your education activities?

The SSO approaches and methods for youth work encourage young learners with fewer opportunities to become **actively involved in society, by activating them through a combination of learning and leisure experiences**, motivating them towards new (old) discoveries, guiding them to overcome every-day-challenges. The learnings are tailored to **learners needs analysis and analysis of their skills and potentials. Social and transversal skills are developed based on reflection on commonalities and diversity, sufficient time for individual and group creation and co-operation** is key in the SSOA.

Non-formal and informal educators, youth and social workers, as facilitators of learning for the young people with fewer opportunities, are called to plan their activities to include opportunities for:

1. **Experience** to develop attitudes of **respect and openness, empathy**, by enabling learning through **experience**: young people can experience these attitudes through group games, practical workshop activities, traditional and social media, face-to-face interaction with others etc... Youth workers may encourage them to come in contact with their **peer-community**, their **neighbourhoods**, their heroes and role models physically or online and build a sense of belonging to a group /community. An event (such as the Future Planning Celebration in Berlin, or the Premiere of the Video Game designed in Valencia) constitute for young people an opportunity to engage within their community, feel acknowledged for their achievements and gain exposure to a broader public active in their life scenarios.
2. **Comparison**. Learners can benefit from exposure to “(cultural) differences” or “different identities”, they are called to reflect and **compare between the familiar and the unfamiliar**. Youth workers and social educators have the opportunity through comparison to guide the young people towards mutual **understanding**, leading to acknowledging commonalities and **differences in a non-judgmental manner**. Young people can reflect and compare sets of own values and attitudes with different ones without prejudices, and rejecting stigmatization, hence gaining awareness of the potential of multicultural societies they live in.
3. **Analysis**. Capitalising on the understanding of similarities and diversity, educators and youth workers can stimulate **careful discussion and analysis, through inquiry-based methods, written or audio/video sources** (such as the journey of the raw materials constituting our self-phone, as presented in Vienna). The analysis can then be appropriated or presented by the learners themselves (whom are in some cases emerging from the global south) in a way that enables the group to **question own practices, consume habits, practices and beliefs**.
4. **Reflection**. time and safe space for reflection support the development of **awareness and critical thinking**. The reflection follows the comparison, analysis and experience. Educators and youth workers may ask young people (in small group or via their self-phone) to **present their learning experiences**, encourage learners to **document their learning** or **reflect** through an evaluation form or a video-message. These materials are useful to keep track of the learning, and to **share what they have learned with their peer groups and friends**.
5. **Action**. Reflection may lead the young learners to action, starting from engaging with others (including other members of their peer-communities) in the best cases through participatory or co-creative activities. Youth workers are responsible for encouraging and motivating the young people to cooperate, to become active, for example in suggesting direct improvements in their social and physical environments (the social space, as experienced in Valencia) and engaging with their neighbourhood and their communities.

## Resilience, Sustainable Transformation and the Element of Change

When dealing with youth and in particular when working with young people with fewer opportunities **change** constitute the core of everyday actions. In some cases, fluid changes can be experienced by youth workers as disruptive, generating instability and making it hard to achieve tangible or solid results. The principle of **mobile and stationary youth work** unfolding in the social space, along with the principle of the **Global Citizenship Education** prepares youth workers - and learners/young people alike - to embrace and successfully deal with uncertainty of real-life scenarios, by adopting a **positive, constructive and mutually supportive approach**. The ability to embrace the **transformative essence of youth** ensures the achievement of a good balance between offering **safe and stable framework for development** and **flexibility in modes to adapt to change**. For this manual the experts of the Access project present a holistic approach linking the different dimensions of being (physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual) with **adaptability and transformability in social-cultural and ecological systems**.

What does **resilience** mean in the context of social space-oriented youth work? Resilience is the capacity of a system - encompassing the young people and the youth workers - to **face disturbances and difficulties in the process of undergoing changes**, in a way to retain and **consolidating their mutual function, structure and identity**.

The list below shows the relevance of developing **competences** to face present and future challenges of the youth 's world

### Social skills and culture

- Valuing diversity
- Openness to otherness
- Responsibility
- Self-efficacy
- Tolerance of ambiguity
- Analytical and critical thinking skills
- Empathy
- Linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills
- Conflict resolution skills
- Knowledge and critical understanding of the self.

### Embracing Transformation and Change

- Tolerance of ambiguity
- Autonomous learning skills
- Flexibility and adaptability
- Co-operation skills
- Knowledge and critical understanding and communication
- Knowledge and critical understanding of the world (including politics, human rights, cultures, religions, history, media, economies, the environment).



## Personal Experiences and Good Practices

Personal experiences and good practices constitute the back bone for learning. Activities run in the social space might encompass the experience and confrontation with **intense feelings** not easy to deal with. Youth workers, trainers and social educators are called to be prepared to address and **deal with strong emotions** and be competent in understanding each person **role in a group**. Activities that have the potential to unleash strong feelings and conflictive opinions have to be carefully foreseen, planned and developed, and **sufficient time for reflection** has to be considered. The methods presented in this guide propose to balance out both **actions and experiences with reflections** to support addressing transformation and difficulties in non-formal learning environment in the (at times **fluid**) **social spaces**.

## Safe Space and Positive Learning Environment

A positive learning environment for disadvantaged young people presents specific characteristics, it has to be recognised by the target users as a **safe space, a space of trust and mutual learning**. What are those specific elements?

Adopting the social-space oriented approach trainers and youth workers propose a set of objectives (based on the existing expertise). The initial objectives need to be presented as relevant and translated into **relevant objectives for the target group of disadvantaged youth**. In short, the objectives have to be:

1. SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-bound)
2. relevant for the learners
3. based on social workers' or educators' **competences, capacity, space and materials** available
4. **adaptable** to concrete methods to reach the learners in their social-space.

## Placing Young People' Potentials at the Centre

Young people in a NEET situation present a variety of profiles and their expectations in participating in an education offer or a training program might differ greatly. In non-formal educational offers **participation is voluntary**, meaning that the young people are free to take part to the offer that interest them the most. Also, the youth workers might have gathered beforehand some information on the profiles of the participants, at the moment of registration for the training or workshop. Regardless of the settings it is important to **ensure higher impact of the offer**, hence to **collect information about the group or the interest and motivation of individual participants**, through direct and periodic inquiring it is important.

Information useful for setting the education offer:

- The **size** of the group (e.g. individual or small group)
- The group **composition** (e.g. social, cultural and economic status).
- The group (previous if any) experience of a specific field (e.g. inclusion, global citizen education, digitalisation).

- The expectations of the young people for the education offer (e.g. what their current skills and potentials are and what they want to learn? Do they enjoy to interact among themselves and with their peer-groups/ communities? Which are their motivation and expectations to attend the education offer?).

Educational resources are to be selected according to the needs and expectations of the target group. Elements to be considered are:

- learners' **age group**: not over simplified, low-threshold, not too childish, not too serious.
- learners' **language** level (when targeting international participants, including participants with migration background/ intercultural settings or when adopting specialised terminology or English wording): if the contents of the instructions or of a resource are not clear, it will not be possible for them to participate. Also, if the instructions are too simple, the target group will not feel considered smart or old enough to adopt the materials.
- **abilities** of all learners, especially in mixed-ability groups; it is useful to try a variety of resources that are modular or imply an entry level and an advanced level, this way all learners in respect to their level of proficiency, or their level or apprenticeship can undertake the activities and learning proposed at their tailored level.
- group's **(cultural) diversity**: not too oriented to a specific culture, and if so considering of the possibility to deal with multicultural groups, where learners may be originating from diverse backgrounds (including the global south) and this might lead to misunderstand or misinterpret the contents presented.
- group's **interests**: all resources should be presented in a way to meet the interest of the young people. Youth workers and educators might consider those materials and tools which tackle in particular the skills, interest and potentials of the young target group.

## Interconnectedness and Sustainability Approach

Global education aims at unleashing emotions and understanding related to (global) issues with impacts on the local level and at the global scale. This enable to channel young people 's feelings leading them to take action to operate (positive) changes with their everyday actions. Capitalising on young people's attitudes and competences, every individual is enabled to practice **social and civic skills**: by informing about an issue the peer groups, by positioning oneself or defending a cause in the peer group or in the social media, by building bridges or advocating for those who are not heard, including one-selves or own communities excluded at the local (or global) levels. Young people when empowered can shape new positive future scenarios and co-create with the tailored support the basis for **social transformation**.



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