
Handbook for youth
engagement
Good practices on
how to reach and
attract disadvantaged
young people

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Tips and tricks for reaching out disadvantaged young people

This document includes tips and tricks for reaching out disadvantaged young people. How you reach and attract disadvantaged young people depends on several conditions, for instance, if there are any specific criteria regarding participation in your project/training (age, social background), or on their specific disadvantage. Here we present the experience of three organisations from Belgium, Spain and Croatia with some general suggestions, but also some concrete examples from our project, such as the example of a call for participants and the criteria. These examples can help you in your work in a very practical way and we hereby provide our permission to use them..

Find the right partners

One good practice is to be in touch with other institutions and organisations – schools, universities and/or youth centers – from disadvantaged neighborhoods that aim to help and improve the life vulnerable or migrant groups. In this way, you can easily have contact with people from disadvantaged groups and as well as get first-hand information about their difficulties, challenges, and needs. In addition, this could be a chance to regularly inform them about your ongoing and upcoming activities and their possibilities to participate in projects or trainings.

Youth centers

Cooperation with youth centers will have a positive impact on your activities by learning from their practices to attract young people or use their databases of participants from past projects or trainings, if they are willing to provide this info. Also, it is possible to exchange information related to disadvantaged young people and their social environment and how to improve your strategy in relation to this social group.

Schools

Equally important is the continual contact with schools, especially from the disadvantaged neighborhoods of the city where you operate. Most the students of this kind of schools are young people at risk of social exclusion, early school leavers or immigrants. Therefore, cooperation can be key to reach young people from vulnerable groups.

Moreover, the direct cooperation with individual trainers, facilitators, teachers and volunteers from both formal and non-formal education is very important to exchange information regarding potential participants in projects or trainings.

Find the right time

There several “good” periods to engage young people in trainings or projects. This mostly depends on the participants’ personal situation or age.

School students

School students are most easily engaged in a training or a project when the school or their teachers are involved. In terms of timing, the afternoon hours are more suitable than morning hours. It is possible to reach young people outside school hours in youth centers, where they spend their free time and participate in some activities. Difficult periods to engage them are during the summer or during Easter or Christmas holidays, as many of them try to find holiday jobs to earn some money.

Young jobseekers

The young job seeker is easily reached during working hours. It is important to have in mind any legal constraints for them. For instance, in Belgium the ideal formula is an intensive project of minimum 20 hours per week, in which case they qualify for an exemption of sanctions by the state for not actively looking for work during the duration of the project or training.

Young employed people

On the other hand, working youth are a target group that is not reachable during working hours and their flexibility to attend trainings or participate in projects depends on several factors, for example working hours or child care.

Some obstacles

Some difficulties may arise during the process of reaching out to and attracting disadvantaged young people.

Age, culture, religion

They mostly stem from their age, social, economic, cultural or religious background.

Some specific periods should be avoided to implement a training or a project, because of religious celebration, for instance, Ramadan, Iftar. Planning around them is never a major issue. Related to participant's family, possible obstacle would be that parents may not allow their children to travel alone because of culture or gender-related aspect, for example in some cases Islamic women are not allowed to travel without family supervision.

Work

Moreover, some high school students work in their free time or during summer holidays to support financially their families. Thus, it is difficult for them to attend trainings or be part of a project during certain periods the year. This problem can be overcome by talking with the potential participants and underlining the importance of this valuable experience. If it is necessary, you can try to convince their parents that it is worth to lose a part of their income to gain valuable skills that may help them find better opportunities.

Vacation

During the summer family vacations and leisure time would be a barrier possible to overcome by convincing participants and their families about the importance and the benefits of participating in a project or training.

List of common selection criteria and call for participants

The project partners selected the participants based on previously agreed common criteria, although there was a degree of flexibility in the selection, which depended on every country, and the participant's individual situation. Therefore, it is advised to apply the criteria on a case-by-case basis.

List of criteria applied in our project

No or little international experience

Firstly, no previous international experience is not a negative factor for a young person to participate in this kind of projects. If participants are demonstrably part of the main target groups of the project, previous international experience should not be an obstacle. On the contrary, we wanted to give a chance exactly to youngsters with little international experience, because for them the value in participating in the project is even greater. We have noticed a general tendency that the same young people participate in different trainings (they become sort of a "perfect participant" thanks to their experience and knowledge) which limits the opportunities for others.

Language skills in the working language of the training

Language skills are an important factor so that the participants can communicate effectively with trainers and other participants. Nevertheless, it is better not to specify a language level, for instance, B2 because most disadvantaged young people do not have the means to certify and prove their language skills. However, a minimum of language skills is needed and those can be easily tested at an interview with the participant.

Possibility to travel abroad

Another criterion was the possibility of participants to travel abroad. In particular, they should have the necessary ID documents – passport and visa, if necessary. However, exceptions can be made if they are willing and able to apply for the travel documents and there is sufficient time. Participants should make sure that their documents do not expire before or during the training.

Migrant background

In our project, the criterion regarding the migrant background was important for the selection of participants due to the focus topic of the project, which was migration and the refugee crisis. Our aim was to engage young people who had a personal interest in this topic as (second or third generation) migrants. Yet, we also aimed to have mixed groups including local young people, which adds richness and diversity to the exchange. Therefore, the selection of participants was not restricted to second or third generation migrants.

Age

When setting young age requirements, you should first check if there are any formal requirements from the programme funding your project. In our case, the project was funded by Erasmus+ Strategic partnerships in Youth and the eligible participants were 13-30 year olds.

After establishing the formal criteria, you should bear the following in mind then deciding on a more specific age range. Raising the age limit will eliminate several barriers, e.g. need for a formal parent permission to travel, difficulty to manage diverse groups composed of 13 and 30 year olds with different interests and needs. However, it is possible by adapting your capabilities to manage this kind of diversity. In addition, it is difficult to engage high school students, so it is better to extend the age limit. However, exceptions can be made as high school students who demonstrate a very high degree of interest and motivation arguably also will have more maturity.

Template for a call for participants

The call for participants is an important part of a project implementation. But what to include in it, how to structure it in the most attractive way and how to promote it?

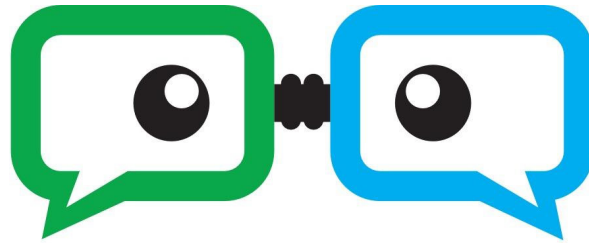
A combination of several practices would be a good strategy. First, the collaboration with youth centers is useful to get in contact with young people in their free time outside the school and inform them in a friendly environment about the project or training.

Furthermore, the contact with tutors, head teachers, social integrators, who works in formal education can help to implement projects in schools or to present and inform the students about ongoing or upcoming activities. By organizing projects in schools or youth centers, facilitators are close to local youth and young adults. In general, the cooperation with public, private or civil sector organisations will be useful not only to reach young people but also used as a dissemination tool for the project itself.

A useful practice to reach potential participants is to organize events that target young job seekers, who are 18-25 years old on average. In that kind of events, there is an opportunity to attract young people to trainings and courses. Moreover, common practice is to distribute printed dissemination materials, for instance, posters and leaflets in the neighbourhood. You can also publish the call online on news websites and in several social media (Facebook, Twitter, national and local youth websites and portals such as <http://jovesteb.org>). In addition, a good practice is to keep a database of young people who participated in workshops in schools or youth centers to contact them later when it is needed to recruit people for other projects.

Below you will find an example of a leaflet with a call for participants. It contains the following information: 1. Project logo; 2. A catchy question to attract attention; 3. Explanation about the project; 4. Explanation of the offer; 5. The criteria for participation and 6. How interested participants can get more info.

Do not forget to design it in a very visual and attractive way with icons and pictures representing the activities, and always add the logo of the programme funding the training/ project.



Youth e-perspectives

Are you between 16 and 29 years old and want to learn about digital journalism ?

Our project:

- Training workshops on digital photography and digital storytelling, writing a good story, and how to effectively use social networks.
- International meeting in with other young people from Spain and Croatia to exchange and learn from each other. We will visit a refugee camp together to hear people's stories firsthand.
- Together we will apply what we've learned creating a picture of migration, reflecting on how we see it through our own eyes.
- Together we will organize a public event to explain the experience to colleagues, family and friends.

What we offer:

- You will learn to talk about reality from your point of view.
- You will learn to communicate objectively and ethically but with a critical spirit.
- You will learn different forms to act on what you experience and stop being just a spectator
- You will learn new skills in the use of ICT and discover new talents
- We provide travel toand accommodation infree of cost as it is covered by the project YeP and Erasmus+ (European Union)

What you need:

- You live in the Brussels Capital Region
- You have a good level of spoken and written English
- You have an open mind on the different aspects of migration
- You can watch, listen and talk with respect for others
- You can commit to participate in a number of workshops in June
- You are able to travel to Croatia, leaving on date and returning on date
- You can provide travel documents suitable for travel within the EU (Identity card or passport)
- You can provide us with the authorisation of your parents to travel if you're a minor

Interested? Want more information?

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Some additional tips to motivate disadvantaged youth

Trip, but not vacation!

To attract young people to participate in a training or project, it is necessary to present the training or the project in an appealing way. A trip abroad is very appealing to young people though you should emphasize that this is not a vacation but an opportunity to learn and broaden their horizons. Also, it could be presented as a good opportunity to exchange ideas and meet people from other countries. Managing their expectations would be the key.

Good for the CV

Furthermore, providing certification is important for young people to add to their C.V. It is also a good argument to persuade their families to allow them to travel and participate.

Something tangible

However, the key to motivating young people is the experience itself. Therefore, it is better to focus on the identification of key competencies participants acquire or improve during the process. Moreover, they will be very motivated if they know that they will come back with something tangible after the project/training – something they can show to their family and friends. The digital stories they created in Youth e-Perspectives on Migration played this role.

All in all, it is preferable not to present the training or the project as a recreational activity but as a chance to improve their skills. Most disadvantaged young people who work in their free time or during holidays to support financially their families will not give up their chance to earn an income for a leisure activity, as opposed to an activity that will help them acquire skills.

Selection procedure

Once you have reached and motivated the young people, you need to select those that are most suitable to participate in the training. The recommended number of participants is up to 24 (optimal number of facilitators – 6).

To carry out the selection procedure, you can use the usual practices of your organisation. The below tips are just a suggestion that might help you if you do not have experience. It is meant to serve as inspiration and is in no way exhaustive and prescriptive:

It is advisable to develop an application form and selection criteria.

The selection criteria can be formulated as follows:

1. Understanding of the project – the candidate has a good overall understanding of the topic and the main activities they will be involved in.
2. Fitness to the project – the candidate has a good understanding and can articulate their own interests and background which makes them a good match for the topic and activities.
3. Capacity to carry out follow up activities and act as a multiplier of the project – the candidate has a good idea of how they can pass on their experience acquired in the project to their peers and engage them in the topic.

Criteria can be assessed on a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is no understanding/idea and 5 is a very deep understanding/clear idea.

The aim of the application form is to understand if candidates fulfil the eligibility criteria and cover the selection criteria. It is the basis for the selection. The application form can be very simple, but it should include both questions regarding the eligibility criteria, such as:

1. Your age
2. Are you able to communicate in [working language of the training]: YES, freely; YES, but with some limits; NO.
3. Do you have a valid travel document (ID/passport/VISA) for [country where the training will take place] or can you obtain one before [dates of the training]? And questions regarding the selection criteria, such as:
4. What do you think this project can bring you? (criteria 1)
5. What do you think you can bring to the project? (criteria 2)
6. If the project could be developed in your neighborhood, with whom you would like to work (person or entity)? how would you do it?

How to organise a preparatory info day for pre-selected applicants (optional)

The preparatory info day is meant for pre-selected participants who cover the formal criteria for participation and is part of the selection process.

It is optional, because it will depend on the number of candidatures for the training.

Participants are informed what they will be doing during the training, where and why.

It will include introduction to digital media, background info about the issues of migrants and refugees and the objectives of the project.

- 1-2 hours of showing them existing resources such as examples of digital stories (e.g. »At the end of the project you will be able to do that ! »)
- 1-2 hours of explaining to them the topic of the project, the tools, the timeline and their commitment (they should be able to participate in min. 4 preparatory meetings and online assignments, f2f training in Croatia, organisation of a peer info day afterwards)

