



Ideas for a mini-guide for the accessibility of meetings or events of the Focolare Movement (working paper – 8/7/2022)

Organizing an event in such a way as not to create barriers that exclude people with disabilities is not complicated. You don't need to be a specialist. Just be aware of the importance of accessibility, follow some practical guidelines and be ready to listen and understand the specific needs of each person.

Within the AEIS project we are designing a simple and concise leaflet, perhaps accompanied by effective and attractive images or cartoons, which summarizes the essential points to consider when organizing a meeting or event. The leaflet could then be reinterpreted in a very short video. For more in-depth information, a more technical document could then be thought of.

Here is a first draft idea (to be reviewed, perfected, etc.) of the contents of the mini-guide

**Every meeting is a moment in which "we make home",
and our homes will be:**
"... welcoming to every person who frequents them,
so that no one feels uncomfortable in it,
and adapted to the environments, characteristics, customs of peoples
in which the people of the Work of Mary live and carry out their apostolate ... "
(Article 62 of the General Statutes of the Opera).

When we organize an event (meeting, conference, etc.), we should take care that it is **accessible, inclusive, participatory** for all the guests.

Among the guests there could in fact be someone who has difficulties in mobility, sight, hearing, orientation, understanding in certain situations. These difficulties may be due to disabilities, health situations, allergies, old age and, in the case of online participation, even simply to technical limitations (small screen, slow internet, etc.). It is our task, as organizers, to avoid creating barriers that hinder participation.

ACCESSIBLE

It means that everyone can **reach** the place of the event, **access** it without obstacles, **stay** there comfortably, **move around, find their way** independently and safely, and use every **space** and **service** connected to the event, such as registration websites, reception, toilets, cafeteria, group meeting rooms, and recreational spaces.

A few examples:

- *those who use an assistive product to move, such as a walker or a wheelchair, must be able to park as close as possible, reach the place through a safe and obstacle-free path, move independently inside it, use a toilet whose sizes and internal arrangement allow full autonomy.*
- *those who walk, but have difficulty walking, need to find frequent support points in the path.*
- *those who cannot see or have difficulty seeing need to find easy points of orientation.*
- *for those with hearing or orientation or understanding difficulties it is essential that the room acoustics are comfortable, without echoes or reverberations.*
- *air conditioning must ensure the right temperature and good air quality.*
- *any signage must be easy to understand, using multiple communication methods including written, visual elements (graphics, colors, shapes), tactile signs, acoustic signals.*
- *Participants must be given the opportunity to report any special needs in advance, to enable the organizer to prepare a solution in time (e.g., availability of a companion).*

And for those who participate online ...

- *we will choose a platform that complies with accessibility standards and can be used independently by those who have some visual or hearing difficulties or in the use of their hands.*
- *In general, it is easier to ensure the accessibility of an online event, because there is no need to move, and the interaction is mediated by a device for everyone.*



- *Ensuring accessibility in mixed mode (i.e. somebody in presence and others online) is more complex: those in presence must always speak through a microphone and make sure to be framed by the camera; audiovisual materials must be shown in a visible manner both in the meeting room and online; those who use assistive communication device must connect to the amplification in such a way that the voice of those who are online is perfectly intelligible to those in the room and vice versa.*

INCLUSIVE

It means that everyone can **listen to** and **understand** what is said, presented and shown during the event, and can independently read any materials distributed.

A few examples:

- *Each speaker or person who intervenes in the debate must speak clearly, from a position clearly visible to the public, turning their gaze towards the public, at proximity of the microphone in the case of amplification.*
- *If possible, choose a venue with an acoustic loop, so that those who wear a hearing aid can tune it directly to the room amplifier.*
- *If a speaker has difficulty articulating words, adequate time should be given to speak; if he or she speaks through a communication device, this must be connected to the room amplification.*
- *If the speaker makes use of multimedia material such as power point slides, he or she will take care to read the content and explain orally any visual elements essential to understanding, so that they can be understood also by those with sight difficulties.*
- *If you are projecting a movie, you will have to introduce it by explaining in summary what it shows (unless it is already prepared with audio description of the scenes).*
- *If available, prefer films with subtitles: these are very useful for everyone, but especially for those with hearing difficulties or for foreigners who do not master the language perfectly.*
- *For deaf people who know sign language (each nation has its own) the best solution is to have a sign language interpreter.*
- *Magnified projection of speakers while they are speaking can also be helpful.*
- *Any material distributed to participants must also be available in digital form, preferably in PDF formatted in an accessible way.*

And for those who participate online ...

- *It should be borne in mind that slides or videos could lose readability if projected in a reduced frame instead of full screen; the subtitles may even be unreadable.*
- *Any sign language interpreter will be present in a box like a normal participant*

PARTICIPATORY

It means that each participant is not only there to listen, but also to actively **participate**: as a speaker, intervening in the debate, participating in a working group, etc. ...

A few examples:

- *In the debate, those with sight or hearing difficulties must be able to ask to speak, have prompt feedback from the moderator that the request to speak has been accepted, receive clear indications on when it is their turn.*
- *Those with motor disabilities must be able to move easily to the place intended for the speakers, through an accessible path that leads to an accessible table or podium; or, in situations of debate, being able to speak from one's seat, with somebody bringing him or her the microphone.*
- *Anyone who intervenes must consider those in the audience who have difficulty seeing or hearing: therefore, speak as clearly as possible, hold the microphone in the right proximity, start by presenting yourself and your appearance (I'm tall, I wear glasses, I have long hair ...)*