



OUTDOOR EXPERIENCES FOR EVERYONE

A manual on how to organise
accessible outdoor activities.



**ÖSTERREICHISCHE
BUNDESFORSTE**



Outdoor experiences – for everyone

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Outdoor accessibility

A venue is called accessible when nobody faces a barrier approaching it, regardless of their abilities or possible impairments. At first thought, accessibility might evoke the notion of blind people or people in wheelchairs. However, a far larger number of people can benefit from accessibility, such as elderly people, pregnant women or families with small children. According to a survey by the German Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology conducted in 2003, accessibility in our everyday life and during leisure time is indispensable for 10 % of the population and necessary for about 40 %. And it's convenient for everybody!

Accessibility in a natural environment is rare. However, there are simple measures which can enable an enriching experience for a diverse group of people – with and without disabilities.

The prerequisite is that those offering outdoor experience activities know about the needs of people with disabilities and inform potential participants about the conditions of a tour in advance. Thus, both those offering and the participants have enough information to enjoy themselves and get involved in this experience.

The aim of this manual is to provide information on how to plan accessible outdoor experience activities in order to promote and facilitate their implementation. Experts of the Austrian federations for people with disabilities BSVÖ and ÖZIV have contributed to the content, which contains all the necessary information in a nutshell. We hope that this manual for interested environmental educators will prove to be a practical tool to organise outdoor activities for everybody!



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Fundamental principles of accessibility

✓ **KISS: “Keep It Short and Simple”**

Give important information in a short and simple way; use easy language for oral explanations. This will make activities easier to understand for everyone (also for children and elderly people)!

✓ **For all the senses**

According to the Two-Senses Principle, information ought to appeal to at least two senses that complement each other (e.g. seeing and hearing; hearing and feeling) in order to be understood by most people. In outdoor activities, it can be best to appeal to all five senses to create an intensive experience for all participants (-->*check list*).

✓ **Flexibility and creativity**

Basically, the same prerequisites apply to tours for people with disabilities as to every other tour: if the guide is willing to commit to the situation and meets the wishes of participants with flexibility and creativity, the activity is bound to be a success. It is important that you acquaint yourself with the needs and wishes of the participants before the tour, so as to be able to take them into account.

✓ **How to react?**

Respect towards each and every participant is the basic requirement in every tour. If you get the feeling that a participant needs help, offer it without forcing it upon them. A rule of thumb during activities with people with disabilities is "as much self-determination as possible, as much support as necessary". Always address them directly for questions and information, not the person accompanying them (if there is one). If you are uncertain or have questions about how to deal with one person, just address this issue directly. Don't be afraid of putting your foot in it!

✓ **The service chain**

In order to benefit from a comprehensive (tourist) offer, information on arrival/departure and on orientation and mobility in situ needs to be provided. Several services such as transportation, accommodation, food, drinks, and leisure-time offers also need to be available. In a complete service chain, the necessary information and all of these services are on hand. If one item is missing (e.g. no information on accessible restrooms or no means of transport for arrival and departure), the service chain is faulty and the offer can't be used or not fully. This is why it is important to check whether the important items in the service chain are available before announcing any outdoor activity (-->*check list*).

Accessibility tips

Accessibility of outdoor experience activities means that they are available to everyone, irrespective of any disability. Existing offers are rarely accessible. However, if you know about the needs and requirements of specific groups of people, many barriers can be easily removed.

If certain barriers cannot be dismantled, this does not have to imply that an activity is completely unsuitable for people with disabilities. For example, an event can be unsuitable for people in wheelchairs due to the situation of a trail whereas people with other kinds of walking impairments, blind and visually impaired people, and people with

learning difficulties can take full advantage of this activity.

If the invitation contains all the important information on the conditions and possible barriers (-->*check list*), interested people can decide for themselves whether the offer is suitable for them. After all, they know best what they need.

This guide aims to encourage you to make existing offers available to as many people as possible. However, this does not necessarily imply creating made-to-measure tours for different groups of people. The objective is to create offers which are, if possible, accessible to everyone!

a. People with limited mobility

This group includes people who need mobility aids such as a wheelchair, wheeled walker, crutches, walking sticks or prostheses. Some wheelchair users steer it manually, others have an electrical wheelchair. If necessary, accompanying persons can assist by pushing the wheelchair. People who use a wheelchair can also leave it. In some situations (e.g. when going to the toilet), this is inevitable, but also during a tour it is not uncommon for them to walk one stretch of the tour (with another mobility aid) or to leave their wheelchair during a pause. Other people such as pregnant women and parents with strollers also benefit from offers for people with limited mobility.

Requirements:

Contact:

- Communicate at eye level with wheelchair users - for example, sit down during a longer talk. By contrast, kneeling down might seem "forced".
- Adapt your pace to the pace of your participants. If necessary, offer your arm or hand for support.
- Don't be afraid to put your foot in – words such as "go" and "walk" can be used, they are not necessarily offensive.

Infrastructure:

- Accessible restrooms (-->*Indications*)

- Accessible parking, or at least a sufficiently wide (3.5 m), flat space on solid ground (-->*Indications*). Such parking is also important for people with walking disabilities who do not need a wheelchair.
- An accessible trail which is not too steep (< 6 % gradient) and as wide as possible (at least 1.2 m); solid ground; distance not too far (-->*Indications*).
- Regular opportunities for rest stops (benches with back rests) are especially important for people with walking disabilities.
- If a trail is challenging for people with limited mobility (e.g. short stretches with more than 6 % gradient, soft ground), an accompanying person can assist them. Make sure that the trail is wide enough for two people to walk side by side. Athletic people with limited mobility can also master difficult parts alone. Point out the conditions of challenging parts in advance and trust the assessment of your participants.

Implementation:

- During your hike, look for points where one can see the open countryside, or (if you have the landowner's consent) cut down bushes etc. at viewpoints if they bar people in a wheelchair from the view.
- If there is no suitable trail, you can also organise activities at one place. Try to offer a wide range of activities ("for all the senses"). As an alternative to a hike on a non-accessible trail, you could also choose an asphalted, quiet road and then organise activities at one place (tips for wheelchair hikes --> *links*).

b. People with visual impairments and blind people

There are various kinds of visual impairments which differently affect eyesight (blurred vision, restricted field of vision, various manifestations and combinations of both). People with visual impairments can still find their bearings relying on their (differently strong) sense of vision, for example they might have a perception of strong contrasts or striking forms. The extent of visual impairment can vary according to external factors (distance from the object, light, time of day, blood sugar level etc.), so that a person who in bright daylight can find their way pretty well by sight, might be practically blind by night.

Blind people on the other hand basically use their senses of hearing, touch, and smell to find their bearings. However, some also have a minimal sense of vision (e.g. distinguishing between light and dark) which they can use for support in certain situations.

Requirements:

Contact:

- Don't be confused if you can't make eye contact – not only with blind people, in which case you might have expected this, but also with people with visual impairments. They might be able to see some things, but direct eye contact is often only possible to a limited extent or not at all. If the central visual field is impaired, it might seem as though a person doesn't look at you, although they see you in the edge of their visual field.
- Offer your arm wherever orientation is difficult (e.g. in rough terrain).
- Don't be afraid to put your foot in - words such as "look" and "see" can be used, they are not necessarily offensive.

Infrastructure:

- Blind and visually impaired people do not need accessible restrooms. However, if there is no guidance system which they can read with their tactile sense and no other elements for orientation, it might be necessary for you to accompany them to the restroom.
- If you send a written invitation to people with visual impairments or to organisations for the blind and visually impaired, send them per e-mail, e.g. as MS Word file (clear structure, very little formatting or none at all). This will make it easy to enlarge the invitation and read it with voice output. If there are pictures in your invitation, describe them with a caption ("The picture shows...").
- For blind and visually impaired people to be able to independently participate in an event, it is important that it be accessible with public transport. If such an infrastructure is not available, think about providing rideshare opportunities or choosing a meeting point which is accessible with public transport.
- A hiking trail does not necessarily need to be suitable for people with limited mobility. On the contrary, it might even be very appealing to blind people and people with visual impairments

to leave the road and cut across country, which they might not be able to do on their own (sensory experience). If you plan difficult stretches, it is recommended to advise the participants of that in advance, so that they can bring a familiar accompanying person to help them overcome obstacles or steep stretches.

- Walking on a bumpy trail for a long time can be very exhausting, as people with visual impairments need to concentrate hard on orientation. This is why you should not go "off-road" for too long (45-120 minutes walking time, varying according to the needs of the participants) or change to an even, easier road if necessary.
- Watch out for obstacles at the height of head and breast. These often go unnoticed, as people focus on the ground, especially when walking with a white stick.

Implementation:

- Describe the trail conditions of the next metres in order to facilitate walking for your participants. *Examples:* "In two metres, a five-metre descent starts and leads into a hollow." "In four metres we will pass a tree on your right." "Three metres in front of you, there is a branch at the height of your head."
- Describe your environment in detail. *Example:* "We now step on a bridge over a dried-up river. On our right, there is a thick deciduous forest with many high trees. On our left, there is a meadow; the grass has just been cut..."
- You could also describe colours. Many blind people and people with visual impairments are interested in the colours of their environment, as they know them from memory or are able to perceive them at least in some sort of way.
- Sounds and smells which we often do not pay much attention to, such as birdcalls or freshly cut wood, are interesting to blind people as well as to seeing people. Use these sensory experiences consciously in your tour.
- Objects that can be touched, smelled or tasted, such as fruit, bark, leaves, mounted animals etc., are an important part of an event for blind people and those with visual impairments.

c. People with learning difficulties

Every person with learning difficulties is different regarding their cognitive skills, the extent of their impairment and their development in various areas. Learning difficulties can become apparent in difficulties in reading, writing and understanding difficult language, as well as in orientation.

Requirements:

Contact:

- Be polite and not patronising.
- Use simple language and short (but complete) sentences. Don't use loanwords, abbreviations or ambiguous idioms. Use "adult language".
- Make sure that you have been understood, and answer questions precisely.

Infrastructure:

- No accessible restrooms necessary.
- No accessible trail necessary. However, if the terrain is rough, you need to be careful, as the participants might not be very sure-footed. Only choose longer stretches on difficult terrain or with obstacles if you have first checked with your participants and their accompanying persons.
- There should be resting opportunities (or the possibility of resting on the ground). If the tour is too exhausting for your participants, shorten it. Rely on the judgment of the accompanying person(s) when assessing the situation. Be flexible and, if necessary, change the programme at short notice.

Implementation:

- Take into account the KISS principle (-->*Fundamental principles*).
- A duration of 2-3 hours is enough.
- Don't choose complex games; carefully consider whether to suggest locomotorily difficult games.
- Take regular breaks.

d. People with hearing impairments and deaf people

Deaf people can not or only faintly perceive acoustic stimuli. This is why visual communication is very important to them. In direct communication, many deaf people use sign language; some can also communicate in spoken language by talking audibly and reading lips (lip-reading enables them to understand approximately 30 % of the spoken content). As an alternative to telephone calls, they can communicate via SMS or e-mail. However, you have to take into account that deaf people are often unable to read very complex words or texts, as sign language has a very different structure than spoken language.

For people with hearing impairments it is important that acoustic information and impressions be articulate and audible and not drowned by the sound of the environment or by many people talking at once.

Requirements:

Contact:

- Choose a quiet environment for conversation.
- Speak slowly and articulately. Keep eye contact while speaking and make sure that your lips are visible (for lip-reading).
- Provide paper and pens for communication.
- If necessary, arrange for sign language interpreters to accompany the activity.

Infrastructure:

- People with hearing impairments normally do not have any special requirements for infrastructure. However, you should pay special attention on multi-use roads or trails (e.g. hiking trails used by mountain bikers, roads with motor traffic), as approaching vehicles might not be heard.
- If possible, use a portable audio induction loop for events with people with hearing aids. It will enable them to receive your words without interference (and it is wireless).

Implementation:

- Provide concise information in writing.
- Choose quiet places with little traffic (be careful on roads with many mountain bikers).
- Whenever possible, sign language interpreters should accompany the activity.

Check list – planning and implementation

- ✓ Planning: Revise your offer: For whom is it suitable? Are there any remaining barriers? Which measures would be necessary to make the offer suitable for a larger group or to make it accessible to all?
- ✓ Check the infrastructure: How about arrival? Is the road suitable for people in wheelchairs? Are there accessible restrooms? Where can I rest with the group?
- ✓ Announce the event in easy-to-understand language ("KISS").
- ✓ Elaborate on these points in your invitation:
 - Accessibility (public transport, cars)
 - Accessible parking (or suitable area to park and leave the car) available?
 - Accessible restrooms available?
 - If there are barriers, state explicitly for which groups the offer is suitable. If people with disability ought to bring an accompanying person (e.g. difficult terrain, or short stretches of > 6 % gradient for people in a wheelchair), point that out in the invitation.
 - Trail conditions (length, gradient, condition of the ground)
 - Resting opportunities available?
 - Duration
 - Food and drink: is there an accessible restaurant? Or ought the participants to bring their own food and drink?
 - Are (guide) dogs allowed?
 - For an event of several days: is there accessible accommodation close by?
 - Contact address for queries
- ✓ Include all senses: propose games which include different senses (e.g. Water:Rucksack games: "sound map", "barefoot caterpillar", touching games with eyes closed) and let the participants touch, smell and taste natural objects.
 - Listening: e.g. animal sounds (birdcalls, croaking of frogs, insects), water, wind
 - Touching: e.g. tree bark, moss, (hairy) leaves, ground
 - Tasting: e.g. fruit, herbs
 - Smelling: e.g. leaves, wood
 - Seeing: e.g. different colours of the leaves in the forest, landscape forms

Annex

a. Indications for accessible trails and infrastructure¹

The following indications are points of reference for necessary features of accessible outdoor trails. If single parameters on a trail you choose do not fulfil the criteria, point to these "problems" in your invitation or talk about them with your participants in advance. Short, steep stretches (> 6 %) or uneven stretches might be mastered with an accompanying person; for athletic people they might not be a problem at all.

	Wheelchair	Limited mobility	Visual impairment	Learning difficulty	Hearing impairment
Total distance	1–10 km	<i>see left</i>	-	-	
Longitudinal gradient	max. 4–6 %	<i>see left</i>	-	-	-
Transverse gradient	max. 2 %	<i>see left</i>	-	-	-
Width & passing points	At least 1.2 m (ideally 1.5-2.0 m); wider passing points (2 m wide and 2.5 m long) in sight	At least 1.2 m (ideally 2.0 m)	(1.2-2.0 m on accessible trails); for guided off-road tours, width is not important	-	-
Narrowing of the trail	At least 0.9 m width (short stretches)	<i>see left</i>	-	-	-
Surface of the trail	Relatively even, sealed: asphalt, concrete, paver, cast stone pavement etc., water-bound surface, even, firm natural ground (no thick rooting, not very stony or muddy)	<i>see left</i>	-	-	-

¹ Source: modified from “Freiraum – Planungsleitfaden für die barrierefreie Gestaltung von Wanderwegen“ Erfurt, 2005.

Seating accommodation	every 100 metres is <i>desirable</i>	every 100–300 m	-	-	-
Steps, stairs, rises	No steps rises of max. 3 cm height	Steps of max. 15 cm height; not more than 5 steps/km on average; max. 10 steps in succession; stairs with handrails	Stairs with handrails	-	-
Fissures	Fissures across the trail with a maximum width of 3 cm; Fissures parallel to the trail with a maximum width of 0.5 cm (e.g. grids)	Fissures in the trail surface are no wider than 10 cm	No danger of tripping over fissures in the trail surface	-	-
Trail use	No heavy motor traffic roads or roads with motor vehicles going past quickly; no confusing road situations; no riding trails	No heavy motor traffic roads or roads with motor vehicles going past quickly; no confusing road situations; no riding trails; no heavy bicycle traffic	<i>see left</i>	<i>see left</i>	<i>see left</i>
Restrooms	accessible restrooms at the starting point (parking areas, bus stops,...) or during the tour; in mountain huts, restaurants etc.	-	-	-	-
Resting possibilities	1.5 x 1.5 m supporting surface; possible to reach without rises; tables high enough for wheelchair to go under it: lowest point at least 0.7 m height)	Height of the seats 48– 50 cm; solid single seats with armrest and backrest, sitting surface not curved	Off-trail	-	Off-trail
Parking space	3.5 m width	<i>see left</i>	-	-	-

b. Legal information

+ ISO: There are several ISO standards on the topic of accessibility. Amongst others:

- ISO 21542 “Accessibility and usability of the built environment”
- ISO 23599 “Tactile walking surface indicators”

LINK: www.iso.org

www.iso.org/iso/bringing_down_barriers-infography_final.pdf

+ The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was adopted in 2006.

LINK: <http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml>

c. Links for accessible leisure-time offers

+ Online map to find wheelchair-accessible places:

<http://wheelmap.org/>

+ European Network for Accessible Tourism (ENAT):

<http://www.accessibletourism.org/>

+ Naturefriends International. 2013. Accessible Tourism for All.

http://www.nfi.at//index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=14&Itemid=50&lang=en

+ Accessible offers in Terra Raetica – on the three-border junction of Austria, Switzerland and Italy

www.terraraetica.eu/de/humana-raetica/barrierefrei.html

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