



Project Result 3

Youth programs 4 ASD: Piloting youth programs with the participation of youth with ASD

Experience Report
Transnational

Report

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Introduction

As part of the Erasmus + Project YouthASD, piloting of activities based on the guide, the training modules, as well as the methodology and lesson plans developed (see annexes), were carried out in the 5 partner organisations from the consortium: KMOP, ANS, CARDET, MIRAM and SOSU located in Greece, Italy, Cyprus, Spain and Denmark.

The project aims to provide youth workers and youth organisations with a new, innovative and accessible learning opportunity on ASD. More specifically, the project's objectives are:

- To support the participation of ASD youth in youth organisations' activities
- To increase the attractiveness and accessibility of youth work for ASD youth
- To provide the necessary training methodology and tools to youth workers in order to include ASD youth in their work
- To provide organisational support to youth organisations to include ASD youth in their initiatives by upskilling their administrative and management staff
- To provide youth training opportunities adjusted to ASD needs

Further information can be found at <https://youthasd.eu/results/> **AND** <https://elearning.youthasd.eu/>

During the three-day activities' piloting, valuable information was collected and compiled in this report.

Each partner selected youth workers to participate in and implement piloting activities organised in each partner country, with a total of 15 young people with ASD and several neurotypical young people participating in the activities together. Throughout the activities, mentoring and support were available to the youth workers.

The activities were based on a 3-day youth program, where each youth worker was free to design their own youth program with the following values:

- The necessary safety measures are effectively put in place
- The youth program promotes EU citizenship, EU values and valuable skills for the youth
- The youth program foresees the socialisation of neurotypical and ASD Youth

When planning the activities, the ICF model was introduced as a planning tool, and templates for lesson plans were provided (attached in the annexes) – the youth workers had the option to use these provided tools if they were relevant to the chosen activities.



➤ The Guide

The guide presented to the youth workers was the first result of the Erasmus+ project YouthASD and contains crucial information about what ASD is, the different areas in ASD, how to communicate with people with ASD, which considerations to take when communication with people with ASD, how to create a safe and inclusive environment, including the organisational structures as well as how to support your staff in ASD-related skills development.

The guide can be found and read in full version here:

[Guide for youth organisations on structures and strategies for the inclusion of people with Autism Spectrum Disorder \(ASD\) AND https://elearning.youthasd.eu/courses/guide/](https://elearning.youthasd.eu/courses/guide/)

➤ The training modules

The Training modules introduced to the youth workers consist of five modules.

1. Introduction about ASD and communication with youth with ASD
2. Understanding cognitive and social development in youth with ASD
3. Description of Youth Needs
4. Creating a safe and inclusive environment
5. Communicating with parents and managers in youth organisations

The training modules aim to show youth workers how to reach and include people with ASD in their activities. It addresses their need for specialised knowledge and further professional development in creating the framework for these activities to increase youth workers' capacity to implement ASD-inclusive activities and raise awareness among youth workers on the challenges people with ASD face.

The Training modules can be found in its full length here: <https://elearning.youthasd.eu/courses/methodology-and-training-program/>

➤ ICF

ICF - International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health - is a WHO classification published in Danish in 2003.

ICF is a complex interaction model and classification encompassing biological, psychological and social factors. ICF is widely used and accepted as an international reference framework for describing functional ability. ICF provides a common language across disciplines, institutions, sectors, cultures and nations. ICF focuses on physical, psychological and social functioning in combination with health and contextual factors and thus looks at the citizen's life situation, not just the diagnosis itself.

ICF emphasises that "functional ability" is a complex ability influenced by many factors. Functional ability depends on diagnosis, body function, activity and participation, mainly environmental and personal factors. In the ICF's understanding, functional ability is: "a general term for body

functions, body anatomy, activities and participation. In other words, functional capacity is a person's ability to perform daily activities and participate in society.

The biopsychosocial model has a complex interplay of all factors at all times. The purpose of ICF is to describe functional ability and impairment, not to measure it. It can also be used as a planning tool for an activity if the participant in the activity is challenged in one way or another.

The components in the ICF are:

- Body functions and structures are the body's physical, physiological and mental functions.
- Activity is a person's performance of a task or action and describes functional ability at the individual level.
- Participation is a person's involvement in daily life and describes functioning at a societal level.
- Environmental factors are the physical, social and attitudinal surroundings. Environmental factors can be either facilitating or limiting.
- Personal factors are linked to the person, e.g. age, gender, social status, coping skills and experience, etc.

When planning the three-day activity for young people with ASD, it can be beneficial to consider the five components.

For further information, see the attached annexe on the methodology.

The piloting activities:

- [Activity description ANS/Italy](#)

The pilot activity carried out as part of the YouthASD PR3 methodology was a street dance workshop led by a dance expert who is also a youth worker working with the USHAC association in Carpi. Founded in 1986. The street dance workshop took place in the association's gym in Carpi, primarily promoting true inclusion by bringing together neurotypical young people and those with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) who share a passion for dance and music.

Participants:

- 2 neurotypical participants (aged 11 years)
- 6 participants with ASD (2 females and 4 males, with a mean age of 16)

In the first session, in-depth interviews were conducted with youth workers from USHAC to develop the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) profiles for each participant. At the same time, interviews with the young people themselves explored their interests and preferences. The next 2 sessions were devoted to implementing the structured activities based on what emerged during the first meeting.

Process involved:

The first planning session involved in-depth interviews with youth workers, from which valuable information was extracted to shape subsequent activities. This was followed by a separate planning session with the youth workers from the street dance workshop, where ICF profiles were analysed and environmental adaptations were explored. These adaptations included selecting activities according to the common interests of the participants with ASD, using an agenda to present the activities to the young people in a way that increased the predictability of what would happen, selecting music according to the preferences of the participants, and avoiding triggers of sensory sensitivities. Choosing where to hold the activities was also guided by the intention to regulate the activities in a familiar place for youth with ASD.

The methodology followed a participant-centred approach, ensuring that the street dance workshop was not only an enjoyable experience but also contributed to each participant's overall well-being and inclusivity.

➤ Activity description: CARDET/Cyprus

The Smile Project Team of Autism Support Famagusta Centre organised a multifaceted approach to engage young people with ASD. The inaugural session immersed participants in the world of handcrafts, fostering creativity, manual dexterity, and a sense of accomplishment. The second session delved into the realm of drawings and art activities, providing an avenue for self-expression, imagination, and the development of visual-spatial abilities. The final session combined the dynamic elements of gymnastics with the therapeutic benefits of music, offering a unique synthesis to promote physical fitness, coordination, and emotional well-being. On the last day, the YouthASD project was introduced to the dedicated youth workers of the Smile Project.

Participants:

- 7 participants with ASD

Process involved:

These transformative sessions catered to a diverse group of youth with ASD; in total, 7 participants, acknowledging the varied needs and developmental stages within the spectrum. The centre thoughtfully organised the sessions to maintain an optimal balance between individualised attention and the enriching dynamics of group participation. The age range of the participants was carefully considered to tailor activities to their specific needs and interests. The duration of each activity was calibrated to strike a harmonious balance, recognising the participants' unique attention spans and energy levels. The scheduling of these sessions was considerate of the varied schedules and preferences of the youth, ensuring maximum participation and enjoyment.

The development of each session was an intricate process, where the centre's team considered the nuanced requirements of youth with ASD. Environmental adjustments were made to create a sensory-friendly space, promoting a sense of security and comfort. The principles of the International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF) were seamlessly integrated into the program, emphasising inclusivity and accessibility.

The exchange of ideas and experiences between the Autism Support Famagusta Centre and the Smile Project Team facilitated a broader understanding of inclusive practices, enriching the collective efforts to empower and support youth with diverse needs.

➤ [Activity description KMOP/Greece](#)

The primary purpose was to engage youth workers in a collaborative effort with young people with ASD and neurotypical young people to foster understanding, promote inclusivity, and explore unconventional sports. The location for the training varied, including meeting spaces and a visit to the Orama sports club's stadium. Sessions were typically conducted during the day to ensure optimal engagement. Each session lasted approximately 2 hours, with a small break whenever the participants needed to.

The program incorporated interactive sessions, presentations, and a practical visit to the Orama sports club's stadium.

Participants:

- The participants consisted of 7 young people with ASD and 3 neurotypical young individuals. The age group ranged from adolescents to young adults (17-27 years old).

Process involved:

A preliminary meeting was held to introduce participants and discuss their interests. Here, the participants discussed their interests, hobbies and desire for learning. The young people expressed a specific interest in learning about less-known sports.

The ICF framework assessed and addressed the participants' needs, holistically emphasizing functioning and disability.

Ice-breaking activities were implemented to foster a comfortable environment for interaction.

The second session involved each participant presenting a less-known sport of their choice, interactive games, allowing the participants to engage in Q&A and incorporating videos and demonstrations for better understanding.

The third session included a collaborative visit to the Orama sports club's stadium. The 3-day training successfully achieved its goals of creating a safer and more inclusive environment for young people with ASD. The combination of interactive sessions, diverse sports exploration, and collaboration with external sports clubs contributed to the overall success of the pilot program. Feedback from participants and youth workers will be instrumental in refining and expanding similar initiatives in the future.

➤ [Activity description Mira'M/Spain](#)

An inclusive program of activities for youth with autism was created to learn which activities may be helpful to include in community activities for youth with autism in their local communities. Youth workers working with youth with autism were also involved. The location of the activities is framed within the Resource Center of the Mira'm Foundation in Gandía. Participants were selected

through questions about the activities they wanted to carry out, respecting each individual's and participant's needs in the program. Flexibility in scheduling was also considered for attendance on different activity days. The activities took place on non-consecutive days. One morning session and two-afternoon sessions were held, considering the schedules and prioritising the maximum attendance of the individuals with autism. Sessions lasted approximately 1:30 or 2 hours, respecting breaks and keeping pace with the youth with autism.

Participants:

- 5 young people with autism ranging from 17 to 23 years old
- 3 youth workers ranging from 17 to 23 years old.

Process involved

Initially, participants were selected, and an initial meeting was held to narrow down the activities that could be carried out. Youth workers were guided by professionals from the Mira'm Foundation who are experts in adapting activities and creating safe environments for individuals with autism. Interest was shown in participating in social and cooking dynamics. Finally, the ICF was considered to assess the activities and their subsequent functioning.

The first session was a presentation of program attendees. A preliminary dynamic was prepared to get to know each other better and create a small bond that would later help achieve the objectives in the following days.

In the second session, participants were asked to choose a recipe collaboratively. Each participant chose their favourite fruit, and we mixed them in a fruit salad as a snack. Then, we went to the supermarket to find the ingredients, select them, and return to the kitchen to prepare the fruit salad. Visual supports were incorporated for following the recipe and steps to achieve total autonomy and properly understand the activity.

The third session, Social Dynamics, was conducted with popular and regional games. Youth workers were responsible for preparing the dynamics and rules for playing. Emphasis was placed on teamwork and coordination among the groups. The presence of professionals from Fundació Mira'm ensured a good atmosphere during the dynamics. It has even been proposed to expand the activity in the future by visiting inclusive environments such as a school, as part of a physical education class, or a sports activity near Mira'm facilities. This three-day program promoted a more inclusive environment for youth with autism in the community. The feedback from the participants was positive. For the future, the aim is to generalise these strategies beyond the Fundació Mira'm community to other nearby local areas to expand this knowledge.

➤ Activity description SOSU/Denmark

The program of the activities was planned and created in an interactive dialogue between the three participants and the youth worker. Nothing was decided before the meeting, and it was up to the participants to comment and suggest what activities they would find interesting and relevant. The approach was very participant-centred, ensuring that all participants felt safe in each



other's company, got a chance to be involved in the decisions, felt motivated to meet again to do other activities, and overall felt included in the process.

The three participants did not know each other prior to the piloting but were found through private and personal networking. Furthermore, the decision on when to meet for the second and third sessions was left up to the participants to decide, as it had to fit into their schedule of school and work. The activities took place on non-consecutive days, in the afternoon after school.

Participants:

- 2 neurotypical participants, age 16
- 1 participant with ASD, age 17

Process involved

In the first session, a group interview with the participants focused on them getting to know each other, exchanging their views and interests, and planning the next two sessions. They were very motivated to get to know each other. Before they met, an agreement was made with the young participant with ASD that the trainer had to inform the other participants about what autism is, what challenges it poses for this participant, and what needs he would have during the activities. This talk and information were given with ICF in mind as a template to remember to mention all the challenges and strengths he experiences daily.

They quickly decided that the next two sessions should be a walk for an hour, and the third time, they wanted to go together without any "grown-ups" to MacDonald. The reason why they chose those activities was due to considerations that came up during their first conversation. Here, the participant with ASD said that it was essential for him to do the activities in a calm and familiar environment where it was clear what was expected of them. He was also not comfortable with the chosen activities being too physical, as he would worry about it being too intense or too pressurised.

At the end of the piloting, the three young participants verbally evaluated their experience and were very positive in their assessment. They thought it was essential to involve young people with and without challenges in communities in the future, as they believed there was a lot to learn from each other. They agreed that they would continue to meet occasionally, even after the formal piloting was over.

➤ Summarising

Participant

Across all activities, 26 participants with ASD were involved in the activities centred around inclusion.

The activities:

The piloting activities from various countries demonstrated a concerted effort to engage young people with autism spectrum disorder in inclusive and meaningful experiences. Each initiative

employed a tailored approach to cater to participants' diverse needs and interests while promoting overall well-being and community integration.

ICF profiles were used to tailor activities according to participants' specific interests, preferences, and abilities. This ensured that activities were meaningful, engaging, and relevant to each individual's unique profile, promoting active participation and enjoyment.

Participant-centred approach:

All activities were designed with the participants' interests, preferences, and comfort in mind. From selecting activities to scheduling sessions, the focus remained on ensuring that participants felt valued and included in the decision-making process.

In several activities, initial in-depth interviews were conducted with youth workers and participants to develop ICF profiles for each individual. These profiles helped comprehensively understand participants' functioning, disabilities and health-related factors.

The use of ICF extended to facilitating communication among participants. Before the activities, the youth worker informed other participants about the challenges and strengths of the participant with ASD, fostering understanding and support among peers.

Environmental Adaptations:

Environmental adjustments were made to create sensory-friendly spaces, ensuring participants felt secure and comfortable during the activities. This included selecting familiar locations, avoiding sensory triggers, and providing visual support for better understanding.

The ICF framework guided the selection of environmental adaptations to create sensory-friendly spaces and promote inclusivity. Organisers considered factors such as sensory sensitivities, preferences, and individual needs when planning activities and selecting locations.

Collaborative Efforts:

Collaboration between youth workers, professionals, and participants was central to the success of these initiatives. By working together, stakeholders were able to address the nuanced needs of youth with ASD and create inclusive environments that fostered learning and growth.

Holistic approach:

The activities incorporated various elements, including arts, sports, social dynamics, and community outings, to provide participants with a well-rounded experience. Emphasis was placed on promoting physical fitness, emotional well-being, social skills, and cognitive development.

Feedback and continuous improvement:

Feedback from participants and youth workers played a crucial role in refining and improving future initiatives. By listening to the needs and experiences of stakeholders, organisers can continuously adapt and expand their programs to better serve the community.

Throughout the activities, the ICF framework likely played a role in evaluating participants' progress, outcomes, and overall experiences. Feedback from participants, youth workers, and professionals could be analysed within the framework to identify areas of success and areas for improvement.

Key outcomes:

➤ ANS/Italy:

Achievements, adaptation, and successes:

The workshop was a positive experience for the USHAC participants and their neurotypical peers. All participants felt welcome during the activities, which fostered an environment where everyone could embrace the diversity within the group. The neurotypical participants had the opportunity to share their expertise in breakdancing with the USHAC participants, while the latter acted as role models for the younger participants. The workshop was, therefore, successful in promoting inclusivity and fostering mutual learning and appreciation between the participants.

Challenges

The main challenge faced during the pilot was the recruitment of neurotypical participants. Initially hampered by the Christmas period and later by school-related organisational difficulties, these challenges were overcome to ensure a diverse and inclusive group for the street dance workshop. The commitment to overcoming these obstacles underlined the dedication of both the organisers and the participants to making the piloting a success.

Testimonials from participants (youth and trainers):

Both neurotypical and USHAC participants' feedback highlighted the positive impact of the street dance workshop. Participants expressed a sense of belonging and acceptance during the activities, emphasising the welcoming atmosphere created. The sharing of skills and experiences between neurotypical and ASD participants was consistently cited as a highlight, demonstrating the success of the project in breaking down barriers and fostering real connections.

➤ CARDET/Cyprus

Achievements, adaptation, successes

The Youth Programmes at the Autism Support Famagusta Centre achieved noteworthy success in several key areas. The carefully designed sessions, spanning handcrafts, drawings, art activities, gymnastics, and music therapy, demonstrated a commitment to providing diverse and holistic experiences for youth with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Including varied activities ensured participants had cognitive, physical, and emotional development opportunities, fostering a well-rounded approach to their growth. The programmes' success can be attributed to the individualised support provided by trained facilitators/youth workers. This adaptability addressed the unique needs of each participant, promoting a sense of inclusivity.

The seamless integration of the International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF) principles underscored the centre's commitment to creating an inclusive environment, considering the abilities and challenges of youth with ASD.

Continued attention to environmental adjustments was crucial in creating a sensory-friendly space. This aspect allowed participants to feel more comfortable and engaged, as well as the centre's ability to adapt strategies and activities based on the participants' responses.

Challenges:

One of the inherent challenges in working with youth with ASD lies in the individual variability of their needs and preferences. Adapting activities to suit each participant required ongoing adjustments. Furthermore, youth with ASD may experience challenges in communication, including difficulty expressing needs or understanding

instructions. This posed challenges in effective communication between participants and trainers, necessitating innovative communication strategies.

Testimonials from participants (youth and trainers):

Testimonials from both participants and trainers underscore the positive impact of the programmes on the lives of youth with ASD. The expressions of joy, pride, and personal growth are indicative of a programme that goes beyond mere engagement, fostering a sense of empowerment and belonging. Continuous feedback, adjustments, and sharing experiences with other projects, such as the presentation to Smile Project youth workers, contribute to a collaborative and evolving approach to supporting youth with diverse needs.

Some of the verbal testimonials were:

Participants:

- *"I loved the drawing sessions. The trainers understood me, and I felt proud of my creations".*
- *"The gymnastics and music therapy were so much fun. I felt energised and happy!"*

Trainers/youth workers:

- *"Seeing the progress in each participant was incredibly rewarding. The adjustments we made along the way highlighted the importance of flexibility in our approach."*
- *"The success of the programmes lies in the small achievements of each participant. Witnessing their joy and growth motivates us to continue refining our methods."*

➤ KMOP/ Greece

Achievements, adaptation, and successes:

The Participants actively engaged in interactive sessions, fostering a sense of community and understanding between neurotypical and ASD individuals. Aligned with the participants' specific interests, the adjustment to explore less-known sports proved successful. Participants demonstrated improved communication skills during the presentation and Q&A sessions, and the practical experience at the stadium enhanced coordination, teamwork, and physical activity for all involved.

The collaboration with the Orama sports club and the diverse activities at the stadium promoted a safe and inclusive space, challenging preconceived notions and fostering acceptance.

Challenges:

The logistical challenges entailed coordinating the visit to the sports club and ensuring a smooth flow of activities, which required meticulous planning and coordination. Furthermore, the condensed nature of the 3-day program limited the time available for immediate feedback and real-time adjustments. Additionally, if the group could work more together and get to know each other better, it would be more beneficial for all the participants.

Testimonials from participants (youth and trainers):

The testimonials highlight the positive impact of the training, emphasising both the participants' personal growth and the program's success in creating a more inclusive environment for individuals with ASD. The challenges mentioned provide valuable insights for refining future initiatives.

Some of the testimonials were:

Participants:

- *"I enjoyed learning about new sports and playing Turbojan at the stadium. It was fun, and I felt like part of a team. I want to do more activities like this."*
- *"Meeting new friends and learning about sports I had never heard of was a unique experience. I realised we are not so different and can have fun together."*

Trainers/youth workers:

- *"Seeing the participants actively engage with each other and the sports activities was incredibly rewarding. The program successfully created an inclusive environment."*
- *"Working with the YouthASD project was a positive experience. The young people embraced Turbojan, and it was heartening to witness the inclusive atmosphere fostered during the stadium visit."*

➤ **Mira'M/Spain:**

Achievements, adaptation, and successes:

An inclusive group was initiated by creating bonds between youth workers and individuals with autism. This bond is the key and seed for the continuation of activities after the program if they wish, with the assistance of the Mira'm Foundation. The specific interests of the participants and keeping pace with people with autism were respected to adjust the activities accordingly. There was good attendance from participants, and improving social relationships is an important dimension in the quality of life of young people. The sense of belonging to a group played a transversal role in completing the program.

Challenges:

Regarding planning: Adjusting the schedules of groups, professionals, and youth workers to attend the centre for activities and work in the community. This requires long-term planning, stipulated within the limited time frame of project results.

Testimonials from participants (youth and trainers):

Throughout the activities, there was a positive and respectful atmosphere, and both the participants and the youth workers participated eagerly, creating a welcoming and inclusive environment.

However, future programs of inclusive activities should aim to expand both in duration and variety of activities, possibly even including small outings or camps. Without the support of directly involved professionals, it is complex to achieve good synergy between youth workers and teenagers with autism. Initiatives should be directed towards working and obtaining support within the community and more natural support groups.

Some of the testimonials were:

Participants:

- *"I enjoy going to play with my group of friends. There, I am happy."*
- *"I enjoy cooking and teaching others to cook."*

Trainers/Youth workers:

- *"These activities allow me to continue learning and learn from the professionals at the Mira'm Foundation about how to create inclusive activities."*
- *"I listen and adapt to people with autism to know what they need."*

➤ SOSU/Denmark

Achievements, adaptation, and successes:

Throughout the activities, the participants were very motivated and open to developing new friendships built on curiosity and openness towards one another. And even after the piloting ended, they have continued to see each other either going for walks or playing games online.

All participants have been very open about their challenge, because as one of the young people without ASD said, "I may not have any diagnoses, but that doesn't mean I don't find socialising and social rules challenging sometimes, and I also thrive best in safe and familiar surroundings".

Challenges:

Initially, it was quite tricky finding young participants with and without ASD to be part of the piloting of PR3, but through a personal network, we succeeded.

Testimonials from participants (youth and trainers):

All participants agreed that it was important to create a "safe space" in the group, where you felt safe and not defined by whether you had a diagnosis or not. They all felt that knowing something about ASD gave them extra security and allowed them to make agreements on how to act if it became too difficult to participate in the activity. Specifically, an agreement was made that if the participant with ASD put on his headphones and withdrew from the activity, it was okay, and he would take the initiative to return to the activity when he was ready. However, this was not necessary at any point during the three sessions, but for all participants, it was reassuring that the agreement was made in advance.

They all agreed that a group of 3-4 participants is very suitable if you don't know each other beforehand. It makes it easier to talk to everyone and make sure everyone is included while at the same time not "putting too much pressure on."

➤ Summarising

Achievements and successes:

Inclusive community building: Across all initiatives, there were notable achievements in fostering inclusive activities where neurotypical youth and those with ASD could come together. Initiatives such as street dance workshops, handcraft sessions, and sports exploration successfully promoted mutual learning, appreciation, and acceptance among participants.

Personal Growth and Empowerment: Participants experienced personal growth and empowerment through engagement in diverse activities tailored to their interests and needs. Based on the ICF Factors, the holistic approach encompassed cognitive, physical, emotional and social development, which led to positive outcomes and a sense of achievement among the participants.

Environment adaptations and inclusion: Environmental adaptations, guided by principles of inclusivity and accessibility, played a crucial role in creating sensory-friendly spaces and ensuring the participants' comfort and engagement. The seamless integration of the ICF principles facilitated individualised support and adjustment to activities, promoting a sense of belonging and well-being.

Challenges:

Logistic hurdles: Organisers faced logistical challenges such as recruitment difficulties, scheduling conflicts, and coordinating visits to external venues. These challenges required meticulous planning, flexibility, and innovative solutions to ensure the smooth execution of activities.

Testimonials:

Participant testimonials: Participants expressed gratitude for the inclusive environments created and highlighted the positive impact of the activities on their personal growth, social connections, and sense of belonging. The testimonials emphasised the importance of feeling understood, accepted, and valued within the community, fostering a sense of empowerment and pride among participants.

Trainer/youth workers testimonials: Trainers and youth workers shared their observations of participants' progress, noting the importance of flexibility, adaptability, and collaborative efforts in achieving successful outcomes. They underscored the significance of continuous feedback, adjustments, and shared experiences in refining and expanding future initiatives.

In summary, the transnational pilot activities demonstrated significant achievements in fostering inclusive communities, promoting personal growth and empowerment, and overcoming challenges through collaborative efforts and innovative approaches. Testimonials from participants and trainers highlighted the positive impact of the initiatives on individual well-being and community integration, underscoring the importance of inclusive practices in supporting youth with ASD. Across the transnational pilot activities, several common themes and strategies emerged, showcasing a collective effort to support youth with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in inclusive and meaningful ways. The piloting activities exemplify a collective commitment to promoting inclusivity, understanding, and empowerment for youth with ASD. By embracing participant-centred approaches, environmental adaptations, holistic development, and collaborative efforts, these initiatives have made significant strides in fostering inclusive communities and supporting the well-being of individuals with ASD across diverse cultural contexts.

Feedback from the youth worker/ trainer, as well as the participants

➤ ANS/Italy

Feedback from youth workers gathered after the piloting

Concerning the challenge of managing the energy of a neurotypical youngster, *"We faced a challenge in managing the energy of neurotypical youngsters who showed a strong energy and desire to run and play. However, this provided an opportunity to adapt activities and find creative ways to engage them without compromising the overall experience"*.

Positive aspects of the interaction; *"Despite the barriers, the interaction between all the participants was very impressive. Watching young people with ASD and neurotypical individuals share different experiences proved to be a valuable experience that exceeded our initial expectations"*.

Sharing different experiences; *"The strength of the workshop manifested itself in the sharing of diverse experiences. Young people learned from each other, fostering an environment rich in mutual learning and personal growth"*.

Promoting inclusion: *"Despite the initial challenges, we managed to create an inclusive environment. Each participant felt an integral part of the group, contributing to an atmosphere of acceptance and mutual respect"*.

Feedback from youth:

"I really enjoyed the activity because I was able to show off the moves I had learnt in breakdancing. It was nice to see everyone having fun and dancing together".

"I learnt new dance moves that I didn't know before. It was fun to see how everyone had something unique to share."

"I enjoyed meeting new friends during the activity. We learnt fun new choreographies".

➤ CARDET/Cyprus

Feedback from youth workers/trainers:

Positive engagement: The youth workers expressed satisfaction with the level of engagement observed during the handcrafts, drawings, art activities, gymnastics and music therapy. They noted that participants were actively involved and seemed genuinely interested in the sessions.

Flexibility and Adaptability: Trainers highlighted the success of the programmes in terms of flexibility and adaptability. The ability to make real-time adjustments based on the participants' needs and preferences was recognised as a key factor in the overall success of the sessions.

Team Collaboration: Feedback emphasised the importance of teamwork among trainers. Collaborative efforts in planning and executing activities and sharing insights on individual participants contributed to a cohesive and supportive environment.

Feedback from youth:

Enjoyment and Fulfilment: Participants verbally (or non-verbally, through facial expressions) expressed their enjoyment of the diverse activities. They spoke about the fulfilment they derived from the creative sessions.

Sense of Belonging: A common theme in participants' feedback was a sense of belonging. The combination of activities provided a platform for individual expression and fostered a sense of community and acceptance among the participants.

The feedback from both youth workers/trainers and participants paints a comprehensive picture of the programme's success. The program's adaptability to individual needs, the positive impact on communication and social interactions, and the promotion of personal growth were recurring themes.

Challenges, though present, were effectively addressed through continuous adjustments and a commitment to individualised support. The testimonials suggest that the programmes achieved their objectives and exceeded expectations, creating an environment where participants felt valued, supported, and empowered.

The combination of verbal feedback and testimonials serves as a rich source of insights for the centre. It provides a foundation for continuous improvement, allowing the centre to build on strengths, address challenges, and refine strategies for future youth engagement initiatives.

➤ [KMOP/Greece](#)

Feedback from youth workers/trainers:

- *General impression: "The willingness of the youth to learn a new sport was evident. Their coordination and teamwork improved significantly during the Turbojan session. It's clear that inclusive sports programs can have a positive impact."*
- *Collaboration with youth: "The collaboration with YouthASD was smooth. The communication leading up to the event was effective, and the atmosphere created during the stadium visit aligns with our goal of making sports accessible to everyone."*
- *"The program exceeded my expectations. The interactive sessions allowed us to connect with the participants on a personal level. Their enthusiasm for learning new sports was inspiring."*
- *"Working with the youth and seeing them embrace Turbojan was fulfilling. The collaboration between the sports club and YouthASD showcased the potential for inclusive sports activities."*
- *"The ice-breaking activities set a positive tone. Participants seemed a bit reserved initially, but as the day progressed, they opened up and engaged in discussions about their interests."*

- *"The presentations were a hit. It was heartening to see participants sharing their knowledge and actively participating in the Q&A. Some even went above and beyond, preparing visual aids."*
- *"The stadium visit was the highlight. The Turbojan session was well-received, and the collaboration with Orama Sports Club added a professional touch. The participants left with smiles and a sense of accomplishment."*

Feedback from youth:

- *General impression: "I didn't know what to expect, but it turned out to be really cool. Meeting people with different interests was interesting. Turbojan was fun, and the stadium visit made the whole experience memorable."*
- *Overall reflection: "I think this program showed that we can all have fun together, no matter our differences. I'm glad I participated."*
- *"I liked meeting new friends. The sports were interesting, especially Turbojan. I felt good playing with others, and the trainers were nice."*
- *"It was different and fun. I learned about sports I never knew existed. The stadium visit was exciting, and everyone was friendly."*
- *"I was shy at first, but the games helped me relax. I liked hearing about everyone's hobbies, and it was cool that we could choose the sports we wanted to learn about."*
- *"Presenting my chosen sport made me a bit nervous, but people were interested. The Q&A part was fun. I liked the videos and demonstrations, too."*
- *"The stadium visit was the best. Turbojan was awesome! I felt part of a team. I hope we can do more activities like this."*

The combined verbal and written feedback indicate a positive experience for youth workers/trainers and participants. The program successfully achieved its objectives, creating a welcoming learning, collaboration, and inclusion environment. Participants expressed enthusiasm for the activities and a desire for more such opportunities.

➤ [Mira'M/Spain](#)

Feedback from youth workers/trainers:

"We enjoy participating alongside young people with autism because it's an opportunity to learn how to adapt activities to become better professionals in the future."

"We need to take many variables into account, factors of the person, their participation, but that makes us think and stay active."

"Now we are more confident in our abilities to carry them out beyond the program."

Feedback from the youth:

"Being able to enjoy three days piloting with the professionals from Mira'm is great. Besides, I learn to eat healthily."

These verbal feedbacks indicate that it has been an enriching experience for both the youth workers and the participants with autism. The bond created has fostered inclusion and participation in activities. There is a mutual desire to continue the program beyond this pilot phase, as well as to expand to more activities and inclusively participate in the community. The flexibility of the program, the ICF model, and previous social interactions are likely key factors in these pilot projects. However, a challenge is mentioned in the subsequent section of the conclusions regarding generating new activities for actual participation in the community.

➤ SOSU/Denmark

Feedback from the youth workers/trainers:

Overall, it was a very compliant group of young people to work with. They were all very motivated and eager to get to know each other and were accommodating to the challenges and solutions that arose in their interactions. They wanted everyone to feel heard and included in the community and the chosen activities.

The surprising thing about our conversations was that they all realised that the adults/teachers/trainers often set the limits for how diverse the groups doing the activities are. They often decide in advance who will participate; therefore, you don't even know these activities exist if you're not part of the target group.

Feedback from youth:

All 3 sessions allowed some constructive and deep dialogues about being young and participating in a youth community built around activities of all kinds. They all experienced that they would like to have more breadth in their communities but that it could be difficult.

Especially the young person with ASD expressed that the activities had to make sense to him in some way in order for him to participate in them, e.g. he would never want to go to the cinema with the other two, as he thought it made more sense to meet at one of their homes and watch Netflix in a safe and familiar environment. All in all, being part of the trial for PR3 was a very positive experience for all three participants, and they found that their knowledge and inclusiveness towards each other created a very welcoming and inclusive atmosphere where everyone had the right to be who they were without any judgement or labelling.

➤ Summarising

Across various locations, youth engagement programs focusing on inclusivity and diverse activities have demonstrated significant success. Feedback from both youth workers/trainers and participants highlights the positive impact of these programs on personal growth, community engagement, and fostering a sense of belonging.

Key themes emerge from the feedback, including the importance of adaptability and flexibility in addressing individual needs, the value of teamwork and collaboration among trainers, and the creation of inclusive environments where participants feel accepted and respected regardless of their differences.

Participants across locations expressed enjoyment, fulfilment, and a desire for more opportunities for diverse activities. They emphasised the significance of shared experiences, mutual learning, and the sense of community fostered by these programs.

Moreover, the feedback underscores the importance of continuous improvement, with programs aiming to build on strengths, address challenges, and refine strategies for future initiatives. By prioritising inclusivity, personalisation, and meaningful engagement, these programs have created environments where all individuals feel valued and empowered to participate fully.

Conclusion

Across all activities, 26 participants with ASD and a number of neurotypical participants were involved in the activities centred around inclusion. The piloting of the activities was hosted in five different countries by respectively ANS (Italy), CARDET (Cyprus), KMOP (Greece), MIRAM (Spain) and SOSU (Denmark).

The transnational piloting initiatives represent a concerted effort to foster inclusivity and support the well-being of young individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). These initiatives have demonstrated remarkable success in promoting community integration, personal growth, and empowerment through a multifaceted approach encompassing tailored activities, environmental adaptations, and collaborative efforts.

Across diverse cultural contexts, the use of the International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF) model has emerged as a pivotal tool in planning, implementing, and evaluating activities. By customising interventions based on individual interests, preferences, and needs, organisers have created meaningful and engaging experiences that cater to the diverse abilities and strengths of participants with ASD. The ICF framework has facilitated communication, fostered understanding among peers, and guided environmental adaptations to ensure sensory-friendly spaces conducive to active participation and enjoyment.

Key themes such as adaptability, flexibility, and collaboration have underscored the importance of a holistic and participant-centred approach to youth engagement. By embracing diversity, fostering inclusive environments, and prioritising individualised support, these initiatives have met their objectives and exceeded expectations, creating lasting impacts on participants' lives and community dynamics.

In conclusion, the transnational piloting initiatives exemplify a collective commitment to promoting inclusivity, understanding, and empowerment for youth with ASD. By prioritising participant-centred approaches, environmental adaptations, and collaborative efforts, these initiatives have made significant strides in fostering inclusive communities and supporting the well-being of

individuals with ASD across diverse cultural contexts. The success of transnational pilot activities underscores the importance of thoughtful planning, participant engagement, and collaborative efforts in promoting inclusivity for youth with ASD. By implementing the outlined recommendations, future initiatives can build on these successes, further enhancing the impact and reach of inclusive practices within communities worldwide. Through continued collaboration, advocacy, and capacity building, the impact of these initiatives can be sustained and expanded, creating lasting change and promoting social justice for individuals with ASD worldwide.

➤ Key Policies and Recommendations:

Tailoring Activities to Participant Interests:

Adopt a personalised approach to activity planning, leveraging the ICF model to tailor interventions based on individual needs and interests. Flexibility in content design allows for greater engagement and participation among youth with ASD. Design future activities based on the expressed interests and needs of young people with ASD, allowing for flexibility and personalisation to maximise engagement.

Training for Youth Workers:

Provide ongoing training and professional development opportunities for youth workers and staff to enhance their understanding of ASD, communication strategies, inclusive practices, and the application of the ICF framework in program planning and implementation. Equipping staff with ICF-based skills enhances their ability to provide tailored support and promote meaningful participation.

Incorporating Practical Experiences:

Integrate hands-on, practical experiences and real-life applications into activities to enhance learning, foster teamwork, and promote inclusivity. Practical engagement, such as sports demonstrations and community outings, provides valuable opportunities for skill development and social interaction. Aligning with the ICF framework to address specific functional goals and enhance skill development. This approach fosters meaningful engagement and facilitates skill transfer to real-world settings.

Flexibility and Adaptability:

Maintain a flexible program design and implementation approach, leveraging the ICF framework to adapt real-time activities based on individual needs and preferences. This flexibility promotes inclusivity and responsiveness to the dynamic nature of participants' experiences, allowing for real-time adjustments based on participant feedback and emerging needs.

Documentation and Knowledge Transfer:

Document each activity's successes, challenges, and feedback to inform future planning and program optimisation. Share best practices and lessons learned. Document participant profiles using the ICF framework to capture comprehensive information about functioning, disabilities, and

health-related factors. This documentation serves as a valuable resource for future planning, knowledge transfer, and continuous improvement efforts.

Collaboration with External Organisations:

Establish partnerships with external organisations, including sports clubs, NGOs, and community centres, to enrich program offerings and provide unique opportunities for participants. Collaborative efforts expand resources, enhance program quality, and promote community involvement.

When establishing partnerships with external organisations, consider the ICF factors, such as environmental and personal factors, to ensure that program activities are inclusive and accessible to all participants. Collaborative efforts guided by the ICF framework promote comprehensive support and enrichment opportunities.

Advocacy for Inclusive Programs:

Advocate for including individuals with ASD in various community activities and promote awareness and understanding to foster acceptance and break down barriers. Highlighting the benefits of ICF-guided interventions can facilitate acceptance and support for inclusive programs within the broader community.



Annexes (evidence)

- Annex I – Piloting Methodology

https://elearning.youthasd.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/YouthASD-PR3_pilot-methodology.docx-1.pdf

- Annex II – Templates for lesson plans

https://elearning.youthasd.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/YouthASD_Lesson-Plan-version-1-2.pdf

https://elearning.youthasd.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/YouthASD_Lesson-Plan-version-2-2.pdf

https://elearning.youthasd.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/YouthASD_-Lesson-Plan-version-3-2.pdf

