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POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS



TRANSFERABILITY GUIDELINES





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Hi-Ability – Developing social and professional skills through outdoor experiences.

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1 What is the Hi-Ability model for inclusive outdoor learning activities?

The Hi-Ability model for inclusive outdoor learning activities is an innovative methodology to promote the empowerment, social inclusion and employability of people with intellectual disabilities by enhancing their skills in outdoor touring and trekking.

Through a multi-dimensional approach, this model focuses on:

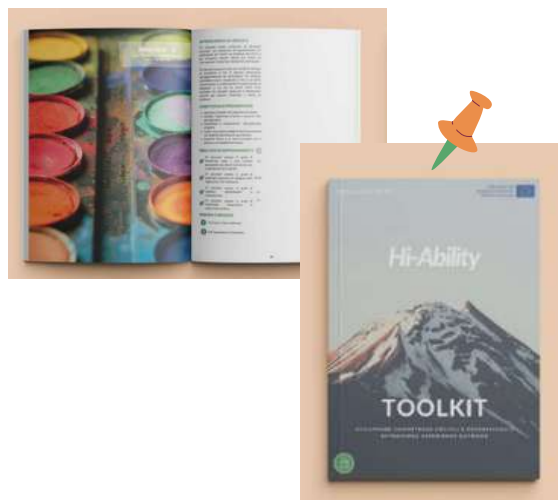
- **Training people with intellectual disabilities** as assistants to professional guides for outdoor/nature tours to acquire personal and professional skills and then to test their acquired skills through a pilot experimentation at a local level.
- **Training professionals** working with people with intellectual disabilities to develop their skills in the field of empowerment and improvement of psycho-physical well-being of people with intellectual disabilities through outdoor activities.

Regarding the specific inclusive outdoor activities and sports that can implement the Hi-Ability model are:

- **Trails combined with environmental education experiences** (birdwatching, educational farm, back-horse riding, visit to protected natural areas, wildlife observation, botanic gardens etc.)
- **Cultural trekking** (historical visits and trekking, urban trekking, gastronomic tasting, experiential trekking)
- **Adventure experiences** (Adventure parks, climbing, snorkelling, canoeing, kayaking, etc)

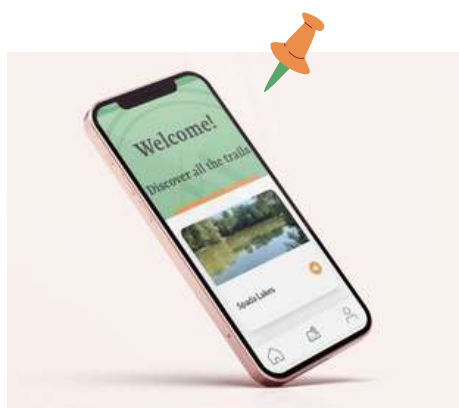


To achieve that, the Hi-Ability model developed a structured and long-standing training framework for both people with intellectual disabilities and professionals, through the development of:



Toolkit for Educators

Toolkit for educators, including the training structure and content, the pedagogical framework for the training methodology and guidelines for educators, learners, and organisations. *Available in English, Italian, Greek and Croatian.* All the resources available in this Toolkit, and some extra materials, are also available, in an interactive way, on the EASPD learning hub, the [D-LOT platform](#)



Easy-to-read Hi-Ability app

on accessible nature tourism and routes for people with intellectual disabilities to organise their own trip/vacation.



Green Travel Guide

on environmental tourism and accessible hiking dedicated and developed by people with disabilities. *Available in English, Italian, Greek and Croatian.*

All the project results are available on the [project website](#).



2 What is the added value for people with intellectual disabilities?

The fact that people with intellectual disabilities improve their skills in the field of outdoor touring and trekking have a **positive impact for them** in a multi-perspective way, not only in their physical health, but in their mental health, social bond, new skills learning, enjoyment of new hobbies, and even economic benefits. All this through a **strong socialization in a natural environment**.

2.1. Socialization and leisure

As mentioned, the **socialization benefits are one of the strongest achievements** of inclusive hiking. Very often, social, and cultural actions for people with disabilities tend to **segregate them**, as these activities are provided within protected and 'closed' contexts, taking place in a perspective of 'assistance' and isolation, misreading the real needs of people with disabilities, and with negative consequences on the perception of disability towards society.

Moreover, during the pandemic of COVID-19, people with intellectual disabilities felt very isolated and did not attend any social events.

There is a direct improvement of **social skills and bonding** thanks to meet new people. They experience faster development of the communication skills, raise awareness of community and the importance of teamwork and the strength of mutual support. Another positive side is that hiking is a way to create new social relationships and strengthen the group.

It is very important that people without disabilities participate with other people with intellectual disabilities in outdoor learning activities so that they can learn to overcome differences and raise awareness of the importance of teamwork, **overcoming difficulties together**, developing empathy.

Along with the social dimension, the **leisure perspective** is one of the most innovative benefits of inclusive outdoor learning activities. While a great majority of actions to ensure a better quality of life for people with disabilities do not consider the leisure as an important aspect, inclusive hiking put it in the centre; without forgetting about the rest of benefits.

Learning new hobbies and being able to enjoy them is a right recognised in the **Article 30 of the UN CRPD**. People with intellectual disabilities enjoying spending time in contact with nature and practising outdoor learning activities create new hobbies such as hiking or even simple everyday walking in their neighbourhood thanks to experiences combining fun with the discovery of new spaces for learning.



2.2 Empowerment, physical and mental health

One of the most evident benefits from practising sports is in the health of participants. Physical wellbeing while spending time on the open air is also transformed into psychological wellbeing, having an impact on the participants' daily lives. From a **physical perspective**, there is a development and/or improvement of motor skills and strengthening of physical fitness. This aspect is key, as often people with disabilities suffer from obesity and reduced mobility. Physical exercise also lead to better sleep experiences.

From a **psychological perspective**, hiking leads to the release of excess energy, which automatically contributes to the stabilization of emotions, and in particular leads to reduced oscillations in behaviour. It enhances a better psychological feeling, reduce anxiety, and improves cognitive functions such as attention.

Moreover, this experience changes their normal everyday routine and allow them to stay in company of new people, and this contributes to their psychological wellbeing. Also, being in contact with nature is directly linked with wellbeing, healthy and wholesome lifestyle.

During the horseback riding, the learning objectives are to make the people with intellectual disabilities not afraid of big animals such as horses, and so they can enjoy the riding.

All these benefits will promote the emancipation, legitimacy, confidence, and self-awareness and self-esteem of group at risk of marginalization that will result in the development of the autonomy and empowerment of people with intellectual disabilities, through approaching nature and environmental issues. The growth mindset is also an important aspect to keep in mind.



2.3 Education and employment

In terms of **learning**, the participants can learn about nature topics, about the benefits of outdoor learning, environmental education, and awareness of sustainable practices. Furthermore, they can acquire new skills such as risk management, bouldering techniques, sense of responsibility and to have an active and proactive role in group management. Even there is extra benefits from colours, sounds and smells. All this, broads the horizons of people with intellectual disabilities.





In nature it is possible to acquire new skills and change perspective, this meaning that outdoor education allows the possibility to have a new innovative way to deal with new experiences, seek new stimuli due to unexpected events and intensify the capacity of problem solving, creativity and concentration.

For example, playing outdoor sport such as tennis can be rather a challenging activity, where the learning objectives are mainly for the person with intellectual disabilities to have direct control of the activity undertaken.

The new educational knowledge and skills will result in a potential **increase of employability** in the field of sports activities dedicated to mountain and nature, and in the accessible tourism. The professional skills that people with intellectual disabilities can develop through outdoor learning activities to support a professional guide are:

- *Communication (even English skills to communicate with a wider group, not only locals)*
- *Team working*
- *Analysis of information and critical thinking*
- *Trekking-related skills (what to wear for a trekking activity, sense of direction, etc.)*
- *Managing groups*
- *Accessible tourism promotion*
- *Managing to learn*
- *Digital skills (e.g., using a trekking app)*
- *Coordination and organisation of activities*
- *Expertise on the local territory, its fauna and flora*
- *The geological and historical characteristics of the path*
- *Use of tools (map, compass, etc.)*
- *Sense of direction*
- *First aid*
- *Understanding of trail signs*

This is crucial, as currently in the EU **only 20.7 % of women with disabilities and 28.6 % of men with disabilities are in full-time employment.**



2.4 Economy

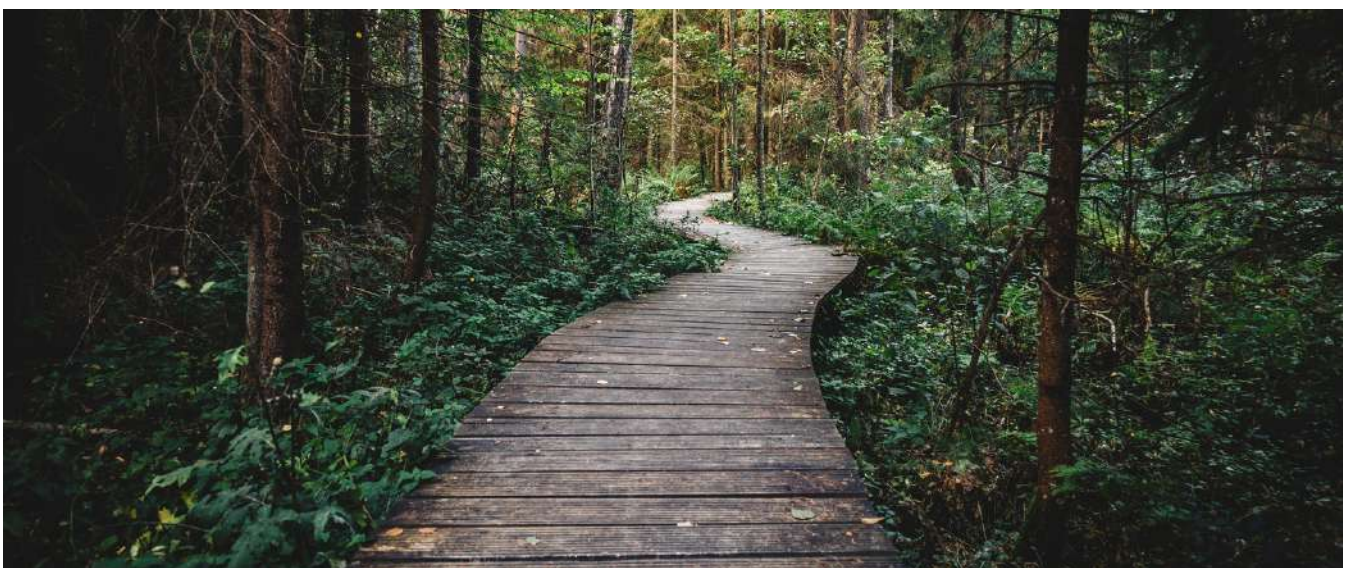
Finally, there is a direct positive impact in the **economy of the small local businesses** which develop the outdoor activities, and the possible benefits to turn it into an accessible tourist offer. Moreover, learning outdoor learning activities could have an important positive impact on **the economy of people with intellectual disabilities**, as if they get a job in the field.

In relation with the increasing employability aspect aforementioned, it is also a key aspect, as currently in the EU, **29.5% of women with disabilities and the 27.5% of men with disabilities are at risk of poverty.**



3 What is the added value for society?

- **Development of responsible environmental behaviours:** Through positive experiences in nature, adults can develop their love for nature, and this represents the foundation an active contribution to environmental protection.
- **Good governance of the territory:** The expert knowledge of the local territory, its fauna and flora, along with the responsible environmental behaviour, makes people to take care about the territory.
- **Preventative approach.** The benefits on physical and mental health mentioned before can reduce the future need for support and expensive rehabilitation services, and thus the pressure on public healthcare and social protection services.
- **Resilient communities.** Communities that prioritise inclusion of people with disabilities, a healthy lifestyle and environmental protection are more future-oriented and provide supportive environments for children and young people as they grow up.
- **Less social exclusion.** Inclusive sports connect people with intellectual disabilities with their territories and communities and helps reduce risks of institutionalisation
- **Positive contribution to society.** Trainings on inclusive sports opens up educational and professional opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities and help them develop more autonomy and independence.
- **Equity and poverty reduction.** Inclusive sports help to create a more equal, mature, and harmonious society, while helping to reduce poverty risks for people with intellectual disabilities, as they acquire professional skills that can lead to professional opportunities



4 Inclusive outdoor learning activities: Policy recommendations to get there

4.1

DEFINITION AND OBJECTIVES

MAIN CHALLENGE:

Policy makers and professionals lack a shared understanding of quality inclusive outdoor learning activities and what it entails. Overall, there is no 'outdoor culture' developed yet. So, countries and communities do not have strategies to develop inclusive sports.

NATIONAL SOLUTIONS:

Develop through consensus building, clear inclusive outdoor learning **activities and procedures for training programmes** covering topics such as access to the services, assessment, eligibility, service quality, progress tracking and monitoring of people with intellectual disabilities, and a shared vision and understanding among decision makers on inclusive outdoor learning activities and its benefits for people with intellectual disabilities.

Create platforms and campaigns to inform national policy makers, professionals, and the general public about quality inclusive outdoor sports training.

EU SOLUTION:

Develop EU Guidelines on inclusive outdoor sports for Member States and candidate countries to consider and mainstream them in relevant initiatives in the fields of disability rights and environmental awareness.

4.2

STATE OF PLAY

MAIN CHALLENGES:

- ❖ **Poor or no data** in most countries on the availability and quality of existing inclusive outdoor learning activities for people with intellectual disabilities. Most of the training are addressed to professionals working with people with disabilities or to people with physical disabilities.
- ❖ There is **no offer for structured and long-standing trainings**, so it is not easy to define the learning outcomes and objectives, as there are no previous learnings.
- ❖ Insufficient **adapted spaces** for accessible and inclusive outdoor learning activities.

NATIONAL SOLUTIONS:

- Conduct a **situation analysis**, mapping existing inclusive outdoor sports programmes contents, methods, and good practices, as the Hi-Ability project performed it in Croatia, Greece, and Italy.
- Encourage all the already existing programmes **to include internal monitoring and evaluation** procedures and produce annual programmes and financial reports.
- The national and local governments should develop **adequate facilities**, arrange various outdoor spaces, and possibly camps, ensuring they are accessible for people with disabilities; and specifically, for those with intellectual disabilities.
- Developing **national guidelines** to build structured and long-standing learning programs, as benefits will be seen in long-term, and the learning experience derived from offered structure activities is life-affirming and positive.
- Create **toolkits** for:
 - **Educators, caregivers, and families** on outdoor learning activities to create the proper environment for these activities to be carried out
 - **People with intellectual disabilities** to carry them out.



EU SOLUTIONS:

- Compile and review existing definitions, frameworks, systems, and good practices for inclusive outdoor learning activities in **an EU-wide study on inclusive outdoor sports** policies and practices. This would include monitoring and evaluation, the status of implementation of inclusive sports, assessments, and service procedures in inclusive outdoor learning activities.

4.3

LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND FUNDING

MAIN CHALLENGES:

- ❖ Lack of **legislative frameworks and strategic plans** to regulate, organise, and guarantee high-quality and sustainable inclusive outdoor learning activities.
- ❖ Inadequate stable and sustainable governmental and decentralised funding for outdoor activities for people with intellectual disabilities.
- ❖ **Variable levels of access** to, availability, and affordability of inclusive outdoor learning activities services in different geographical and income areas, and especially in low-income, remote, rural and island areas. People with intellectual disabilities often face economic difficulties.
- ❖ Lack of **quality services and personnel** trained for the specific support needs for people with intellectual disabilities.
- ❖ Lack of mechanisms for service supervision, **monitoring, evaluation, impact measurement, and quality control**.

NATIONAL SOLUTIONS:

➤ **Expand the state aid** from national to local governments to provide continuous and secure funding to ensure more offer and better quality inclusive outdoor learning activities.



Include the Hi-Ability model in the **national strategic plan for people with disabilities** to achieve a common vision, mission, and objectives, based in the Hi-Ability model and built-in co-production with stakeholders, including service providers, organisations of people with disabilities, that:

- **ensures availability of services** and accessibility of services and procedures
- includes national governmental, EU funding frameworks, and a **diversification of funding sources**
- **provides guidelines** on how to develop inclusive outdoor learning activities and ensure coordination
- Includes clear, early, and simple information about eligibility and adaptation for all people with intellectual disabilities
- Includes a **quality assurance framework**
- Provides a system for monitoring, evaluation, data collection, analysis, and reporting of services on inclusive outdoor learning activities

➤ **Co-financing of membership in sports activities** should also be sought, if necessary, especially for low-paying parents.



EU SOLUTIONS:

-  Foster the exchange of information and experience on inclusive outdoor learning activities among national Ministries and relevant stakeholders.
-  Include recommendations for creating **strategic plans as part of EU initiatives on disability, education, and employment** (in the framework of the Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Disability Employment Package, Child Guarantee, and the 2023 Year of Skills).



4.4

TRAINING AND WORKING CONDITIONS

MAIN CHALLENGES:

- ❖ Many countries lack a **training service system for professionals** and university programmes for professionals working in inclusive outdoor learning activities
- ❖ Outdoor learning sports can carry dangerous **safety conditions**. Moreover, being amid nature can be a difficult challenge also for some people with intellectual disabilities.
- ❖ Outdoor learning is often **limited to the idea of general well-being** rather than a tool for personal and professional development. Paternalism of society to people with intellectual disabilities can make these outdoor activities to be only focused on improving their physical and mental health, but not on developing the necessary skills to increase their employability.

NATIONAL SOLUTIONS:

- Develop a **comprehensive and continuous training system**, including the creation of Vocational Education and Training (VET) and university courses, and in-job training for all professionals involved in the outdoor sports sector, with planning and funding for implementation.
- Make a periodical **in-job training and re-training** for professionals working with people with intellectual disabilities with supervision, mentoring and support mechanisms, and encourage exchanges and peer support groups.
- Ensure **good working conditions**, the availability of reflective supervision and support, assistance for developing interdisciplinary teams.
- Create **specific safety measures** for people with intellectual disabilities related with i.e., the equipment, to not lose orientation and walking on the safe path (e.g., visible checkpoints along the path).

EU SOLUTIONS:

- Create a **platform for training on inclusive outdoor learning activities**, with MOOCs, presentations, and online training available in all EU languages.
- Support the development and implementation of **national inclusive outdoor learning activities** training plans for systems of continuous training.
- Provide funding for the sharing of good practices, through organisation **exchange, visits, conferences, international study tours** to highly functional inclusive outdoor learning organisations, and the funding of scientific research at national level and EU level, through programmes such as Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe.



4.5

SOCIAL ACCEPTABILITY

MAIN CHALLENGE:

- ❖ **Poor offer of community-based activities for people with intellectual disabilities** to engage the community, as they still suffer a lot of social exclusion.
- ❖ Due to this poor offer, people with intellectual disabilities are not used to it. So, they can experience fear and concern about health and safety; and the **feeling of not being capable**.
- ❖ **People with intellectual disabilities can feel uncomfortable participating**, and even face lack of motivation, because of social stigma

NATIONAL SOLUTIONS:

- **Awareness-raising activities** for children, parents, teachers, and society in general focused on:
 - The benefits of outdoor activities
 - The stigma in mental health
- **Creating groups for outdoor learning activities:** NGOs can organize groups for outdoor learning for people with psycho-social and intellectual disabilities.

EU SOLUTIONS:

- Declare **2024 the Year of Diversity and inclusion**, with a strong focus on people with disabilities, specifically on people with intellectual disabilities.
- **Awareness-raising campaigns** on employability of people with intellectual disabilities in the framework of the new Disability Employment Package, focusing on inclusive outdoor activities as one of the opportunities.

5 The Hi-Ability model: Transferability guidelines to become a European model

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide the necessary tools to replicate the Hi-Ability model of inclusive outdoor learning activities for people with intellectual disabilities. The dimension of the transferability covered by these guidelines will be:

1. **The establishment of a European model, and its implementation in the Member States**
2. **The implementation by organisations working in outdoor education and/or social inclusion**
3. **The incorporation of the Hi-Ability model in other fields of education**

5.1 Feasibility of local implementation

5.1.1 Challenges

The Hi-Ability model has been developed in a simple and universal way to facilitate the replication in different territories, but also at different levels, from local to bigger organisations and institutions, even in different sectors.

Overall, the main challenges to implement this model are cross-cutting. Specifically, some of them must be addressed through the policy advocacy detailed above. So, please, take into consideration the policy recommendations for the following challenges while thinking about implementing the Hi-Ability model:

- **Overall, there is no 'outdoor culture' developed yet.** So, countries and communities do not have strategies to develop inclusive sports.
- **Difficulties to define the learning outcomes and objectives,** as there are no previous learnings because of the lack **offer for structured and long-standing trainings** on inclusive outdoor learning activities
- Insufficient **adapted spaces** for accessible and inclusive outdoor learning activities.
- Inadequate stable and sustainable governmental and decentralised **funding** for outdoor activities for people with intellectual disabilities.
- **Variable levels of access** to inclusive outdoor learning activities services in different geographical and income areas, and especially in low-income, remote, rural and island areas. People with intellectual disabilities often face economic difficulties.
- Outdoor learning sports can carry dangerous safety conditions.
- **Social stigma** on people with intellectual disabilities



On the other hand, transferring the model to other countries, communities and fields have other challenges related, like:

- **Cultural differences and climate conditions** (e.g., depending on the popular sports played, or the climate conditions to do some activities outdoor and/or in the nature)
- **Level of awareness** of the importance of inclusion of people with disabilities for resilience and sustainable societies, but also about the benefits of outdoor activities for people's quality of life.
- **Differences in approaching specifically adults with intellectual disabilities** (e.g., the level of the integration in society or they are placed in institutions).
- **The learning experiences will differ** according to the target groups of the trainings and their level of knowledge and experience working in outdoor learning activities and/or with people with intellectual disabilities.





Finally, also some challenges must be considered while working with people with intellectual disabilities:

- Working with people with **different types of disabilities, multiple disabilities and/or complex disabilities** in groups activities
- The fear that people with intellectual disabilities may experience with the **new, different, and unexpected factors.**
- **People with intellectual disabilities can feel uncomfortable participating**, and even face lack of motivation, because of social stigma and insufficient awareness on the benefits of the outdoor learning activities.

And even working with people with intellectual disabilities outdoor and/or in nature:

- **Being amid nature can be a difficult challenge** for some people with intellectual disabilities.
- **Ambiguity about the environment**, when the activities take place in the nature, on a rugged path or in a place where there is no good visibility (e.g., in a forest). In the city, a new road or change of direction can also cause stress and upset.
- **Difficulties orienting oneself** when taking part in outdoor activities and remembering the path to come back.



5.1.2 Transferability recommendations

5.1.2.1 Cross-cutting recommendations

- **Analysis the state of play of the work** with people with intellectual disabilities, and specifically related with outdoor sports and learning activities in the correspondent region.
- **Lectures, workshops, and training presentations before the implementation of the Hi-Ability model** based on the integration of people with disabilities and the benefits of inclusive outdoor education. These actions will raise awareness and acceptance and will facilitate the way to implement the training.
- **The training methodology must be adapted and targeted to the country and culture** to be effective and successful. The Hi-Ability methodology was developed in a universal way so that it can be easily replicated.
- **Collaboration among organisations working in outdoor education and/or social inclusion** to ensure the specialised knowledge on outdoor activities as well as on working peer-to-peer with the people with intellectual disabilities.

5.1.2.2 Implementing activities with people with intellectual disabilities

- **Adapting different activities depending on people's types of disabilities** as well as the support needs (e.g., people with Down Syndrome frequently suffer from vertigo).
- **Organise activities according to people with similar age and interests** on outdoor activities (maybe also in terms of level of experience)
- **Developing communication skills** with people with intellectual disabilities to help reducing the stress and the uncertainty that such new activities might cause.
- **Awareness-raising activities** on the benefits of outdoor activities and being in the nature before participating in the Hi-Ability activities.
- During the activities, **promoting collaboration among all the participants** to strengthen the feeling of overcoming difficulties together.
- **Strengthening the autonomy** of adults with intellectual disabilities by preparing them to the risks and coping with uncertainty and unforeseen events.
- **Training people with intellectual disabilities** on how to use tools and strategies in nature, as well to develop the sense of orientation and choose the safe path to take by learning about the equipment needed and the checkpoints and signals along the path.



5.1.2.3 Learning content and materials

In the 'Monitoring and evaluation' section below, you will find orientations about the training curriculum, the learning objectives, and the correspondent skills to implement the Hi-Ability model. Moreover, to make it effective, the training and materials must be dynamic and practical. Try to **balance the theoretical** part with a more practical one.

For that, the training should include:

- **Project-based activities**
- **Game-based activities**
- **App game-based activities**
- **Multi-platform learning materials** (PowerPoint presentations, quizzes, videos, mobile apps, etc.)

All these materials and activities must be **accessible and inclusive** for people with intellectual disabilities. As it is recommended to adapt the learning curriculum and activities, depending on the type of disability targeted, then the accessibility criteria of the materials must also be adapted. These materials must be developed along with an accessibility expert.

On the other hand, consider these learning materials to be available **online**, as some of the trainings can take place online. Furthermore, it is important to consider that some participants may be not be familiar with the use of e-learning platforms, so they would need assistance.

5.1.3 Transfer to other organisations and fields

5.1.3.1. Organisations working in the field of outdoor education and/or social inclusion

As mentioned before, the collaboration with organisations specialised in outdoor education and/or social inclusion is key for the success of the implementation of this model. For this reason, the Hi-Ability model was developed by organisations of both fields. So, the transfer to other organisations working in those fields would be easy to implement.

In this case, the resource developed could be useful for:

- Outdoor education centres
- Outdoor activity clubs
- Hiking associations
- NGOs supporting people with mental health issues



5.1.3.2. *Transfer to other fields of education*

The Hi-Ability model has a proved good impact in improving the quality of life of adults with intellectual disabilities, their personal and professional skills. Moreover, as it is an educational tool, the Hi-Ability model can be implemented in many other fields of education.

All entities focused on education at all ages (e.g., upskilling and reskilling) could implement this model for developing acceptance of diversity, environmental awareness, healthy lifestyle, resilience, teamworking, etc.

On one side, the Hi-Ability model can be very beneficial for **children and young people**, so they can be raised in diversity and inclusion, and in healthy lifestyle:

- Training in outdoor activities for students in **preschool, schools, and universities**
- Implementing inclusive outdoor activities in **youth organisations and networks**
- Educating youth in **leadership skills**
- Educating youth in **professional skills** (e.g., becoming educator of outdoor activities).
- Set it up as an **Erasmus+ Youth trainings**

On the other side, participating in these inclusive outdoor activities is an excellent opportunity for **different teachers, educators, and trainers** to develop their psychosocial skills and acquire knowledge on inclusion, environmental awareness, and healthy lifestyle to better influence the development of children and raise awareness in their community.

Finally, as the trainings are conducted in the nature, the Hi-Ability model could also be used for **enhancing environmental and cultural activities**. Engaging outdoor activities in nature is beneficial at all ages and can be another strategy to raise awareness on the climate crisis and the green transition.

For **old people**, which compose a large part of people with disabilities, the Hi-Ability model can be adapted and implemented by the social services providers.





5.2 Monitoring and evaluation

5.2.1. Learning objectives

As mentioned before, **the learning experiences will differ** according to the target groups of the trainings and their level of knowledge and experience working in outdoor learning activities and/or with people with intellectual disabilities.

The Hi-Ability model is targeted both to professionals, experts in trekking and outdoor activities, and people with intellectual disabilities. **For professionals**, the focus of the training will be to develop and strengthen their skills needed to support people with intellectual disabilities.

For **people with intellectual disabilities**, the objective will be to develop their “outdoor” skills in order to improve their quality of life through strengthening their personal and professional skills (e.g., use of tools and apps, orientation, interpersonal skills, etc.).

Specific learning objectives and outcomes that could be identified are:

5.2.1.1. Training on mountain sports and social inclusion for professionals

- to communicate knowledge and information to people with intellectual disabilities
- to understand the concept of intellectual disability
- to understand the environment can be a tool to overcome barriers
- to safely accompany people with intellectual disabilities
- to understand the concept of accessible nature
- to know how to engage people in nature-related matters
- to collaboratively organise an outdoor activity and prepare the group
- to know the legal framework for working with people with intellectual disabilities
- to know the psychological approach needed to work with people with intellectual disabilities

5.2.1.2. Training on mountain sports and social inclusion for people with intellectual disabilities

- to gradually experiment with more strenuous walks in terms of time and physical effort.
- to strengthen muscle structure and improve the cardiovascular and respiratory system
- to develop and increase the sense of direction
- to learn to read a map and recognise of the main symbols and signs
- to develop autonomy (e.g., preparing the backpack)
- to experience and overcome obstacles





- to experience sports with peers and adults in various contexts
- to experiment activities without parental figures
- to experiment in outdoor environments
- to take increasingly appropriate behaviours and social skills in collective situations

5.2.1.3. Training on sports and social inclusion

- to know cartography and the use of GPS
- to promote inclusive motor-sports participation of people with disabilities
- to adopt inclusive practices
- to know the physical and psycho-social benefits of inclusive sports for different disabilities
- to know first aid principles
- to build a network for the promotion of mental health
- to know how to create the appropriate climate to include people with and without disabilities
- to educate and motivate not only physical and technical skills, but also personal skills useful to people with and without disabilities both in sports and in other aspects of life
- to know how to promote the transferability of skills acquired through sports activities to daily activities
- to know how to sustain a positive relationship over time with people with and without disabilities.

5.2.1.4. Training on accessible tourism

- to design, organise and manage travels/trips and stays for tourists with special needs
- to manage technical and behavioural aspects of organising a trip
- to manage the reception of information with reference to the special needs
- to know techniques of group management
- to know communication techniques to address specific needs



5.2.2. Skills

Achieving the previous mentioned learning objectives will be possible only identifying the personal and professional skills that participants need to learn in order to create the proper environment for these lessons to take place.

In this section you will find the necessary skills both for educators, caregivers and professionals, and people with intellectual disabilities.

5.2.2.1. For educators, caregivers and professionals working in outdoor education for people with intellectual disabilities

In terms of development of **professional skills**, the following should be considered:

- Developing **communication skills** with people with intellectual disabilities, to help them reduce the stress and the uncertainty which can be caused by new activities
- **Analysing information**
- **Trekking-related skills** (e.g., what to wear for a trekking activity, sense of direction, etc.)
- **Managing groups** in the outdoor and, more in general, in sports activities
- Being able to **support people with disabilities in sports** activities in general
- **Promoting accessible tourism**



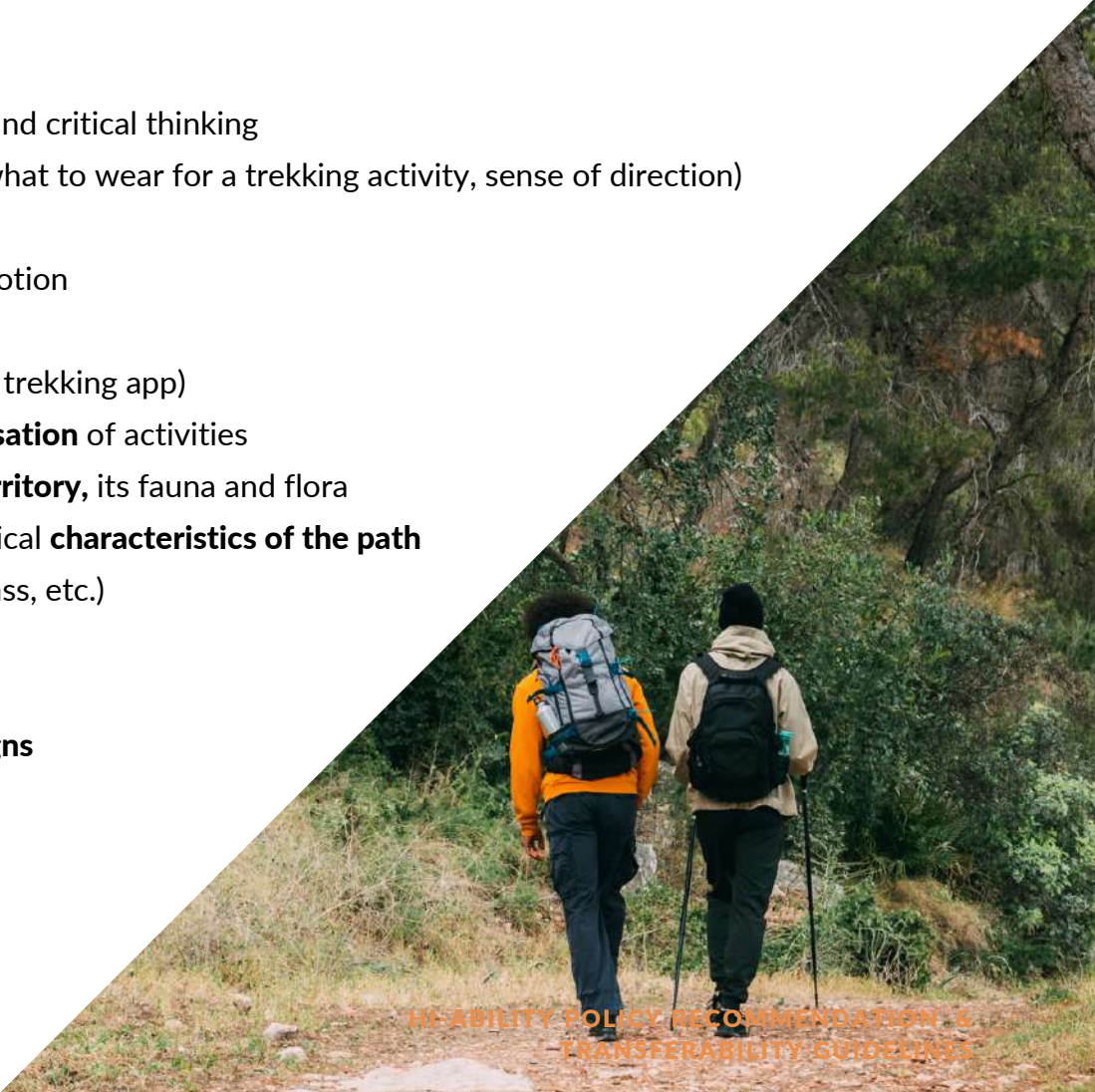
5.2.2.2. For people with disabilities to become assistants to trekking guides

In terms of development of **personal/social skills**, the following should be considered:

- **Wellbeing** - pursuit of life satisfaction and adoption of a sustainable lifestyle
- **Flexibility** - Ability to manage transitions and uncertainty, and to face challenges (8.1 out of 10)
- **Collaboration** - Engagement in group activities and teamwork, thus acknowledging and respecting others
- **Empathy** - The understanding of another person's emotions, experiences, and the provision of appropriate responses
- **Communication** - use of relevant communication strategies and tools depending on the context and content (even English skills to communicate with a wider group, not only locals)
- **Self-regulation** - Awareness and management of emotions, thoughts, and behaviour
- **Managing learning** - the planning, organising, monitoring, and reviewing of one's own learning
- **Growth mindset** - belief in one's and others' potential to continuously learn and progress

In terms of development of **professional skills**, the following should be considered:

- **Team working**
- **Analysis of information** and critical thinking
- **Trekking-related skills** (what to wear for a trekking activity, sense of direction)
- **Managing groups**
- **Accessible tourism** promotion
- Managing to **learn**
- **Digital skills** (e.g., using a trekking app)
- **Coordination and organisation** of activities
- **Expertise on the local territory**, its fauna and flora
- The geological and historical **characteristics of the path**
- **Use of tools** (map, compass, etc.)
- **Sense of direction**
- First aid
- Understanding of **trail signs**



5.2.3. Training Curriculum

Once identified both learning outcomes and skills, the programme of the training can be developed. Below you will find the recommended basic structure that the trainings based on the Hi-Ability model must have in other to achieve the goals

5.2.3.1. For educators, caregivers and professionals working in outdoor education for people with intellectual disabilities

To develop a high-quality outdoor learning training for educators, caregivers and professionals working in outdoor education for people with intellectual disabilities, the programme could be structured around the following modules:



MODULE 1

Environmental education for social inclusion

- a) **Topic 1:** The relevance of Environmental Education for social inclusion
- b) **Topic 2:** The importance of nature and environment
- c) **Topic 3:** Tips to live a sustainable lifestyle

MODULE 2

The power of outdoor learning with vulnerable learners

- a) **Topic 1:** Concept and benefits of Outdoor Learning
- b) **Topic 2:** Becoming an outdoor leader: essential soft skills to successful leadership
- c) **Topic 3:** Outdoor recreational activities for PWID: Best practices





MODULE 3

How to design outdoor training activities to develop the skills and competencies of persons with disabilities

- a) **Topic 1:** The importance of education to autonomy
- b) **Topic 2:** Intellectual disability and learning methods
- c) **Topic 3:** Observation of participants and creation of tailored pathways based on the result of the evaluations
- d) **Topic 4:** Preparing adults with intellectual disabilities for outdoor activities
- e) **Topic 5:** Taking learning outdoor - How to shape effective outdoor learning for empowering PWID

MODULE 4

How to manage outdoor rock climbing and bouldering with persons with disabilities

- a) **Topic 1:** Introduction to rock climbing and behavioural activation
- b) **Topic 2:** Manage fears and limitations
- c) **Topic 3:** Effective emotional regulation and centre of gravity.



MODULE 5

Trekking-related skills (orientation, maps, safety etc)

- a) **Topic 1:** Benefits of hiking of PWID and things to consider before heading out
- b) **Topic 2:** Time to hike!





MODULE 6

Risk management in the outdoors

- a) **Topic 1:** Definition of risk management
- b) **Topic 2:** Identification of risks related to outdoor
- c) **Topic 3:** Difficulties of PWID in doing outdoor activities

MODULE 7

Collaboration in the outdoor

- a) **Topic 1:** Definition of collaboration in outdoor
- b) **Topic 2:** Communication channels and outdoor activities for PWID
- c) **Topic 3:** Best practices for encouraging collaboration



MODULE 8

How to assess the outdoor experience

- a) **Topic 1:** “Voice out” your feelings
- b) **Topic 2:** From the Impression to the Expressio

The selected *modules* aim to:

- ✓ A. Help the target group by teaching them **the potential of the outdoor as well as an environmental education**, and deepen their knowledge about the two concepts (**modules 1 and 2**)
- ✓ B. **Provide practical guidelines for the implementation of activities** with people with intellectual disabilities (**modules 3 and 4**)
- ✓ C. **Develop specific and professional skills** in the field of outdoor education (**module 5**)
- ✓ D. **Support people with intellectual disabilities** and facilitate their engagement in the outdoor (**module 6 and 7**)
- ✓ E. **Assess the skills acquired and evaluate the impact** of outdoor activities on people with intellectual disabilities (**module 8**)



You will find all the content of these modules in the **Toolkit for Educators**, including the training structure and content, the pedagogical framework for the training methodology and guidelines for educators, learners, and organisations. Available in English, Italian, Greek and Croatian.

All the resources available in this Toolkit, and some extra materials, are also available, in an interactive way, on the EASPD learning hub, the **D-LOT platform**.

6 Conclusions



In a historical period in which attention to environmental issues is crucial, **social innovation is key to ensure a sustainable growth**. Problem-solving actions must apply a holistic approach, where no one is left behind. Social innovation ensures this approach by enhancing diversity and inclusion in society.

The outdoor learning activities promoted through the Hi-Ability model works to facilitate the **full participation of people with intellectual disabilities in society**, towards the full recognition of their rights and promoting the 'Union of Equality' of the EU Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities 2021-2030.

This document showed the **direct benefits** of inclusive hiking through a strong socialization in a natural environment and put the right to leisure for people with disabilities in the agenda. There is evidence of motor skills developed, better psychological feeling enhanced, social skills and bonding improved, and empathy and teamwork sense strengthened, among others.

Moreover, inclusive hiking provides **skills learning** such as risk management and bouldering techniques and provides environmental education. This can lead to more employment opportunities and the improvement of their economic situation. Inclusive hiking can become part of the accessible tourism sector and provide economic benefits for small business.

However, there is still **insufficient awareness** in general about the potential benefits of these sports. Then, there is no funding, nor political commitment to promote these activities, and accessible and inclusive hiking are not even in the scope. Even if so, the social stigma of people with intellectual disabilities is still a great issue to tackle.

To overcome these difficulties, a real **political commitment from local to EU level is needed to allocate more funding** to promote the 'outdoor culture' through awareness-raising activities while increasing the offer, ensuring the quality of inclusive hiking learning, creating adequate facilities, and hiring high-quality educators. All this, ensuring the full participation of people with intellectual disabilities.

Finally, although in this document we focused on the benefits of inclusive outdoor learning activities for people with intellectual disabilities, there is a win-win relation of these outdoor learning activities towards the green transition, as environmental education is promoted, as well as more green parks and facilities in urban areas. This perspective could be interesting for further research on the field of the benefits of **combining disability and nature**.

Annex 1: The Hi-Ability project

The Hi-Ability model has been developed through the EU funded Hi-Ability project. Its goal has been the acquisition of specific skills and competences by adults with intellectual disabilities to strengthen the social and professional integration of target groups at risk of marginalization through the use of the environment as a resource of the community.

To achieve that, the project:

- Developed educational materials and **training courses for professionals** working with people with disabilities to improve their skills in outdoor education activities
- **Trained people with intellectual disabilities** as “assistants” to professional guides for outdoor/nature tours to acquire personal and professional skills and then to test their acquired skills through a pilot experimentation in all involved countries (Italy, Croatia, and Greece).
- **Created an app** to facilitate the participation of people with ID in outdoor activities.

This document is part of the goals of the project, so as to provide **policy-recommendations** to policy-makers to enhance the conditions to implement the Hi-Ability model; and the guidelines to facilitate **the transferability of the model** to all EU countries.

The partnership that leads this project composed by a positive combination of **(1) Organizations** specialized in working with **adults with disabilities**; and **(2) Organizations** expert in **outdoor sports**:

- **Cooperativa Sociale Controvento Onlus** (Italy): specialized in the socio-psycho-educational services for people with intellectual disabilities.
- **Associazione Sportiva Dilettantistica Trekkify** (Italy): sports association and a social enterprise, focused on outdoor activities to promote environmental education and social participation.
- **EPIONI – The Greek Carers Network** (Greece): NGO working with caregivers of people with intellectual and physical disabilities, counting with high-qualified staff (i.e., psychologists and psychiatrists).
- **EPOS Fylis – Ellinikos Politistikos Orivatikos Syllogos Fylis** (Greece): association that promotes sports activities dedicated to mountain and nature, such as i.e., mountaineering, hiking
- **Health life Academy – Udruga Akademija Zdravog Zivljenja** (Croatia): NGO working for people with disabilities participating in sport and outdoor activities.
- **EASPD – The European Association for Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities** (Belgium): European network including 22,000 organizations in 41 countries specialised in providing social services for people with disabilities.

The experiences and lessons learned through this project, along with the expertise of the partnership, were the base to identify the added value, challenges and recommendations of inclusive outdoor learning activities for people with intellectual disabilities. These recommendations and guidelines will be shared with different stakeholders and communities concerned throughout Europe.





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Hi-Ability - Developing social and professional skills through outdoor experiences.

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