

Flyers, panels, guidelines for blind people

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Introduction

The following guidelines are based on the guidelines of the Interreg Central Europe COME-IN, aimed at valorising the CE cultural heritage, increasing the capacities of small and medium size museums, by making them accessible to a wider public of people. The **COME-IN** guidelines provide different solutions to improve the inclusiveness and accessibility of museums, and are based on two key principles:

- **INCLUSION:** means to respect everyone just the way he or she is. It means that all people have the opportunity to take part fully in the life of society. From its space to its educational activities, the whole inside of a museum must be designed in order to achieve maximum inclusion;
- **ACCESSIBILITY:** means freedom from any kind of barrier. Museums' purpose should be to promote equal access for all and to ensure a welcoming atmosphere and suitable environment. Accessibility has to take into account. Accessibility has to take also into account:
 - **Physical access** to public buildings, roads, transportation and other indoor and outdoor facilities, including museums.
 - **Access to any kind of information and communication** providing usable websites, audio and video guides, Braille and tactile signage.
 - **Social access**, regards the right to have equal opportunities to participate to all aspects of social life: education, work, leisure, culture, sport, etc.
 - **Economical access**, by offering free admission, reductions, and/or priority access for disabled people and/or the accompanying persons.

The COME-IN guidelines have been the subject of a training day dedicated to disability held at the Centro Cuori of ESU of Venice on 05 December 2019. During the meeting the participants were able to deepen their knowledge about good practices to eliminate barriers and facilitate cultural and touristic experiences for people with disabilities. Moreover, part of the guidelines and good practices of the COME-IN project have also been made available to the HISTORIC partners so that they could be adopted in the pilot sites and museums targeted by this project.

This draft finally briefly summarises part of the COME-IN guidelines, as guidance for the project partners for the improvement of the inclusiveness and accessibility of their pilot sites, archaeological areas and museums.

Section A – Awareness raising

A1. Overcoming barriers to participation

The UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities has stated that “Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.”

This definition underpins the fact that barriers are the problem not the disability. So we should remember that “The person comes first”. So, the focus should be on the barriers and not on the disability, with an inclusive approach which benefits all the museums customers, not only the people with disabilities. Here, following the COME-IN Guidelines is represented in the tables below the difference between the social model vs medical model.

(ICF) SOCIAL MODEL	(ICD) MEDICAL MODEL
Focus on barriers (Allow inclusive access)	Focus on disabilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Remove mobility obstacles (steps, slopes, small or heavy doors, etc.) - Avoid long distances (reconsidering transport facilities, provide rest isles and comfort areas, etc.) - re-consider available tools/devices functionality (computers, mouse, etc.) - Adapt signs and orientation items and tools - Adopt coherent and respectful physical and verbal relationship - Re-position art pieces and labels (height, surrounding space, etc.) - Provide mobility facilitation tools (wheelchairs, portable chairs, etc.) 	Mobility impairment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - wheelchair users - people with walking sticks or crutches - elderly people with reduced mobility - persons with asthma or heart disease - other affected physical functions: standing, sitting, coordination, manual dexterity.

(ICF) SOCIAL MODEL	(ICD) MEDICAL MODEL
Focus on barriers (Allow inclusive access)	Focus on disabilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide inclusive tools/devices (tactile, audio, Braille, digital, etc.) - Re-position art pieces and descriptions (height, surrounding space, Braille labels and catalogues, tactile books, etc.) 	Visual impairment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - blind people from the birth - blind people with residual vision - people who lost sight due to injuries or diseases - partially sighted people

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adapt and clarify signs and audio orientation items/tools - Review art pieces' presentations (simple language, different perspectives, spatial focus, tactile aids, storytelling, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - elderly people with reduced sight
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide inclusive tools/devices (radio/Wi-Fi audio loops, hearing aids, etc.) - Review art pieces' presentations (simple language, sign language, video, etc.) 	<p>Hearing impairment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - people deaf from the birth or from an early age - people which lost hearing in the course of their life - people with a certain degree of hearing loss
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide multisensory approach to arts (experiencing art through all senses) - Adopt a learning by doing approach to arts (provide workshops, laboratory sessions, etc.) - Review art pieces' presentations (simple language, reduced number of art pieces, storytelling, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide multisensory approach to arts (experiencing art through all senses) - Adopt a learning by doing approach to arts (provide workshops, laboratory sessions, etc.) - Review art pieces' presentations (simple language, reduced number of art pieces, storytelling, etc.)
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A2. Correct wording

Appropriate wording and phrases are important when speaking to or about people with disabilities. Language can be either a strong inclusive tool or a way to reinforce stereotypes and social barriers. For this reason, it is very important to focus on the person, not on the disability.

Here below some useful suggestions:

- Never use the article 'the' with a specific disability to describe people with that disability. The preferred term, 'people with disabilities', stresses the humanity of the individuals and avoids objectification;
- Never use the word 'normal' to refer to people who do not have a disability in contrast to people with disabilities. Use 'non-disabled' or 'people without disabilities' instead;
- Don't use language that implies a person with disability is heroic because they experience disability. Conversely, don't make out that people with disability are victims or objects of pity;

- Avoid phrases like ‘suffers from’ which suggest discomfort, constant pain and a sense of hopelessness;
- Wheelchair users may not view themselves as ‘confined to’ a wheelchair – try thinking of it as a mobility aid instead;
- Most disabled people are comfortable with the words used to describe daily living. People who use wheelchairs ‘go for walks’ and people with visual impairments may be very pleased – or not – ‘to see you’. An impairment may just mean that some things are done in a different way;
- Common phrases that may associate impairments with negative things should be avoided, for example ‘deaf to our pleas’ or ‘blind drunk’;
- Avoid passive, victim words. Use language that respects disabled people as active individuals with control over their own lives.

Section B – The service chain

B1. Accessibility mapping

An exhibition should be designed so that it can be accessible, easily visited and enjoyed by anyone. This approach is based on the so-called universal design principles.

“Universal design” means the design of products, environments, programmes and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.

“Universal design” shall not exclude assistive devices for particular groups of persons with disabilities where this is needed (art. 2 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities).

The HISTORIC project follows the COME-IN! approach about accessibility that takes in consideration not only the issues related to the visit of the exhibition and the museum objects and items. There are other important aspects that guarantee a satisfactory experience to the visitors. They can be split into the so called “Service chain”, which describes all aspects that are relevant for visitors of a museum, as shown in the picture below:



Service chain of a museum should consider the following components:

- Input - Information and communication before the visit
- Arrival
- Entrance
- Cash desk
- Wardrobe
- Exhibition area
- Toilet
- Shop
- Output - Information and communication after the visit

The accessibility criteria are based on the Service Chain elements cross-checked with the four relevant aspects of accessibility:

- physical access;
- information and communication access;
- social access;
- economical access.

The accessibility matrix shown here below can be used to check whether the current situation in the museum is compliant or not with the accessibility criteria, as suggested by the COME-IN! guidelines:

Accessibility/ Service chain	Physical Access	Information & communication access	Social access	Economical access
Input				
Arrival				
Entrance				
Cash desk				
Wardrobe				
Exhibition area				
Toilet				
Shop				
Output				

B2. Customer service

It is important to always assist all visitors with equal attention to their requests, providing the following information:

About physical access

- how to get there;
- connections to accessible public transport;
- parking facilities for disabled people and accompanists;
- tactile and/or sensorial trails and paving;
- accessible entrance;
- seating available around the museum.

About the exhibition

- what can be visited and if there are any restraints or parts of the museum not accessible
- costs, tickets, discounts and free of charge services for disabled persons or their accompanists
- available audio-video tools and support for visual and hearing impairment
- Braille guidebooks available
- tactile tools or tours available
- estimated visit length
- additional services available: e.g. wheelchairs, accompanying staff
- on demand guided tours or accompanists for free
- workshops and laboratories

About additional services

- location of accessible wardrobe, dressing rooms
- location of accessible toilets or baby change facilities
- café, bar or refreshments
- resting rooms
- visitor assistance

Moreover, the interaction is one of the most important factor in the connection between visitors and museum staff. Here are provided a list of positive and negative approaches:

- focus on the person and not on the disability;
- direct your attention to the person with the disability, never to his or her assistant or interpreter;
- ask if and what help is needed;
- if assistance is accepted, wait for the instructions;
- respect people's personal space and privacy;
- speak eye level with the person;
- let people see your lips and facial expression when talking;
- you can give verbal instructions when walking with a blind or visually impaired person, describing the surroundings and obstacles (eg. about steps, seating, etc.);
- never distract guide dogs.
- don't be afraid to make mistakes, anyone can make them, just learn from them and move on.

Section C – Visiting the exhibition

C1. Multisensory exhibition

Multisensory presentations give the opportunity to enjoy exhibitions also to people with visual, hearing and cognitive impairments. Multisensory means accessing information through more than one of our senses. Beside sight, an exhibition should be experienced as much as possible through the other senses: hearing, touching, tasting and smelling.

Here are listed two typology of multisensory exhibition:

- Audio and video guides: Audio guides are very useful when visiting an exhibition because they allow visitors to watch the artefacts and have an immediate explanation without reading labels or panels. This is a great help especially for those people who can have difficulties with reading, like elderly people, children, persons wearing bi-focal lenses or persons with dyslexia. Then they allow all visitors to appreciate better artefacts: standing back and having the opportunity to admire the work of art as a whole. Audio guides are usually available as devices you can rent at

the museum entrance, or apps downloadable on your smartphone. Blind people can use audio guides on accessible touchpads. Audio guides content might present a simple description of the artefacts of an exhibition or have more advanced interactive features for different purposes and recipients.

- Tactile tools: Tactile tools can be used as interpretation aids by visually impaired people. Tactile drawings or paintings can translate works of art, spaces or buildings into a tactile language. They do not reproduce exactly the original artefacts, but they allow people to create a mental image. They can be used together with Braille information and audio explanation.

C2. Interacting with visitors

Since accompanying groups through exhibitions consists in describing, explaining and telling things, all basic communication techniques should be fully employed: use of voice and body language, logic and clarity of reasoning, rhythm and narration.

In case of visitors with visual impairments, it is important to describe and reproduce verbally the work of arts so that they can really get an idea of it. This description can be combined with the use of some tactile reproductions or models.

- Introducing the tour: One of the most important moments of the visit is the first contact with the visitors: introduce yourself and, if it is a small group, greet each visitor. If the persons of the group don't know each other, ask their names and where they come from. In this way it is easier to establish a relation between the participants. Ask them about their expectations for the visit or why they chose to come to the museum. This will help to modify the tour according to the interests and needs of the visitors. The visitors will get the feeling that they are important and that the museum is arranging a special tour for them, not a standard tour.
- Describing art to blind people: before starting the actual verbal description of the work, it is important to provide some preliminary information. The following questions might help structure the introduction to the work:
 - What is it? A painting, a statue, an archaeological relic ...
 - Where is it placed? How big is it? What is made of?
 - What is the theme of the work?
 - Who is the artist?
 - When was it created?
 - Why was created?

Then start describing the piece. If there is a tactile reproduction of the painting, you can use it. The person, touching the reproduction, can have more clues to reproduce mentally the image. But remember, the tactile reproduction is not like a photograph, it is more like a map where one can find the position of the elements represented. So at the beginning, you need to accompany the person's hand in the exploration of the reproduction, explaining the key elements of the image he or she is touching. Colours could be "translated" or compared with the perceptions of other senses. For example, comparing colours to materials they can touch, like earth, water, wood or stone.

Conclusion

These guidelines, briefly summarizing the COME-IN! handbook is focused on the knowledge and skills necessary to deliver a good service to visitors, taking into consideration all issues regarding INCLUSION and ACCESSIBILITY in museums, and in particularly:

- the AWARENESS that BARRIERS ARE THE PROBLEM not the disability, which means having always an inclusive approach which benefits all the museums customers, not only people with disabilities
- the importance to know how to IDENTIFY AND REMOVE ANY BARRIER that could hinder the full access to museums and galleries
- the use of an INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE, which focuses on the person, not on the disability
- the Museum SERVICE CHAIN, as an innovative approach about accessibility that includes all aspects of the visit: information and communication before the visit, arrival, entrance, cash desk, wardrobe, exhibition area, toilet, shop and information and communication after the visit
- and last but not least, the relevance of COMMUNICATION AND CUSTOMER CARE, which implies paying always attention to all visitors' needs and requests.