

AccessibleEU: Accessibility and Higher Education

Working together to build a more accessible European Union for persons with disabilities.

Typology: Awareness-raising

Venue: University of Porto

Date: Wednesday, October 30, 2024

Format: Hybrid from 9:00-14:15 hours / onsite only from 15:30-17:30 hours

Language: English

Number of participants: 300 participants

Registration form: https://accessible-eu-centre.ec.europa.eu/content-corner/events/accessibleeu-european-event-accessibility-and-higher-education-24-aw-eu-01-2024-10-30_en

In collaboration with:



AccessibleEU Consortium composed by:



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1. Context

Accessibility in higher education is now a top priority across European universities, driven by legal advancements and a deeper understanding of the diverse needs of students. Despite progress, the challenge to eliminate barriers for students with disabilities is more urgent than ever, as these obstacles significantly impact their participation in university life. Actually, the latest EU statistics highlight a concerning disparity, showing that 20.3% of individuals with disabilities are more likely to leave school early compared to 10.8% of their non-disabled counterparts. Furthermore, only 30.9% of students with disabilities advance to tertiary education.

The concept of accessibility is broad, extending beyond just the physical and digital realms—where significant improvements have been observed—to include curriculum adaptation, inclusive teaching strategies, and individual support, among others. And even today, students with disabilities encounter numerous obstacles, ranging from navigating physically inaccessible environments to accessing suitable study materials and receiving adequate support.

The "Accessibility and Higher Education" AccessibleEU awareness-raising event, organised in collaboration with the University of Porto, aims to be a melting pot of ideas and innovation, bringing together a vibrant mix of university professors, students, administrative and service staff, researchers, and managers from inclusion service offices. Together, they will delve into discussions about best practices, confront challenges, and explore new frontiers in making European universities more accessible. Furthermore, this event aspires to sketch out a European roadmap for the future, advocating for a holistic approach to ensure that accessibility in higher education not only meets current standards but also anticipates the needs and aspirations of the future. This balanced perspective aims to merge practical, on-the-ground experiences with strategic, visionary thinking to create a more inclusive and accessible educational landscape across Europe.

2. Objectives

The main objectives are:

- Discuss the standards and indicators that should be considered to ensure inclusive education in universities.
- Enhance the analysis of the remaining challenges in the area of curricular adaptations.
- Fostering Transnational Collaboration and Sharing Practical Initiatives

Special attention will be focused on considering the implication of the different agents that will intervene in the University environment:

- Teachers
- Students
- Administration
- Research staff
- Inclusion Service offices at the universities
- Policy and strategic decision makers
- Libraries

3. Expected Agenda

Opening Session

9:00 – 9:30 The European Commitment to Accessibility: Following Steps and Challenges

This session will be the welcoming to the event and will introduce the main challenges and opportunities in the field of accessibility in higher education.

- Jesús Hernández Galán. Director of [AccessibleEU](#)
- Inmaculada Placencia. [European Commission Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion](#)
- Marta Gutiérrez Benet. Head of Sector - Erasmus+ Programme Coordination at [European Commission Directorate General of Education, Youth, Sport and Culture](#) (TBC)
- Ana Camanho Vice-Rector for Digital Transformation and Information Management, [University of Porto](#)
- Pedro Nobre. Director of the Faculty of Psychology, [University of Porto](#)

Panel 1

9:30 – 11:00 Advancing Accessibility and Inclusion: Working on Policies, Practices and Culture at the University

Panellists will share their insights on the policies and practices related to the accessibility and inclusion of persons with disabilities (students and staff) in universities. Some panellists will highlight their experience with the Erasmus+ Project European Network of Inclusive Universities (EUni4All-Network), to establish a European network of universities dedicated to fostering inclusion and serving as a benchmark for students with disabilities. This session will delve into this project, exploring both the opportunities and challenges it presents.

Moderated by:

- Sílvia Duarte. [Fundación ONCE](#) – UNI4ALL

Speakers:

- Alice Ribeiro. [University of Porto](#)
- Anne O'Connor. [Dublin City University](#)
- Gerald Craddock. [Centre for Excellence in Universal Design](#)

11:00 – 11:30 Coffee Break

Panel 2

11:30 – 12:30 Accessibility and Design for All: Revision and Adaptation of Curricula.

This panel will focus on the intersection of accessibility and design for all within educational curricula. Experts will discuss the challenges and strategies involved in revising and adapting curriculum to meet the needs of diverse learners. In addition to commenting on the current situation of the issue addressed, topics will include innovative approaches, best practices, and emerging trends aimed at promoting inclusivity and equity in education. The discussion aims to provide valuable insights and foster dialogue among educators, designers, policymakers, and advocates.

Moderated by:

- Klaus Miesenberger. [Johannes Kepler University Linz](#)

Speakers:

- Nick Tyler. [University College London, UCL](#)
- Roberta Lulli. [ATHENA Project](#)
- Rodrigo Ramos. National Institute for Rehabilitation (TBC)
- Frederic Fovet. [Thompson Rivers University](#)

Panel 3

12:30 – 14:00 Enhancing Accessibility for Students with Disabilities in the European Higher Education

This panel aims to address the critical issue of accessibility for students with disabilities in higher education across Europe. The participation of these diverse stakeholders promises a comprehensive exploration of how educational quality standards, national policies, and student experiences intersect to impact accessibility. The panel seeks to foster transnational collaboration to drive forward a more inclusive educational landscape, ensuring that higher education is accessible to all students, regardless of their disabilities.

Moderated by:

- Boris Janča. [Masaryk University](#)

Speakers:

- Goran Dakovic. [European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education \(ENQA\)](#)
- Helene Peterbauer. [European University Association \(EUA\)](#)
- Pedro Encarnação. [AAATE](#)

14:00 – 14:15 Closing remarks and presentation of upcoming session

- Vítor Carvalho. [University of Porto](#)

14:15 – 15:30 Lunch

Panel 4 (onsite session only)

15:30 – 17:30 Inspirational and Practical Session Sharing Initiatives of Accessibility and Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities at the University

The goal of the panel would be to provide attendees with practical insights and innovative ideas that they can take back to their own institutions to improve accessibility and inclusion. This setting would also encourage networking among participants, fostering a community of practice that supports ongoing learning and advocacy for disability rights within higher education.

This session will consist more of a hand-on approach to the issue of accessibility and inclusion where participants will be able to share their experiences and projects in which they are involved. For that purpose, this session will be open to pitch presentations of the activities and initiatives of the participants, in order to share them and discuss with the panel of experts.

Moderated by:

- Alice Ribeiro. [University of Porto](#)

Panels of experts:

- Bruno Giesteira. [University of Porto](#)
- Klaus Miesenberger. [Johannes Kepler University Linz](#)
- Boris Janča. [Masaryk University](#)
- Pedro Encarnação. [AAATE](#)