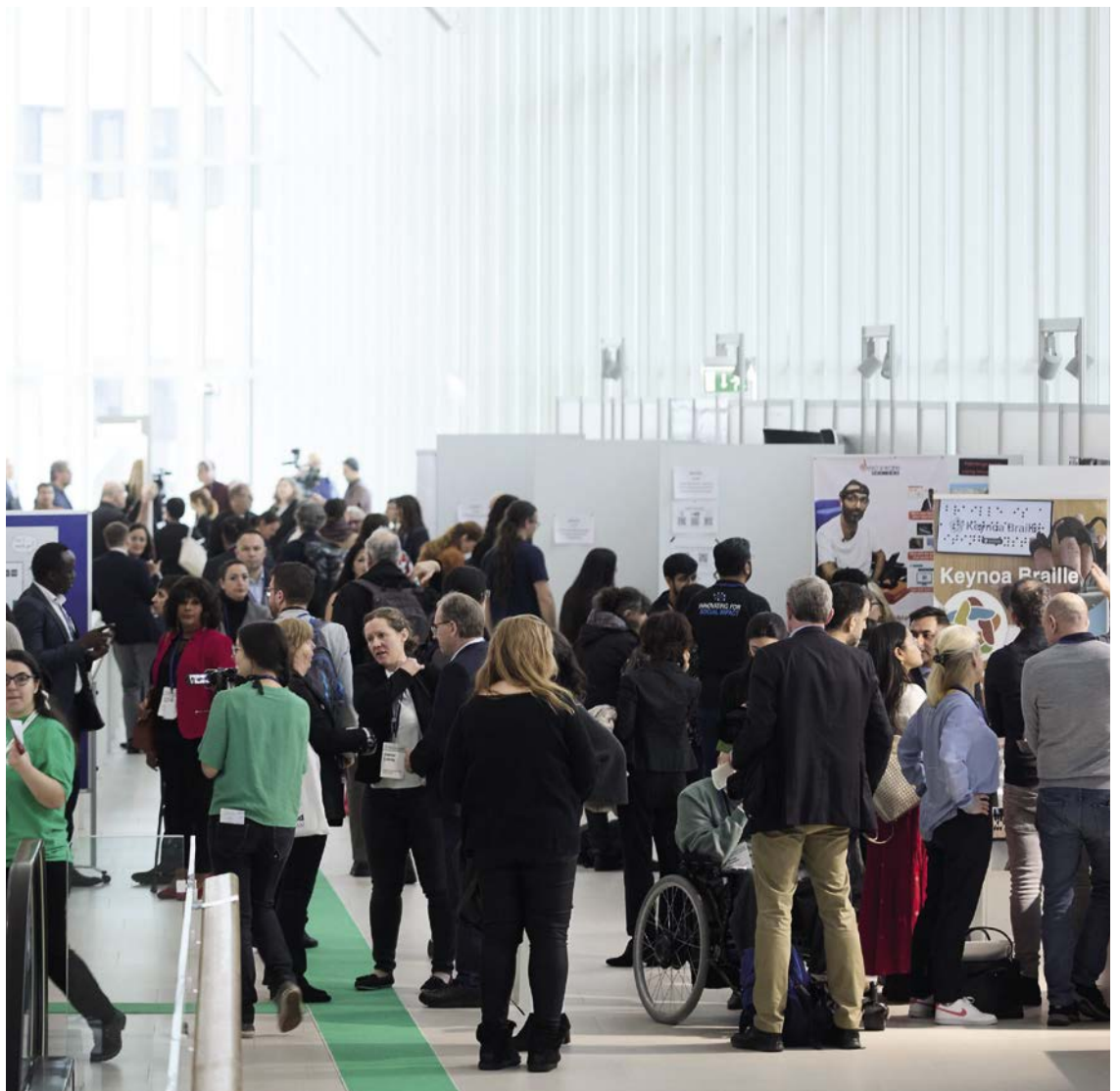




# Zero Project Guide

# Conference Accessibility

A practical guide for event organizers – the Zero Project Team answers the most common questions about in-person and online accessibility.



Accessible  
PDF:



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## Imprint

**Authors and contributors:** Fritz Ruhm, Michael Fembek, Wilfried Kainz, Judith Hermetter, Anja Günther, Robin Weis, Anna Königseder, Michael Pichler, Malgorzata Grobelna, Isabella Essl; **Design:** Christoph Almasy; **Graphic Facilitation:** Petra Plicka; **Editing:** John Tessitore

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Essl Foundation, c/o Haus der Philanthropie, Schottenring 16/3, 1010 Vienna, Austria

# Accessible and inclusive events – use the Zero Project experience!

FOREWORD BY MICHAEL FEMBEK, CEO OF THE ZERO PROJECT

The Zero Project, launched in 2008 by the Austrian non-profit ESSL Foundation, is committed to the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Since 2012 it has been organizing the Zero Project Conference, which has become a unique global meeting place to innovate for disability inclusion by showcasing innovative solutions. From the outset, the aim was to make the conference as inclusive and accessible as possible, and to turn it into a good practice itself.

It has been a significant learning experience, as have the unique circumstances of recent years caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and rapid technological advancements.

The very first Zero Project Conference took place in 2012, and since 2014 it has been hosted annually at the United Nations Office at Vienna (UNOV) and is also co-organizing Zero Project Conferences in India, Singapore, and Chile. For more than 10 years the Zero Project has been regularly engaged in conference sessions at the Conference of State Parties (COSP) at United Nations Headquarters in New York and has presented at leading conferences globally, including those of the ILO, the ITU, the EASPD, the Harkin Summit, and many more – usually more than ten a year.

In 2021, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting travel restrictions, the Zero Project Conference had to be fully virtual for the first time. A total of 85 hours of programming, featuring nearly 500 speakers, was streamed live over three days on three different channels.

From 2022 to 2024 the Zero Project Conference was held as a hybrid event, with the entire programme streamed live. Both the Zero Project Conference 2024 and 2025 attracted more than 1,000 participants from some 100 countries, and offered more than 120 sessions over three days. Additional side events and smaller networking gatherings take place inside and outside the conference venue, including the Austrian Parliament.

In Austria, we have been organizing company dialogues ('Unternehmensdialoge') together with regional partner organizations since 2017. These one-day events take place throughout the year at a range of locations – in event centres as well as in offices, government buildings, and even on company premises.

Having extensive expertise, we thought it was a good time to publish the Zero Project Accessibility Guide in 2025 (a new and completely revised version of a Guide we first published in 2019).

We try to be as open and outspoken about what we do and about our experience, and we do not claim that anything is ideal or universally applicable, as each event is unique – shaped by its context, resources, and conditions.

Making conferencing more accessible is an endeavour that we can only do together, all of us, and this is our contribution to travel faster. Join us in this mission! We look forward to hearing your ideas, experiences, and suggestions to help us continue advancing this process.

# A guide to start your own journey

This guide aims to help event organizers create inclusive events in which everyone can equally participate. The measures and recommendations are based on the knowledge and experience gained by the Zero Project in the course of more than 12 years of organizing its Zero Project Conference in Vienna and being part of literally hundreds other organizing teams.

## There is no perfectly accessible conference

This guide provides practical advice for practical decision. It does not offer final or one-size-fits-all solutions or scientific knowledge about conference accessibility.

It does not offer perfection. It is important to note that no event will ever be one hundred per cent accessible and inclusive. In practice, not everything can be done, due to budgetary restraints, local conditions, available expertise, or other limited resources.

### CONTRIBUTE YOUR OWN EXPERTISE!

If you would like to contribute your expertise, suggest improvements, or share your experiences, please contact us at

[office@zeroproject.org](mailto:office@zeroproject.org) or visit

[zeroproject.org/conference-accessibility](https://zeroproject.org/conference-accessibility)

Still, each and every event organizer has to make decisions, and this is where the Zero Project Guide come in. In the end, every event organizer defines what will be offered in terms of accessibility.

## Work with regional DPOs, and ask your future participants!

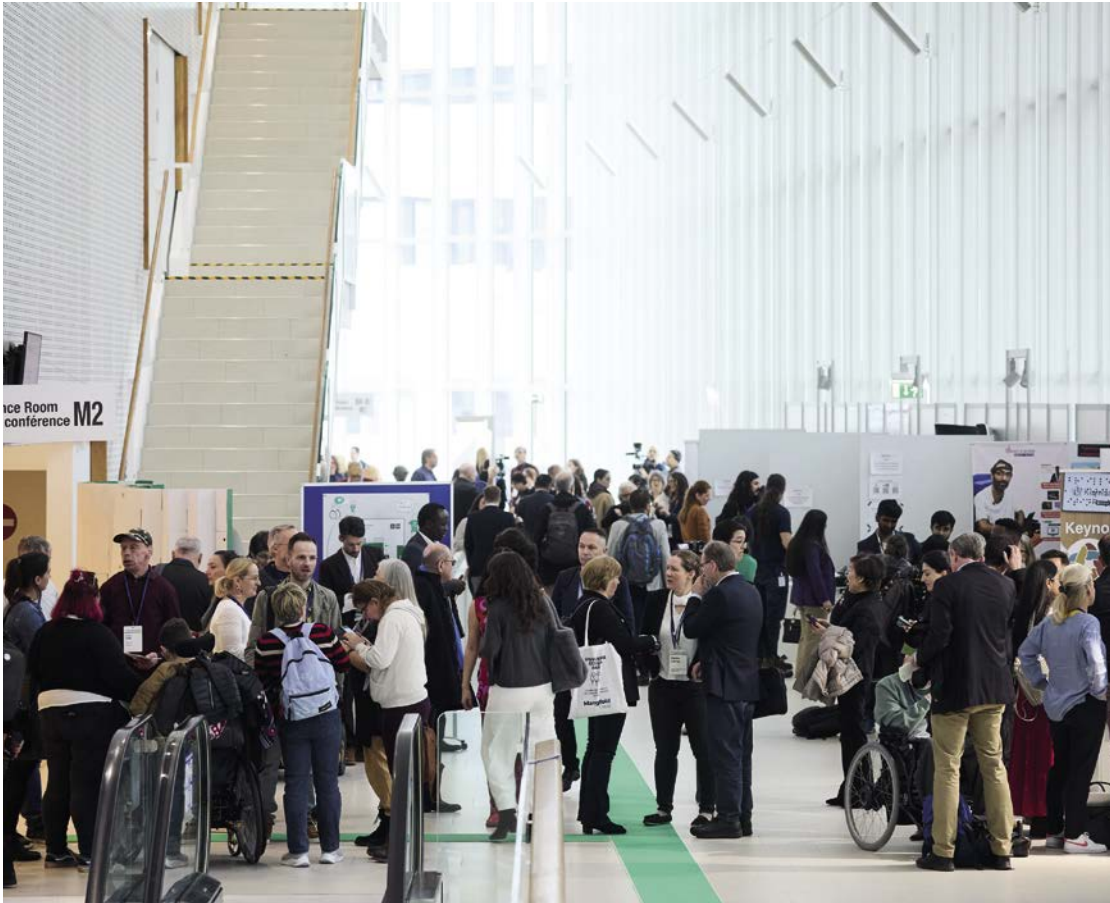
We would like to offer one critical advice at the very start: It is of overall importance to (1) involve local DPOs at an early stage; and (2) engage with participants themselves and ask them about their needs.

If practical advice and direct feedback about the needs of the future participants is included in the planning of an event, this automatically leads to more realistic and effective solutions. This not only avoids unwanted challenges at the last minute but also saves money.

Event organizers are sometimes not confident enough in accessibility to commit to fully accessible conferencing, fearing they might get it wrong and face criticism on social media. They should not be. A vast majority appreciates any effort if taken seriously and involving the community.

## The whole journey: From venue selection to post-event feedback

The following nine chapters begin by exploring how to choose a suitable venue and highlighting the key criteria for an inclusive environment. They also explain how to ensure accessible travel and accommodation for participants.



The Zero Project Conference has been hosted at the United Nations Office at Vienna since 2014. More than 1,000 participants from around 100 countries attend the annual conference. More than 20 per cent of them inform us about their needs for accessibility and assistance in the course of the registration.

One chapter focuses on the essential issue of communication, specifically on making event information accessible, ensuring inclusive registration, and meeting the individual needs of participants.

Technical solutions also play a crucial role. This guide provides information on selecting suitable conference applications, using assistive technologies on-site, and accessing services such as sign language interpretation, subtitling, and audio description. It also addresses the specific requirements of hybrid and virtual events.

Another chapter covers orientation at the venue, including the design of an inclusive reception area. It also presents measures to ensure the accessibility of lectures and panels. Additionally, aspects of participant well-being are addressed, such as trained staff, catering, and rest areas.

### **THE ONLINE GLOSSARY TO UNDERSTAND THE LANGUAGE OF ACCESSIBILITY**

There is an online glossary available with this Guide, containing more than 70 topics and terms you may come across as an event organizer. These terms are explained in a concise way and supplemented with practical tips. Where possible, the terms are illustrated with images or photos.

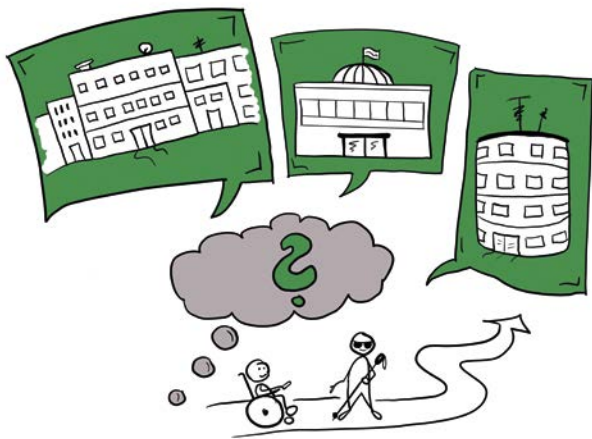
Find more information:

[zeroproject.org/  
conference-accessibility](https://zeroproject.org/conference-accessibility)



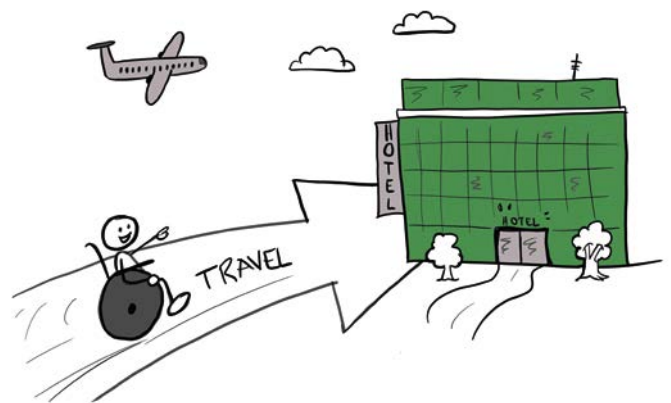
# A picture guide to accessibility

Making a conference, a venue, or an online event more accessible in nine steps, visualized.



## Choose a venue that works for everyone

Think of everyone attending, not only wheelchair users.



## Ensure accessible accommodation and travel

Consider the entire journey for participants, not only the venue itself.



## Start with communications and registration

Use an accessible registration website and Easy Language.



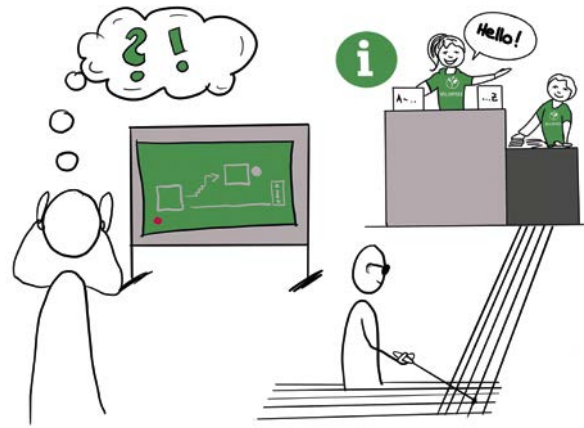
## Inclusive digital services are broadly available

Choose apps and services that work for all participants.



### Host hybrid and remote conferences

Tools like MS Teams and Zoom now offer a lot for free.



### Think of on-site orientation

Add guiding and personal assistance to the organization.



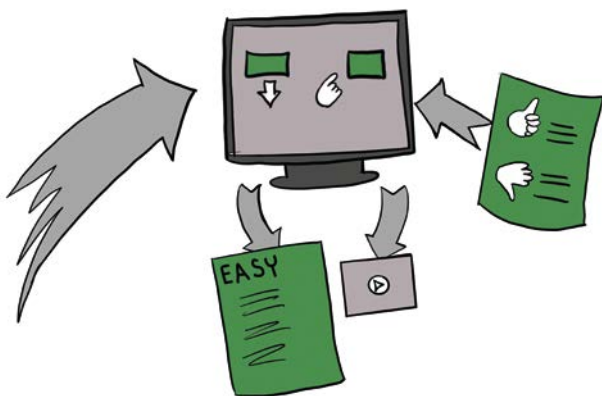
### Make sessions and content accessible

Offer several ways to present content.



### Take care of on-site well-being and inclusion

Train staff and catering, and offer sensory spaces.



### Ask for follow-up and feedback

Run a participants survey and feedback it to your team.

### YOUR MOST IMPORTANT CHECKLIST

- Choose a venue that works for everyone
- Ensure accessible accommodation and travel
- Start with communications and registration
- Inclusive digital services are broadly available
- Host hybrid and remote conferences
- Think of on-site orientation
- Make sessions and content accessible
- Take care of on-site well-being and inclusion
- Ask for follow-up and feedback



# 1.

# Choosing a Venue That Works for Everyone

Choosing a venue that is accessible to persons with disabilities is a fundamental step in organizing an inclusive conference. Involving local Disabled People's Organizations (DPOs) early in the selection process will prevent issues from arising later on regarding physical accessibility. Activate your local network and conference partners to gather advice and build feedback loops with them later on.

**Wheelchair accessibility** is a central consideration, as well as proximity to accessible accommodation options and infrastructure, such as public transport. Hotels may be a good choice if they combine both aspects. However, we strongly recommend inspecting any potential venue in person or, if an in-person visit is not possible, requesting detailed photos, videos, and measurements.

Here is a list of details that you should confirm with a potential conference venue:

- Ensure **step-free access to all conference areas**, such as plenary and seminar rooms, speaker podiums, registration areas, toilets, catering areas, and other places where social events may take place.
- Check whether **doors are wide enough** and whether automatic or low-resistance doors are available.
- Pay attention to the wheelchair-accessible **height of counters and tables** (also avoiding the high bar tables in the catering areas which are a nightmare for wheelchair users) as well as **flexible seating arrangements** in the rooms where sessions are held.
- If the venue has a capacity limit, remember that some participants may attend with a **personal assistant**.
- Check whether the venue allows service animals, such as guide dogs.

A key tip is to confirm the venue's flexibility in providing temporary solutions, such as **portable ramps or tactile flooring**. Early communication with venue management about accessibility needs and potential accommodations is essential to avoid costly adjustments later.

## Common pitfalls to avoid when choosing a venue

Keep in mind that the choice of a venue is not just about the venue itself but also about whether every participant can get there safely and independently. Consider the broader context of the location: How accessible is it by public transport, including accessible airports, if you are organizing an international event?

Be mindful of your budget in this context – for instance, the cost of transport and the timing of your event. Peak seasons can be expensive, so you might choose to **move your event to the off-season**. Comparing the overall costs of different types of venues is advisable. If accessible hotels prove to be expensive, other options could include **conference centres or universities**. However, keep in mind the safety of the area where the venue is located.

Venues in areas without accessible parking or transport options should also be avoided unless additional arrangements can be made. Especially in the context of historic or older buildings, watch out for a lack of physical accessibility. This could include venues with stairs as the only access to key areas, narrow hallways or entrances, and a lack of **accessible restrooms**. Be particularly aware that standards for accessible restrooms can vary across countries and continents.





## Flexible spaces

It is particularly important that the rooms can be adapted to the exact requirements. At the Zero Project Conference in Vienna, different rooms are available that can be adapted according to the session. For example, give wheelchair users room to move around, and place sign language interpreters where they are needed.

## What participants with visual, hearing, or intellectual disabilities require

However, physical accessibility is not the only consideration. For your participants who are deaf or hard of hearing, different accessibility measures will be required, such as tactile information or induction loops. Also consider participants with intellectual disabilities, for whom **easy-to-understand information** and guidance will be useful. Other factors might be **colour blindness or neurodivergence-related** needs, which will impact decisions regarding lighting, acoustics, and the provision of a quiet room.

Obviously, venues that are unwilling to collaborate on accessibility improvements or training their staff should not be considered. To this end, be sure you have an **assigned contact person** to liaise with for any issues during the preparations and the event itself.

### RED FLAGS FOR PLANNERS

- Not wheelchair accessible (restrooms, bathrooms, cafeteria, corridors, the space in front of meeting rooms, elevators, etc.).
- Inflexible stage setup: No accessible podiums for persons with motor disabilities or visual impairments.
- Untrained or uncooperative staff: Venue staff must be trained and informed about accessibility. Do not rely on event or hotel managers who claim to “know it all already.”
- Unjustifiable costs: Verify the cost of technology, what is included in the package, and what needs to be rented separately, including technical support staff.



### Step free entry zones, automatic doors

The venue should enable independent and safe access for all participants. Ramps must have a gentle slope, non-slip surface, handrails, and adequate width to ensure safe and independent use.

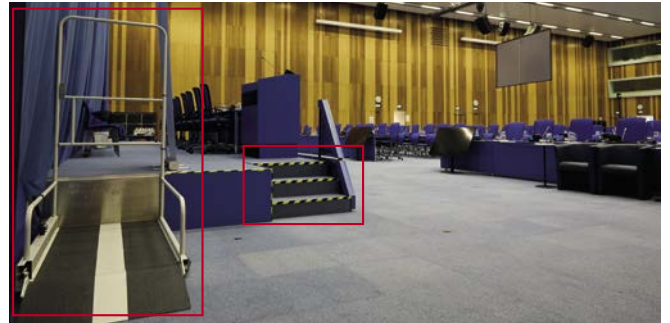


### Wide corridors, adequate lightning

Corridors must be wide enough for wheelchairs, free of obstacles, and have non-slip surfaces. Adequate lighting, clear signage, and turning space are essential for safe and independent navigation.

### Smooth and quick access to the stage

Various options should be available for stage access. As an alternative to a ramp, a barrier-free lift can also be used.



## WHAT IS IMPORTANT FOR KATHARINA



Katharina Praniess is a psychologist and consultant at WAG Assistenzgenossenschaft, which supports persons with disabilities in Austria by organizing personal assistance. Katharina also works as a consultant for Zero Project Austria. Katharina has spastic tetraparesis and uses a wheelchair. The following are very important to her:

“Of course, it would be ideal if the venue were also reachable by an accessible public transport system. In any case, the building hosting the event must be accessible. For me, this includes **automatic doors, lifts, and barrier-free toilets.**”

In the room, there should be a **designated place for wheelchair users. Ideally, this should be at the front of the room, in the centre aisle**, to allow for an easy exit during the event. Often, wheelchair users are seated at the side of the room, which restricts their view.

What is often overlooked is the need for a sufficient number of **accessible tables at buffets.** Ideally, all tables should be wheelchair accessible! I often see situations where most tables are high bar tables, with only one accessible option. This significantly limits the opportunity to choose conversation partners.”

## 2.

# Ensuring Accessible Accommodation and Travel

Travel and transportation options strongly depend on the location of your venue. **Organizing individual transport solutions** will be a significant factor in your budget; however, it might be a necessary one if accessible public transport options are limited. Closely involve your local DPOs and partners in the planning process to identify the best possible solutions.

If your venue is connected to accessible public transport, ensure all participants receive **clear and accessible information about routes and accessibility features**, along with relevant links or phone numbers in case more detailed information is required.

For international participants, share a list of **accessible buses and train stations**. With respect to fixed flight and train arrival times, coordinating and organizing accessible group shuttle services may be a viable option for those participants who cannot use public transport.

Some participants may arrive in their own personal vehicles. Ensure you clearly **indicate parking spaces in proximity** to the entrance or, if required by your venue, and ensure the vehicle is registered and cleared to enter the venue grounds. This might also require using a different entrance, so clarify the closest accessible way into the building.

If providing maps of the surrounding area or conference venue, you should include a detailed written description to support people who cannot view the map or for whom a detailed description beforehand may reduce anxiety or concerns about attending.

Moreover, ensure that **addresses are always complemented with URL links** to digital map

services such as Google Maps, which can help provide directions for visually impaired or blind participants.

Furthermore, allow **enough time** for your participants who use wheelchairs **to board buses or vans**. Do not base calculations on previous events, as they may not have included persons with disabilities boarding transportation services. Managing expectations and timelines is key.

## Steps to secure accessible accommodation

When you identify accessible options, always bear in mind that requirements vary individually and still might not work in the end for all the participants, though everything seemed to have been considered. For any recommendations you offer, no matter how detailed, always **provide a useful direct contact** for the hotel or accommodation.

Details are key to a successful event, as the definition of “accessible” can vary. Always ask for specific features, including measurements, and **request photos or videos to understand the actual situation**.

A physically accessible accommodation must meet a range of criteria. Rooms must provide appropriate layouts, such as **sufficient space to manoeuvre a wheelchair** around the bed and furniture; **roll-in showers; visual alarms, cupboards, and clothes hangers** that can be accessed at lower heights; as well as **hearing accessibility features**. In addition to the rooms, other facilities such as the entrance, reception and dining areas, lifts, and car parks must also be barrier-free.

## Transport information augmented by emergency hotlines

If the event venue is served by accessible public transport, all attendees should be provided with information about routes and accessibility features. But they should also be equipped with emergency phone numbers or other communication lines to get in touch when they are in trouble.



You can search for accessible hotels on a variety of travel booking websites, such as Booking.com and Tripadvisor. A Google search for accessible accommodation can also yield valuable results. Another option is travel agencies that organize accessible trips. Again, your local DPOs and partners will be invaluable in identifying suitable recommendations for your participants.

Once you have a **list of recommended accommodation options** and details about available features, be sure to communicate this to your participants **well in advance**. You can also provide useful assistance by pre-reserving rooms as

### RED FLAGS FOR PLANNERS

- Event agencies need practical experience in handling accessible events, including handling emergency situations such as medical or technical support.
- Hotels and accommodations have to have (1) accessible minimum standards; and (2) a willingness to listen and train its staff where needed.

early as possible. Consider coordinating directly with hotels for group rates, but be aware that **online-only reservations may not be suitable for all guests**. A phone booking option may be better suited for participants who might otherwise face inaccessible or hard-to-navigate hotel booking websites.

### Event or travel agencies need to have experience

When working with an agency, ensure they have experience handling accessibility needs. Ask for examples of past events they have organized with accessibility in mind, and request references from clients with similar goals.

Confirm the agency's familiarity with local resources, such as providers of sign language interpreters or accessible transportation options. Ensure they can manage challenges such as limited availability of accessible hotel rooms or transportation in the area, or even emergency situations when medical support is required or a wheelchair is broken.

Agencies should also have clear processes for collecting and accommodating participant needs.

# 3.

## Ensuring Accessible Communication and Registration

It is important to offer **materials in various formats, such as text files, PDFs optimized for screen readers, large print, and QR codes** to help direct readers from print to accessible digital materials.

Include **alternative text for images, clear headings, and high-contrast colours** to enhance readability. For individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing, provide captions or transcripts for videos. For those with visual impairments, offer **audio versions** of written content. If the event has a website, ensure it is easy to navigate, and make sure forms, including registration pages, are fully accessible. Allow attendees to request specific formats during registration, as different disabilities require different accommodations.

To assist persons with intellectual disabilities, offer a contact option for addressing any questions directly and provide **essential information in Easy Language**. This could be included in a separate document that is easily accessible, such as an **online accessible PDF**. Many persons with intellectual disabilities use smartphones, so it's important to provide a format optimized for mobile navigation. For example, this includes switching between apps, such as from a browser to a text document reader app.

### Highlighting the availability of accessibility features

Understanding available features is key for participants when making decisions regarding their attendance and involvement. Therefore, in each communication – whether it is an event

website, an email, or other channels – be sure to mention which features are available directly or provide a link to a dedicated section with detailed information. Also, provide information on where and how these features can be accessed. For example, clarify **where exactly to collect an induction loop headset**, and whether a particular feature is available in all rooms at all times or only for specific sessions.

Always include a **contact option for additional questions**, and ensure **all staff members are briefed** on available features.

To reinforce this communication, you might also **hold an opening session** at the event to provide an overview of the available accessibility features and explain how participants can use them. This session ensures that everyone, including those who may not have reviewed the materials beforehand, is informed and supported from the outset.

#### VIDEO OF ACCESSIBILITY FEATURES

This video provides an overview of available accessibility features for both the in-person and the online audiences at the Zero Project Conference in Vienna.



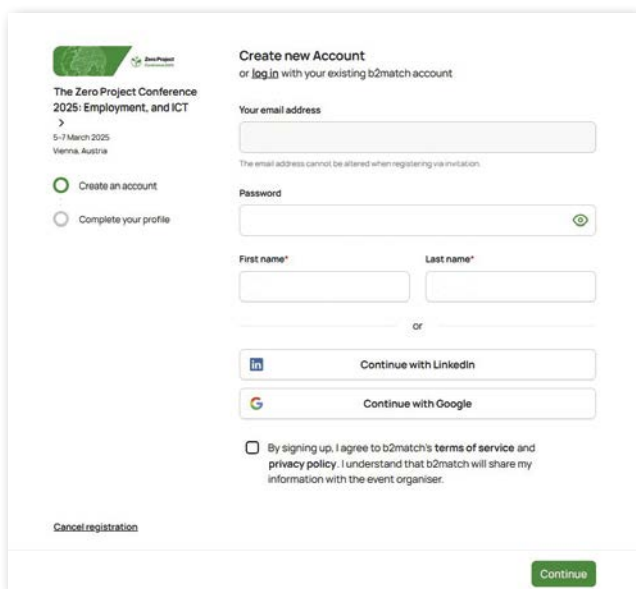
[Watch on Youtube](#)

## Supporting an inclusive registration process

If you opt for a digital registration form or platform, keep in mind that accessibility features cannot simply be added as an afterthought, especially not on short notice. Your choice of provider should be based on already built-in accessibility features.

Online platforms usually require a personal email address for registration, meaning the same email address cannot be used twice. Given that not everyone has an email address, define a workaround that allows registration either without an email address or that enables multiple participants to register using a single email address.

As an alternative, consider providing accessible Word documents for registration upon request. Some sections may be mandatory, while others, such as networking preferences or personal profiles on the conference platform, can remain optional.

The image shows a registration form for 'The Zero Project Conference 2025: Employment, and ICT' held from 5-7 March 2025 in Vienna, Austria. The form is titled 'Create new Account or log in with your existing b2match account'. It includes a 'Your email address' field with a note that the email cannot be changed after registration. There is a 'Password' field with a visibility toggle. Below these are fields for 'First name\*' and 'Last name\*'. There are also social login options for 'Continue with LinkedIn' and 'Continue with Google'. At the bottom, there is a checkbox for agreeing to terms and privacy policy, and a 'Continue' button. A 'Cancel registration' link is visible at the bottom left.

For the global Zero Project Conference we work with platform provider B2Match. Pictured here is the online registration form.

Email communication is an effective way to share important updates and reminders before the conference, such as those related to registration deadlines.

For large events, phone support may be impractical for the organizing team to handle. Whenever possible for smaller events, consider sharing a contact number through smartphone messaging apps such as WhatsApp. This is particularly useful for international participants, as it eliminates high phone charges and allows video calls or image sharing to resolve issues in real time.

Apps like WhatsApp also provide a flexible and efficient way to assist participants who may require immediate guidance or clarification. However, be mindful of international data privacy concerns – always have an alternative option for guests who prefer to communicate through encrypted messaging applications such as Signal.

## Key information to collect from participants

Events always have certain constraints – whether related to budget, language, or accessibility barriers – and as an organizer, you will likely have to make some tough decisions about what can be offered. This is why transparency is key when communicating with participants.

When collecting information, clearly communicate why it's being collected, how it will be used, and assure participants that their data will only be shared with staff responsible for implementing accommodations.

To address diverse needs, include an open-ended question such as, “Is there anything else we can do to ensure your full participation?” This allows participants to share additional requirements that may not fit within predefined categories, ensuring that no need is overlooked.

## Handling requests for specific accommodations

Requests for individualized requirements should be approached with flexibility, empathy, and a problem-solving mindset. Start by ensuring that participants feel comfortable sharing their requests. Use neutral, non-judgmental language when gathering information, such as: “Please let us know any specific accommodations or adjustments you require to fully participate.”

If an individualized request is submitted, acknowledge it promptly, confirming that the team is exploring options. If necessary, consult with the participant to fully understand their needs. Avoid assumptions; instead, ask questions such as, “Could you provide more details on how we can best assist you?”

If fulfilling the request is not feasible due to budget, timing, or resource constraints, communicate this transparently. Offer alternative solutions or partial accommodations that could still improve the attendee’s experience. **Being open about limitations** is crucial for participants when deciding whether to attend and will impact whether they have a positive event experience.

### IMPORTANT PLANNING DETAILS

- Be thoughtful and thorough with collecting data about your participants, and also how to delete them again. Ask for needs and not disabilities.
- Encourage staff members or volunteers to support individual and ad hoc participant needs.



### Collect information, respect privacy

It is important for event organizers to know what requirements participants have. For example, guide dogs are not allowed everywhere.



### A problem-solving mindset

Requests for individualized requirements should be approached with flexibility, empathy, and a problem-solving mindset.

# 4.

## Managing Technology and Digital Services in the Room

### Selecting an inclusive conference app

Conference apps offer a range of benefits, from facilitating networking to enabling quick and efficient updates to the event agenda. A digital platform also holds great potential for enhancing accessibility.

For the Zero Project Conference, we use a service called B2Match as our conference platform. It provides all relevant information, including an **interactive agenda, accessibility features, FAQs, and a gallery of speakers**. Additionally, it offers **various networking tools**. Due to certain accessibility limitations in the app on the mobile phone, we recommend using the platform via one of its web-browsers instead, particularly for participants with visual impairments.

When selecting a conference app provider and assessing accessibility features, consider the following:

1. Consult a local Disabled People's Organization to gather insights and recommendations based on their experience with different providers;
2. Request an accessibility statement to obtain a detailed overview of available features and certifications; and
3. Ensure that an assigned contact person of the conference app is available to promptly address and resolve any accessibility issues encountered by you or your participants. Conference apps are no "online-service only."

### Choosing on-site technology services

Your starting point for determining the technology services for your event is defining its format: **Is it an online, hybrid, or in-person event?**

The simplest format is a fully offline (in-person) event. It requires captions and sign language interpretation to be displayed on screens in the venue, but no complex technical services.

Hybrid formats, however, are more complex, as multiple feeds (**one or more room cameras, captioning, sign language, presentation on the screen, online presenters**) must be combined into a single screen. This requires both experience and expertise from a trusted technical team. In practice, you need to carefully plan how online participants – within the constraints of a screen – and in-person attendees will experience captions, sign language interpretation, presentations, and speakers.

To reduce complexity, consider using a fixed camera on a tripod rather than multiple camera angles or a moving handheld camera. Similarly, if a remote speaker joins an in-person session, it will impact how different feeds are managed. Always **schedule a trial run** to ensure smooth operations on the day of the event.

### Managing sign language, captioning, and audio translation services

The first step in determining sign language services is identifying which languages will be needed. For our global conference, we use **International Sign as a common denominator**, since our





## Sign language

There are many different sign languages. For a conference with participants from different countries, we recommend using International Sign as the common denominator. This saves costs and resources.



participants come from around the world. It is important to note that International Sign is provided exclusively by deaf interpreters. Therefore, your service provider will need to work in tandem with a hearing interpreter to translate audio into International Sign, which results in higher costs that should be factored into your event budget.

For all sign languages, you will likely work with hearing interpreters who can join either online or on-site. Consult your local DPO to understand which certifications and service providers to consider.

Captioning services have evolved significantly. While human-generated captions were previously our preferred option for the Zero Project Conference, AI-generated captions have improved substantially over the years. We now use **Microsoft Teams' captions** for our conference in Vienna and for smaller online events, such as webinars. This reduces costs while maintaining high quality standards.



## Audio translation

Simultaneous interpreting requires both a visual and audio feed, which can be set up via platforms such as Microsoft Teams.

## Captioning

While human-generated captions were previously our preferred option, AI-generated captions have improved substantially over the years.

For the Zero Project Conference 2025, we are introducing **live interpretation into Easy Language** for the first time. While this service is still in its early stages, it is expected to develop rapidly in the coming years, likely leading to AI-powered audio translation services. Live Easy-Language interpretation requires both a video feed (preferably) and an audio feed, which can be set up through platforms such as Microsoft Teams.

### IMPORTANT DECISIONS TO MAKE

- Hybrid events can get incredibly complex to handle, and can get the unwanted stressful atmosphere of a TV station.
- Sign language is a critical accessibility feature and has to be considered carefully to make it work for participants and connect with conference technology.

# 5.

## Hosting Hybrid Conferences and Remote Participation

An easy and affordable way to share event sessions online is to **record and upload** them later to a suitable platform after the event. There are some advantages to this option, primarily because it comes at a much lower cost than livestreaming.

For the global Zero Project Conference, **we use YouTube**. One of its features for on-demand content is **captions in around 300 languages**, provided that a so-called “.srt file” is uploaded, which includes the English captions and timecodes. The English captions are generated through our live captioning during the conference, so they can easily be added to the upload. The International Sign interpretation and presentations are also captured by our cameras in the venue and included in these session recordings.

The delay in uploading the on-demand content allows for additional quality assurance, such as correcting possible typos in the captions. The duration of the **delay depends on your team resources**. The upload itself takes time as data is transferred, but you also need to assign a person to oversee descriptions and settings on your streaming platform. Depending on the amount of data and your team’s availability, this can potentially take a significant amount of time to process.

One reason we use YouTube is its ease of distribution via URL links, eliminating the need for the online audience to register, which could otherwise create barriers.

Livestreams are not just costly, but they do require an expert level of coordination between different camera feeds, presentations, and

captions to ensure communication access. From 2021 to 2024 we offered livestreams of all Zero Project Conference sessions, but due to cost considerations and a limited number of viewers accessing this offering, we decided to shift to providing a livestream for only one stream and select sessions while offering on-demand content after the conference for all the sessions.

When contracting a tech team, request references and ask about their experience handling such complex services. The tech team must ensure all captions, sign language interpretation, and other inputs are properly displayed in an accessible layout. A **common mistake is using captions that are too small for users** to read on their screens or that create awkward line breaks.

### Managing a panel with on-site and remote speakers

Remote speakers who are joining an in-person session introduce a layer of complexity. However, this can be managed **using MS Teams or Zoom calls that are connected** to the conference’s technical setup.

Schedule a test run with a team member acting as a remote speaker before your event. Pay attention to whether the captions are visible to both online and on-site speakers, as well as how to position and share the camera feed so it shows the presentations, other speakers, and sign language interpretation.

## Hybrid formats

For a hybrid panel, online participants, presentations, subtitles, sign language interpreters, and speakers must all be visible on one screen.



## Remote speakers

It is important that all remote participants are online before the session starts. If they are not speaking, they should mute themselves to avoid interference.



On the day of the event, ensure that **each remote speaker joins the call a few minutes early** so there are no delays in starting your session on time. Assign a **volunteer to monitor the virtual waiting room** to address any potential last-minute questions from your remote speakers.

Brief your remote speakers on muting themselves when they are not speaking to avoid background noise interfering with the session. Alternatively, share the session run order with the technical team so they can mute and unmute the remote speakers at the appropriate times.

## WHERE THE DEVIL IS IN THE DETAIL

- Be careful when opting for live streaming of hybrid events, since this can quickly get costly and complex. Recording and a later upload to Youtube is much easier and cheaper.
- Managing a panel with both on-site and remote speakers needs careful planning and trained staff in the conference room.

# 6.

## On-site Orientation: How Participants Get from A to B

Address orientation through human assistance, technological tools, and information in various formats can assist all participants to find conference rooms, food, the toilettes, wardrobes, etc.

At the Zero Project Conference, we work with **volunteers who are available throughout the venue** and are easily identifiable by their green t-shirts featuring our logo and the word “VOLUNTEER” in large, bold letters.

Volunteers receive training on the venue layout and accessible routes both inside and outside the building. They are also **equipped with printed materials and apps** to assist participants in navigating the agenda, finding the right room, and communicating with deaf participants using Google Translate for quick voice-to-text communication.

They also have access to a contact number of the event management team, should an issue arise that they cannot resolve themselves.

Before the conference, a **video recording of the recommended route** from the nearest accessible public transport station to the plenary rooms is shared with participants to help them navigate and anticipate potential barriers such as steps, long walking distances, and seating options for rest breaks.

**Large-print signage** is installed from the venue entrance to the conference rooms. A large-print venue map is displayed next to the reception desk to indicate plenary rooms, restrooms, and other useful services. This map is accompanied by a version with **graphic facilitations that replace abstract icons and words** to enhance clarity.

A **QR code** allows participants to download an audio description of the venue. The conference platform offers a digital venue map in PDF format.

**Tactile flooring** guides participants from the reception desk to all plenary rooms.

### Setting up an inclusive registration desk

Training staff on how to approach and assist participants is essential. This also involves understanding **registration processes for personal assistants and policies regarding guide dogs**. Additional staff members should be available to assist attendees in reaching the plenary rooms if they do not have a personal assistant. Also, ensure that wheelchair users have a clear path and adequate space to access the registration desk. Avoid high tables, as they may be inaccessible to wheelchair users or individuals with dwarfism.

Long waiting lines can be a major inconvenience, and while they may be unavoidable, various measures can help support participants in such situations. For example, offer the option to **collect a ticket or event pass a day in advance**; and assign staff members to monitor queues, identify reasons for delays, and assist individuals who may have difficulty standing for extended periods.

### Useful technologies for on-site orientation

At the Zero Project Conference, we **offer portable induction loop headsets** that can be picked up at the reception desk. Participants must pro-

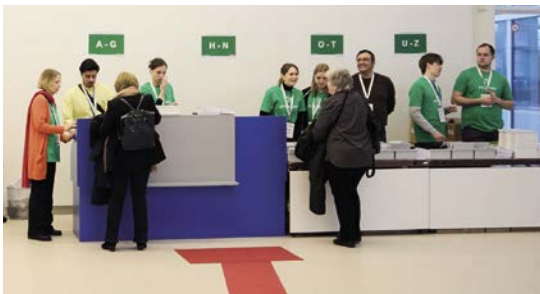
## Assistance

At the Zero Project Conference, we work with volunteers who are available throughout the venue and are easily identifiable by their green t-shirts.



## Tactile flooring

Mobile tactile floor guidance systems with clear, distinct lines direct participants to key areas such as registration, conference rooms, and restrooms.



## Registration

As the first point of contact, the registration desk should be well-lit and welcoming. Ensure a clear, accessible path for wheelchair users with adequate space at the desk.



## Orientation

Large and a little playful maps are well appreciated tools for orientation within the conference venue, which are often difficult to navigate for newcomers and many others.

vide an ID to borrow one of the 'Antenna' devices, which are hairclip-sized devices that convert 60 to 90 dB sounds into 256 levels of vibration and light to convey the characteristics of sound.

At our global and regional conference venues, no other assistive technologies were pre-installed; and to our knowledge, such technologies are rarely available. If these services are relevant to your audience, the best approach is to consult local DPOs, as they can provide insights into specifications and potential challenges that you may need to consider.

## WORKING WITH THE UNAVOIDABLE

- Make participants feel welcome, especially if they are in an unpleasant situation such as having to queue for registration, which is sometimes unavoidable.
- Well trained staff or volunteers can be there, express understanding, and offer apologies and guidance.

# 7.

## Making Sessions and Their Presentations Accessible

Organizing an accessible session involves multiple aspects: (1) physical accessibility within the room, (2) ensuring the session's content is accessible for all participants both on-site and online, (3) proactive communication, and (4) the technical setup to facilitate all of the above.

### Plan for wheelchair accessibility

In terms of physical accessibility, consider reserving spaces for individuals using wheelchairs or other mobility aids, ensuring they have easy access to the room, the front, and the podium if needed. **Do not leave these considerations to on-site staff**; instead, clarify the layout in advance and personally inspect the room once it is set up. If in doubt, engage your local DPOs and partners for feedback and advice.

Allow sufficient time for panellists to settle in on stage. A ramp may be required for wheelchair users, and stage furniture should be adaptable to accommodate the diverse needs and preferences of the speakers. Some may want to sit next to their assistant, for example. Or sign language interpreters might have to be positioned at special spots.

### Clear instructions for speakers and moderators before the conference

Ensure clear communication with moderators and speakers: Clarify which languages will be used, both spoken and signed, and explain how interpretation will work. Schedule time early on to share detailed session information, including the physical setup, and introduce speakers to each other.

We recommend organizing an additional and separate meeting exclusively for the moderator or session chair to provide further practical information, such as who will be their main point of contact should an issue arise; or to familiarize them with any specific accessibility requirements he or she should be aware of, such as the need to rephrase audience questions if they are too complex or spoken too softly. Do not just list the requirements; instead, clarify the advantages and drawbacks of possible solutions to find the most effective ones.

### Sign language interpreters need information to prepare

Sign language interpreters require access to relevant information before the session to ensure quality. This may include scripted questions for speakers, the names of all speakers (to ensure correct spelling), or presentations containing technical terms.

The information collected in these preparatory meetings will also help determine the technical equipment needed for the session. This could include **different types of microphones** (such as clip-on, handheld, or table stands), the **positioning of screens** and sign language interpreters to ensure communication accessibility for speakers and audience members who are deaf or hard of hearing, or **audio description services for any videos** shown.

Consider the length and format of presentations. Pacing is particularly important for speakers and participants with intellectual disabilities, as it **allows time to process** information. It is also essential to incorporate breaks in longer sessions to prevent fatigue.

## Ensuring accessibility to all

It is beneficial to make all materials (slides, handouts, videos) available in accessible formats before the event. This allows both audience members and speakers to prepare and fully engage during the presentation.

Our recommendation is to **provide accessible PowerPoint templates to all presenters**. Presentations in inaccessible formats should not be accepted for several reasons:

- Presentations are crucial for briefing sign language interpreters and supporting participants, who can access materials online before or after the session.
- They are particularly helpful for participants who may experience language barriers if the conference is not in their native language.
- Some participants will use assistive technologies to access the content on their own devices.

As a conference organizer, reserve time to **review presentations and videos** to ensure they meet accessibility standards. Additionally, this allows you to verify that all presenters understand the session's objectives.

Previewing presentations helps ensure high-quality content and that speakers adhere to their allotted time. **For videos, we prepare audio descriptions for selected content** before the conference, and these scripts are read aloud during the event to enhance inclusivity.

At our conference, each presentation is reviewed before being uploaded to the conference platform, usually a week in advance. A common challenge is receiving presentations on time, as many speakers tend to make last-minute changes.

## BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS

- **Conference venue offerings:** Get clarity on what is included, particularly regarding the technical team responsible for managing lighting, stage setup, and other essential aspects, as this is a major cost factor.
- **Work with DPOs as consultants:** They can provide valuable insights on the quality of suppliers and may suggest alternative services.
- **Sign language interpretation:** This is a specialized service and, therefore, a significant cost factor. Discuss options with your local DPOs and partners, and consider remote services if you can provide the necessary technical setup.
- **Live captioning services** have become more automated, reducing costs. However, check with your DPOs to ensure that machine-generated captions meet your quality standards.
- **Investing in a senior technician** to manage and coordinate multiple feeds is worthwhile, especially for hybrid events. Providing live video from the stage, audience feeds, captions, sign language interpreters, presentations, and videos in an accessible manner is complex and requires skilled coordination.
- **Live streaming** can significantly impact your budget. Consider whether it adds value or if recordings can be made available on demand after the event.



## Audio description

Audio description is an additional audio commentary for video (or other visual media) that describes what can be seen on screen. This ensures that persons with visual impairments do not miss out on relevant information or action.

## Use all PowerPoint accessibility features

PowerPoint includes built-in accessibility checks to ensure features such as **high-contrast colours, large text, and clear fonts on slides**. To further improve accessibility, presenters should:

- Avoid using colour alone to convey important information.
- Describe visual content aloud, including images, graphics, and charts.
- Provide captions or subtitles for all videos to assist participants who are hard of hearing.

For participants with intellectual disabilities, consider additional support options:

- For highly complex topics, provide **live interpretation in easy-to-understand language**. This can be delivered through headsets or directly within the session, benefiting participants who speak different languages as well.
- **Graphic facilitation** can be a useful way to summarize key points, but ensure there is sufficient time allocated for its presentation.



## Moderator

The moderator should begin by describing the room setup, speaker positions, and any relevant details for audience engagement.

## Special considerations for online presentations

Platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and WebEx offer various accessibility tools. The platform you choose should be decided in consultation with your on-site technical team.

We recommend a test run at least 15 minutes before the session starts to ensure:

- Sign language interpreters are spotlighted
- Presentations are working correctly
- Videos are both visible and audible
- Live captioning is activated

Assigning a dedicated person to monitor settings and the chat is important. Encourage participants to report issues in the chat so they can be addressed promptly.

When planning the session, discuss the technical setup with speakers, as microphone quality and Internet stability are critical – especially for hard-of-hearing participants and sign interpreters who rely on clear audio for accurate captioning and interpretation.



## Graphic facilitation

During the sessions the graphic facilitator should be at the front of the room and there should be time in the agenda for him/her to summarize the graphics after each speaker or at the end of the session.



## Inclusive participation in sessions

The moderator should begin by describing the room setup, speaker positions, and any relevant details for audience engagement. For example, they should mention whether a staff member with a microphone will move through the room during Q&A sessions, and which assistive technologies are available and not known to everyone in the room. An option is to allow alternative ways to submit questions, such as text messages, if that is well planned and organized.

Speakers should also **briefly introduce themselves with an audio description**, allowing them to share relevant details about their identity or disability in their preferred (often very entertaining) words. If showcasing products, speakers should describe them both visually and audibly.

**Interactive Q&A sessions can present communication challenges.** The moderator should determine whether audience questions need repeating or paraphrasing due to language barriers or low audio levels and should also allow time for the sign interpreter to fully relay the question.

For sign interpretation, it is essential that **speakers do not interrupt or talk over one another**. In virtual environments, moderators should actively monitor the chat to ensure all questions are addressed and that participants can contribute through multiple formats, such as voice or text. For livestreams on public platforms such as YouTube, **assign a staff member to monitor chat activity**. If this is not feasible, disable the public chat function.

### INTERACTION WITH THE AUDIENCE

- Interactivity and participation of the audience has to be well planned and is often simply not working.
- Any interaction with the audience adds complexity to the jobs of sign language interpreters, or may cause microphone and audio issues. Not for beginners.

# 8.

## Take care of on-site Well-Being and Full Inclusion

### Training and organizing on-site staff

Ahead of the conference, involve your trusted DPOs to train staff, including those who have disabilities themselves, as they may still require training on other types of accessibility requirements.

Clarify a process for addressing issues and **escalating problems to senior staff members**, if necessary.

In addition to raising awareness, **address security and safety measures with all partners** – from contractors to hotel management. Review evacuation plans and emergency procedures to ensure they are safe for all participants. Consider additional space requirements, distances between relevant locations, and access to infrastructure; request confirmation that all these requirements will be met in advance.

### How to cater and serve inclusively

Offering a variety of food choices helps accommodate different tastes and accessibility requirements. For example, food that requires cutlery may be difficult to eat for participants with reduced mobility or limb differences.

The selection of food options will partly depend on your budget and catering service. **Be transparent about the available options** and ensure that all items are clearly **labelled, including allergen information**.

To assist participants with visual impairments in selecting their meal, assign a staff member to

describe the different options in detail. Be mindful of potential safety hazards: Empty plates, discarded bottles, and overflowing rubbish bins can pose risks for persons who are blind or create obstacles for other participants. Your contractor should regularly clear and clean all catering areas.

Brief staff members on nearby restaurant options that cater to different dietary requirements.

### Encouraging networking and conversation

A simple yet effective way to support networking and casual conversation is through the use of name badges. Ensure **names are highly visible** by using appropriate contrast, font, and large lettering. The name should be printed on both sides of the badge. This ensures that it remains visible regardless of how the badge is turned or rotated.

The conference platform we use for the global Zero Project Conference offers a networking feature whereby participants can **book individual meetings and receive a designated table** in a dedicated networking area. Here are a few key considerations:

- **Access to the meeting point:** The networking area is clearly marked on the venue map. It is a spacious room with a table plan and signage at the entrance. The table plan and table numbers are also available in Braille. Volunteers are available to assist participants in finding the correct meeting point.
- **Access to communication:** Participants can indicate which languages they speak on the conference platform. For meetings between



## Networking

The conference platform for the global Zero Project Conference offers a networking feature whereby participants can book individual meetings.

hearing and deaf participants, traditional notepads and pens are provided at the tables. Additionally, recommendations for speech-to-text and translation apps (e.g., SignNow, Google Translate) are accessible via QR code.

## Providing a sensory-friendly break room

A perfectly quiet room is difficult to achieve in practice, especially given the constraints of any event venue. The Zero Project Conference is held at the United Nations Office at Vienna, where we must adhere to specific regulations. Within these limitations, this is what we can offer:

- Located near the main areas but in a quieter corridor.
- Bright ceiling lights are turned off, with smaller, softer lamps used instead.
- Traditional conference seating is removed, and a few comfortable seating options and blankets are provided. This setup also ensures ample space for wheelchair users.

The quiet room should be clearly marked on the venue map and highlighted as part of the event's accessibility features.



## Name badges

A simple yet effective way to support networking is by using name badges. Ensure that names are highly visible and printed on both sides of the badge.

Some additional considerations:

- Soothing music or nature sounds are often provided for those who enjoy meditation; however, they may be disruptive for persons on the autism spectrum or individuals who are sensitive to sound for other reasons.
- Some event organizers provide sensory toys to help reduce stress and offer comfort. While opinions on this approach vary, it is generally more common than playing background music.
- In addition to blankets and pillows, you might consider adding lava lamps or textured padded floors or walls. However, always verify whether the venue permits such modifications.

### **SERVING FOOD SO THAT EVERYONE CAN EAT**

Catering staff has to understand the specific needs of participants with different types of disabilities. High tables are a no-go for wheelchair users. Food that needs to be cut or having to hold your plate and glass in your hand during a lunch break will be difficult to manage for many participants

# 9.

## Follow-Up and Feedback

### Making event materials available post-conference

Plan your follow-up activities in advance. It is important to set expectations among your audience, especially for individuals who may not be able to attend in person but still wish to be part of the experience.

For the Zero Project Conference, we share all presentations in an accessible PowerPoint format, allowing participants to download them via the conference platform.

Session recordings are made available on-demand on YouTube and the conference platform as soon as possible after the event concludes.

In addition, a summary of the event is published as a blog post on the Zero Project website, complemented by social media updates. A photo gallery is also uploaded within days of the conference ending.

### Importance of collecting post-conference feedback

We recommend sending a post-event survey to gather insights into participants' experiences. If the event is recurring, the survey should remain consistent each year to track progress and identify trends.

To maximize responses and capture feedback while impressions are still fresh, it is best to share the survey link immediately after the conference ends. Consider sharing the survey questions with your strategic partners, allowing them to collect similar feedback for other events.

At the Zero Project, all feedback received through the survey and personal emails is reviewed individually, and key insights are shared within the team. A dedicated session is held to document suggestions and experiences that help shape the planning and decision-making process for the next conference.

# Further Useful Resources

## **Accessible Meetings, Events & Conferences Guide**

[adainfo.org/hospitality](http://adainfo.org/hospitality)

## **Disability Etiquette Guide**

[unitedspinal.org/top-10-disability-etiquette](http://unitedspinal.org/top-10-disability-etiquette)

## **Making Events Accessible – ICT**

[w3.org/WAI/teach-advocate/accessible-presentations](http://w3.org/WAI/teach-advocate/accessible-presentations)

## **Toolkit to Design More Accessible Scientific Meetings and Conferences**

[disabilityhealth.jhu.edu/inova-toolkit-to-design-more-accessible-scientific-meetings-and-conferences](http://disabilityhealth.jhu.edu/inova-toolkit-to-design-more-accessible-scientific-meetings-and-conferences)

## **Inclusive Events Toolkit**

[architecture.com/about/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/RIBA-Inclusive-Events-Toolkit](http://architecture.com/about/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/RIBA-Inclusive-Events-Toolkit)

## **European Easy-to-Read Standards**

[inclusion-europe.eu/easy-to-read-standards-guidelines](http://inclusion-europe.eu/easy-to-read-standards-guidelines)

## **Accessibility for the Disabled – Design Guide**

[un.org/esa/socdev/enable/designm/index.html](http://un.org/esa/socdev/enable/designm/index.html)

## **Making the Web Accessible**

[w3.org/WAI/fundamentals](http://w3.org/WAI/fundamentals)

## **EDF Guide for Accessible Meetings for All**

[edf-feph.org/content/uploads/2021/02/edf\\_guide\\_for\\_accessible\\_meetings\\_1.pdf](http://edf-feph.org/content/uploads/2021/02/edf_guide_for_accessible_meetings_1.pdf)

## **Web Accessibility In Mind – Accessible Websites**

[webaim.org/services](http://webaim.org/services)

## **Accessibility Checklist for Virtual Events**

[comnetwork.org/blog/accessibility](http://comnetwork.org/blog/accessibility)

## **Inclusive Communication Toolkit**

[businessdisabilityforum.org.uk/resource/inclusive-communication-toolkit-2](http://businessdisabilityforum.org.uk/resource/inclusive-communication-toolkit-2)

# About the Zero Project

The Zero Project's mission is to work towards a world with zero barriers by supporting the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Worldwide, the Zero Project finds and shares solutions that improve the daily lives and legal rights of persons with disabilities.

## The Essl Foundation

In 2008 the Essl Foundation MGE gemeinnützige Privatstiftung – an Austrian charitable foundation that focuses on scientific research and charitable giving – initiated the Zero Project to identify, curate, and share inclusive solutions, as intended and encouraged by Article 32 of the CRPD. The original impetus for what would later become the Zero Project occurred in 2008, when the Essl Foundation carried out a preliminary study on existing data related to persons with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups. Since then, it has evolved into what is now known as the Zero Project.

A dedicated team developed the original idea into a renowned research-driven initiative that engages with more than 10,000 experts from around the world. Well over 1,000 innovative solutions have been identified to date, all meeting key criteria of innovation, impact, and scalability to improve the lives and legal rights of persons with disabilities. Of these innovations, 960 have been recognized with a Zero Project Award.

## An international team

The Zero Project is managed out of its headquarters at the Haus der Philanthropie in Vienna, and its small international team connects with representatives of all sectors of society and around the world. In a collaborative effort, the project conducts research based on an annual theme, and organizes local as well as global events – such as the annual Zero Project Conference in the United Nations Office at Vienna.

Since 2018 the team of Fundación Descúbreme in Chile has joined the Zero Project in the nomination and selection process, focusing on the Spanish-speaking communities.

## A global network

The Zero Project is proud of its global network of partners, experts, decision-makers, opinion leaders, and other change-makers. By fostering close collaboration among all parts of this vast network, the impact of proven solutions can be amplified and replicated elsewhere. As of 2023 our established partner organizations – including Fundación Descúbreme in Chile, Youth4Jobs and EnAble India in India, and SG Enable in Singapore – carry out regionalized activities, such as the Zero Project India Conference, to encourage the replication of the most relevant Zero Project Awardee solutions.

## Finding and sharing solutions

All network activities are based on the Zero Project's unique research method, with its three pillars of (1) selecting solutions based on their innovation, impact, and potential to scale; (2) engaging with thousands of Zero Project Network members as part of the nomination and selection processes; and (3) supporting the selected solutions to increase their impact. Based on a reoccurring four-year cycle, the research has concentrated on one of the following four themes each year: Employment, Education, Independent Living/Political Participation, and Accessibility. In 2024–2025 the research has been centred on Employment. Due to the increasing importance of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), this topic is addressed every year. Inclusive Arts is addressed as a cross-cutting theme, acknowledging the potential positive impact different forms of expressions can have on communities.

Learn more about the Zero Project at [zeroproject.org](https://zeroproject.org)



# A companion for event organizers: Answering the most frequently asked questions on accessibility

- Choose a venue that works for everyone
- Ensure accessible accommodation and travel
- Start with communications and registration
- Inclusive digital services are broadly available
- Host hybrid and remote conferences
- Think of on-site orientation
- Make sessions and content accessible
- Take care of on-site well-being and inclusion
- Ask for follow-up and feedback



Find all accessibility  
measures at #ZeroCon25

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## #ZeroBarriers – Let's learn with and from each other!

Have you attended an event with great accessibility features?  
Use #ZeroBarriers and share good practices on social media.

**Facebook**  
[/zeroproject.org](https://www.facebook.com/zeroproject.org)

**LinkedIn**  
[/zeroproject](https://www.linkedin.com/company/zeroproject)

**YouTube**  
[/zeroprojectorg](https://www.youtube.com/zeroprojectorg)

**Instagram**  
[/zeroprojectorg](https://www.instagram.com/zeroprojectorg)