

"CIRCUS, DISABILITY, AND INCLUSION: CHALLENGES AND PATHWAYS FOR SUSTAINABLE GROWTH"



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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the potential of circus arts as an inclusive, non-formal educational tool has gained increasing recognition across Europe. Blending physical expression, creativity, cooperation, and risk-taking in a safe and playful environment, circus pedagogy offers a powerful framework for the personal and social development of young people—especially those with disabilities. Whether through juggling, balance, aerials, or group acrobatics, circus disciplines provide multiple entry points for children and youth with diverse needs, enabling them to develop motor skills, confidence, and social connections at their own pace.

Despite numerous innovative local and national initiatives, the field of adapted circus remains marked by fragmentation, limited visibility, and uneven access across regions and countries. Practitioners, educators, and institutions often operate in isolation, facing structural, financial, and professional barriers that limit the reach, quality, and sustainability of their programs. The absence of coordinated policies, recognized training pathways, and systemic support continues to prevent inclusive circus from achieving its full potential as a tool for empowerment, education, and inclusion.

This report, developed within the framework of the Erasmus+ project *DiversAbility Circus*, aims to identify the current gaps and challenges in the use of circus activities for young people with disabilities and to offer concrete recommendations for action at the local, national, and European levels. Drawing on field experience, case studies, interviews, and collaborative reflection among partners from Italy, France, Slovenia, Hungary, and Slovakia, it builds a comprehensive picture of the obstacles faced by practitioners and participants alike.

The report is structured into two main parts. The first section maps the critical gaps observed in the field, including the fragmentation of approaches, barriers to access, lack of specialized training and adapted equipment, and insufficient institutional support. The second section proposes a set of actionable recommendations, targeting policymakers, educators, cultural institutions, and funding bodies, with the aim of fostering systemic change and ensuring that inclusive circus practices are accessible, sustainable, and professionally recognized.

By offering both analysis and direction, this report intends to contribute to the development of a more equitable and inclusive landscape for circus pedagogy in Europe—one where all young people, regardless of ability, can find space to play, express themselves, and belong.

CHALLENGES

IN THE FIELD OF

CIRCUS, DISABILITY, AND INCLUSION

FRAGMENTATION OF APPROACHES

One of the most significant gaps identified in the current landscape of circus activities for young people with disabilities is the fragmentation of approaches and pedagogical frameworks.

While several models have emerged across Europe—such as *functional juggling*, *Handicirque* (handicap + cirque), and broader *adapted circus pedagogy*—these often operate in parallel, without consistent communication, collaboration, or knowledge exchange between practitioners and organizations.

Each discipline brings valuable insights and methods to the field: functional juggling emphasizes more accessibility and cognitive engagement through specific tools and structured challenges; Handicirque tends to be rooted in therapeutic and institutional frameworks; and adapted circus often focuses on inclusion and social participation through mainstream circus schools.

However, the lack of coordination between these approaches leads to several challenges:

-  **Absence of Shared Language and Standards:** Practitioners from different disciplines often use different terminologies and pedagogical frameworks, making it difficult to evaluate and compare practices or to design interoperable training curricula and materials. This limits the ability to build collective knowledge and hinders collaboration at the regional and European levels.
-  **Isolated Initiatives:** Many initiatives, especially in Central and Eastern Europe (e.g., Hungary), are driven by individual actors or small organizations without systemic support or integration into wider disability or cultural policy frameworks. As a result, these projects remain fragile and unsustainable, with limited opportunities for scaling up or professional development.
-  **Duplication of Efforts:** In the absence of shared platforms or coordinated strategies, organizations often "reinvent the wheel" by developing tools, methodologies, or equipment already available elsewhere. This represents a misallocation of resources and slows down innovation.
-  **Limited Mobility of Knowledge and Tools:** Because methodologies are rarely documented in a standardized, accessible way, and are often not translated or openly disseminated, it is difficult for new practitioners or organizations to adopt or adapt existing practices. This is particularly problematic for areas where professional training in circus and disability is lacking.

LIMITED ACCESS TO INSTITUTIONS AND CIRCUS VENUES

Access remains one of the most significant barriers to the widespread development and sustainability of circus activities for young people with disabilities. These activities are generally delivered in two main types of settings: **institutional settings** (such as IMEs – *Instituts Médico-Éducatifs*, hospitals, and special schools), and **traditional circus venues** (including community-based circus schools, cultural centers, or performance spaces). Each context presents its own set of structural, logistical, and administrative obstacles that can limit both the frequency and the quality of adapted circus programming.

In **institutional contexts**, external circus educators often struggle to gain access to residents due to strict administrative protocols, legal requirements related to safeguarding and liability, and, in some cases, skepticism about the pedagogical relevance or therapeutic value of circus arts. Even when access is granted, the conditions of collaboration are not always optimal. Staff may be overburdened and unable to provide necessary support, or unfamiliar with how to integrate external facilitators into existing educational or therapeutic frameworks. Moreover, there is frequently a lack of shared vocabulary and objectives between circus professionals and institutional personnel, complicating co-design and delivery of activities.

Conversely, when **young people with disabilities are expected to travel to circus venues**, significant logistical and environmental challenges arise. Public transport is often not adapted or reliable enough to accommodate individuals with reduced mobility, sensory impairments, or cognitive disabilities—particularly in rural or suburban areas where circus spaces may be located on the periphery. Families may not have the time, resources, or information to facilitate regular attendance. Once at the venue, additional barriers frequently emerge: architectural inaccessibility (lack of elevators, narrow doors, uneven flooring), lack of adapted toilet and changing facilities, overwhelming sensory environments (bright lights, loud music), and staff untrained in disability awareness.

These barriers reflect broader structural issues related to the segregation of services and the lack of intersectoral collaboration between the health/social care systems and the cultural/educational sectors. In many European countries, there is a strong divide between “specialized” spaces for people with disabilities and mainstream cultural spaces. This division reinforces a cycle of exclusion where young people with disabilities are confined to closed systems and deprived of opportunities for community participation, creative exploration, and inclusion.

A significant concern voiced by circus practitioners across Europe is the “**double exclusion**” these access issues create: on the one hand, they are blocked from entering institutions to offer innovative and inclusive programs, and on the other, they are unable to welcome disabled participants into their own spaces due to inaccessibility and lack of support mechanisms. This dual constraint not only limits opportunities for young people but also impedes professional growth and innovation in the sector of adapted circus pedagogy.

LACK OF SPECIALIZED TRAINING AND ADAPTED EQUIPMENT

Despite growing interest in the potential of circus pedagogy as an inclusive and empowering tool, one of the most persistent barriers to its equitable implementation remains the **scarcity of specialized training for educators and the lack of adapted circus equipment**. These two deficits are interconnected, creating a cycle that undermines the capacity of practitioners to design, deliver, and sustain inclusive circus experiences for young people with disabilities.

Circus practitioners often receive training in performance skills and general pedagogy, but **very few have access to structured, accredited training** that equips them to work specifically with individuals with physical, sensory, or cognitive disabilities. As a result, many well-meaning educators are left without the tools or confidence to adapt their methods to a diverse group. This gap is particularly pronounced in national vocational and higher education curricula related to circus arts and performing arts education, which tend to focus on technique and artistic expression rather than inclusive practices or disability awareness.

Moreover, youth workers and educators within the disability field—such as staff in IMEs (Instituts Médico-Éducatifs), hospitals, or special schools—often lack training in circus pedagogy. The lack of mutual understanding and cross-training between these two professional worlds (circus and disability support) impedes the co-construction of programs and can lead to missed opportunities for collaboration.

Some organizations, such as *Cirque du Soleil's* social circus initiative or *Extraordinary Bodies* in the UK, have started to develop short-term training modules, but these remain isolated, underfunded, and difficult to access for freelance practitioners or small organizations. In France, the BISAC (Brevet d'Initiateur Spécialisé en Arts du Cirque) offers one of the rare state-recognized certificates in adapted circus, but its availability is geographically limited and not yet harmonized at the European level.

This situation reveals the need for **a more coherent, widely available training pathway**, ideally recognized across countries through mechanisms such as EQF (European Qualifications Framework). Without such training, circus educators risk unintentionally creating exclusionary environments or failing to meet the needs of participants with disabilities.

In parallel with the training gap, the **shortage of adapted circus equipment** poses a serious obstacle to participation and inclusion. Standard circus props—juggling balls, diabolo, poi, balance boards, tightropes—are often not suitable for individuals with limited mobility, visual impairments, or coordination difficulties. In some cases, the equipment can be physically inaccessible or even unsafe without significant adaptation.

A few pioneers in the field have started addressing this issue. Notably, *Craig Quat*, a leading advocate of "functional juggling," has developed a range of props specifically designed to enable people with varying physical and cognitive abilities to engage with circus techniques. His work, however, remains under-diffused, and few educators have access to the knowledge or resources needed to replicate or adapt such tools.

Most practitioners still rely on **makeshift adaptations**—replacing juggling balls with balloons, simplifying movements, using mats for safety—rather than having access to professionally designed, scalable, and universally usable tools. This reliance on improvisation, while resourceful, limits both the consistency and the pedagogical depth of inclusive circus programs. It also places an additional burden on educators, who must constantly reinvent tools and techniques without institutional or financial support.

Furthermore, there is **no shared European repository** of adapted equipment designs or specifications. The absence of standardization makes it difficult to evaluate or compare tools, share innovations across borders, or ensure that equipment meets safety standards. This lack of coordination undermines the scalability of inclusive circus initiatives and discourages investment in innovation.

The combined effect of these gaps—limited training and inadequate equipment—is to **restrict the sustainability and scalability** of inclusive circus practices. Except for a few, most organizations deliver one-off workshops or short-term projects with strong impact, but without trained personnel and appropriate tools, they struggle to maintain or expand these initiatives. The lack of institutionalized support means that inclusive circus often remains a peripheral or experimental activity, rather than an integrated part of educational or cultural programming.

This fragmentation also creates **inequality of access**: only those regions or organizations with exceptional dedication and resources can provide consistent, high-quality inclusive circus experiences. Others are left behind, and the young people they serve remain excluded from the physical, social, and emotional benefits of circus pedagogy.

INSUFFICIENT INSTITUTIONAL RECOGNITION AND SUPPORT

One of the most critical barriers to the development and sustainability of adapted circus activities for young people with disabilities is the **lack of formal institutional recognition and systemic support**. Across Europe, the inclusion of disabled individuals in cultural and physical activities is often upheld as a policy objective, yet concrete measures and long-term investments in the field of inclusive circus remain fragmented, inconsistent, and heavily reliant on grassroots momentum.

In countries such as Slovakia, the current landscape of inclusive circus practice exemplifies this situation. Adapted circus activities are primarily initiated and maintained by **motivated individuals, small collectives, or isolated non-profit organizations**, often operating with minimal funding and without formal institutional backing. These initiatives, while rich in creativity and commitment, face chronic instability due to their dependence on short-term project grants, volunteer labor, or sporadic collaborations with social service institutions.

The absence of **national strategies or structured programs** to support inclusive arts means that these efforts remain marginal, vulnerable to burnout, and limited in reach. Even in countries with stronger traditions of social circus—such as France, Belgium, or the UK—the field is not always recognized as a legitimate component of formal education, youth services, or disability support systems. This lack of institutional endorsement restricts access to sustained funding, hinders staff professionalization, and limits the dissemination and upscaling of successful models.

Very few national education or health policies explicitly reference **circus pedagogy as a tool for inclusion**. Where references to “arts for inclusion” exist, they tend to remain general or favor more conventional forms such as music or visual arts. Circus is often still perceived as niche or recreational, rather than a **structured, evidence-based methodology for physical, cognitive, and social development**.

Moreover, the professional status of social circus educators remains largely undefined. In most EU countries, there is no recognized qualification or certification pathway that prepares professionals to work at the intersection of circus and disability support. This creates legal and administrative barriers for practitioners seeking to operate within public institutions, such as schools or specialized care centers. In turn, institutions are often reluctant to host external circus practitioners due to insurance, liability, or compliance concerns—particularly when working with minors or individuals with complex needs.

Another significant impact of the lack of recognition is **limited access to stable funding**. Adapted circus initiatives typically rely on short-term grants, such as Erasmus+, small cultural funds, or local social innovation calls. While these sources allow experimentation and initial implementation, they rarely provide the **core funding needed to ensure continuity, staff retention, infrastructure maintenance, or longitudinal evaluation**.

For example, organizations such as *Zsonglór Egyesület* in Hungary may offer workshops for children with special needs, but often without a dedicated budget line for inclusion. Similarly, many circus schools working with mixed-ability groups struggle to find resources for accessible transportation, support staff, or adapted equipment because such items are not eligible under standard artistic or educational funding streams.

This **precarious financial model discourages long-term planning**, obstructs the development of partnerships with public services, and increases dependency on enthusiastic but underpaid or unpaid practitioners. It also inhibits robust impact measurement, which is essential for convincing policymakers and funders of the value of inclusive circus.

The cumulative effect of these structural weaknesses is that **adapted circus remains undervalued and underutilized** as a means of inclusion, education, and rehabilitation. The lack of clear recognition leads to:

-  **A scarcity of permanent positions** for educators specialized in inclusive circus,
-  **Unclear career pathways** for young practitioners wishing to enter this field,
-  **A weak integration into cross-sector networks**, including health, education, and disability services,
-  **Limited opportunities for formal research and evidence building**, further reducing its visibility and perceived legitimacy.

In countries where arts and inclusion are not systematically linked, such as parts of Central and Eastern Europe, the risk is even greater that inclusive circus will be seen as an optional, extracurricular experiment rather than a **strategic lever for social participation and empowerment**.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE GROWTH IN THE FIELD OF CIRCUS, DISABILITY, AND INCLUSION

RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS THE FRAGMENTATION OF APPROACHES

The fragmentation within the field of adapted circus arises from the coexistence of multiple visions and disciplines—such as *functional juggling*, *Handicirque*, and *cirque adapté*—each developed independently in different cultural, national, or institutional contexts. While this diversity has led to rich experimentation, it has also created silos that limit mutual learning, coherence, and scalability of inclusive practices across Europe. Overcoming this fragmentation requires strategic coordination, shared knowledge infrastructures, and the cultivation of inclusive pedagogical frameworks that transcend disciplinary and geographic boundaries.

1. ESTABLISH CROSS-DISCIPLINARY DIALOGUE AND THEMATIC ALLIANCES

A first step to reduce fragmentation is to intentionally foster dialogue between the different schools of thought and practice. Initiatives should be supported at local, national, and European levels to convene artists, educators, therapists, disability experts, and researchers working across the various strands of adapted circus. These exchanges—through symposiums, thematic forums, or collaborative workshops—can identify common pedagogical foundations and terminology, highlight complementary methods, and encourage collaborative experimentation.

For example, a structured European forum could bring together practitioners of functional juggling (such as those inspired by Craig Quat's work), educators from *Handicirque* collectives in France, and researchers involved in inclusive performance studies. Such a forum could be facilitated by networks like EYCO or funded under Erasmus+ or Creative Europe, with the aim of developing a shared vocabulary and pedagogical glossary that improves mutual understanding and supports mobility.

2. DEVELOP HYBRID PEDAGOGICAL MODELS

Rather than seeking to unify the field under a single model, the goal should be to develop hybrid pedagogies that integrate elements from different approaches. Functional juggling, which emphasizes rhythm, modularity, and cognitive engagement, can be combined with sensory-inclusive techniques from therapeutic circus models, and the participatory emphasis of community-based *cirque adapté*. By doing so, practitioners can create inclusive curricula tailored to diverse physical, cognitive, and social profiles of participants.

Pilot programs should be funded to test such hybrid models in varied contexts (urban, rural, institutional, and community-based) with the involvement of young people with disabilities. The outcomes of these pilots should be documented and made publicly available, providing a concrete foundation for wider implementation.

3. CREATE OPEN-ACCESS PLATFORMS FOR DOCUMENTATION AND SHARING

One of the most significant barriers to integration is the lack of accessible, centralized documentation. Many successful practices remain unpublished, undocumented, or only shared orally or within closed networks. To address this, a multilingual, open-access online platform should be created, serving as a living repository of methodologies, session plans, adaptation guides, evaluation tools, and case studies.

This platform could be hosted by a European network or umbrella organization and linked to existing structures such as SALTO-YOUTH, EPALE, or the Erasmus+ Project Results Platform. Contributions should be peer-reviewed and tagged with metadata (e.g., type of disability, level of cognitive function, context of use) to facilitate navigation and replication.

4. SUPPORT RESEARCH AND EVALUATION ON INTERDISCIPLINARY PRACTICE

Public and private funding bodies should invest in comparative and interdisciplinary research on the pedagogical value of different circus modalities for people with disabilities. Research projects could explore questions such as:

- What motor or cognitive benefits do functional juggling routines offer versus aerial or balance-based techniques?
- How do group dynamics differ between performance-focused versus therapeutic approaches?
- What are the psychological outcomes (e.g., empowerment, communication, motivation) across different adapted disciplines?

Longitudinal studies and cross-national comparisons can help establish empirical evidence that supports the scalability and professionalisation of adapted circus practice, informing national curricula and European frameworks.

5. ENCOURAGE MUTUAL RECOGNITION AND CROSS-TRAINING

To reduce fragmentation at the professional level, national circus federations and training providers should work towards mutual recognition of competencies and training hours across different approaches. Practitioners of *Handicirque* should be able to upskill in functional circus, and vice versa, through modular cross-training programs and mobility schemes.

Efforts should also be made to ensure that adapted circus certifications (such as BISAC in France) are known and accessible beyond their country of origin, and possibly harmonized at the European level using tools such as the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

6. PROMOTE INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE AND INTERCULTURAL MEDIATION

A final layer of fragmentation arises from linguistic and cultural differences. Terms such as “functional juggling,” “inclusive circus,” “social circus,” and “therapeutic circus” do not always carry the same meaning across countries. A shared lexicon should be co-developed and translated across European languages, enabling clearer communication and deeper understanding across borders. Intercultural mediators or translators with experience in the disability and arts sectors should be involved in this process to ensure linguistic accessibility and nuance.

In conclusion, reducing fragmentation in the field of adapted circus is not about homogenizing diverse practices, but rather about building bridges that allow for mutual respect, learning, and coordination. By connecting disciplines, sharing knowledge, co-developing hybrid methodologies, and investing in collective infrastructure, stakeholders across Europe can foster a more unified, resilient, and impactful ecosystem of inclusive circus practice—one that fully embraces the creativity and potential of all young people, regardless of ability.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS THE LIMITED ACCESS TO INSTITUTIONS AND CIRCUS VENUES

Access remains one of the most significant and persistent barriers to the participation of young people with disabilities in circus activities. Whether due to the physical inaccessibility of circus venues, the logistical difficulties associated with transportation, or the institutional complexity of integrating external educators into schools, hospitals, or care centres, the result is the same: young people with disabilities are routinely excluded from opportunities that could otherwise support their social inclusion, physical development, and creative expression.

This challenge is particularly evident in the two dominant models through which adapted circus is currently delivered. In the first, circus practitioners seek entry into specialized institutions such as IMEs (Instituts Médico-Éducatifs), hospitals, or special education schools. In the second, these same institutions are expected to bring their participants to external circus venues. Both approaches face serious and often overlapping obstacles.

1. STRUCTURAL BARRIERS IN INSTITUTIONAL SETTINGS

In many countries, especially those where public institutions are highly regulated, allowing external circus professionals into medical or educational environments is a complex process. Concerns over liability, safeguarding, lack of familiarity with circus pedagogy, and rigid bureaucratic procedures often prevent such collaborations from taking place. Institutions may lack staff capacity to supervise joint sessions, or be unfamiliar with the potential benefits of circus-based approaches.

Promising models, however, show the potential for systemic integration. In France, long-term collaborations between local circus schools and IMEs have led to weekly

workshops becoming embedded in institutional curricula. These partnerships are often supported by regional cultural agencies or departmental health services, creating a sustainable framework for delivery. In these cases, circus educators become recognized as part of the wider educational or therapeutic team, building trust and shared knowledge over time.

To support the replication of this model, national and regional authorities should:

- Create **standardized protocols and agreements** that define the terms of collaboration between institutions and cultural providers.
- Offer **joint training opportunities** where circus educators and institutional staff can co-develop inclusive programs, understand each other's professional cultures, and align goals.
- Develop **publicly funded pilot schemes** that embed inclusive circus activities into institutional routines, with built-in evaluation components to assess impact and scalability.

2. PHYSICAL AND LOGISTICAL BARRIERS TO EXTERNAL CIRCUS VENUES

For institutions or families trying to bring young people with disabilities to circus schools or venues, the challenges are equally daunting. Many circus spaces are located in former industrial buildings or temporary structures lacking basic accessibility infrastructure such as ramps, elevators, adapted restrooms, or visual/audio navigation aids. Public transport to these areas is often limited, and the costs and risks associated with group travel are high.

An innovative response has been the development of mobile circus workshops, where facilitators travel directly to schools and centres with portable equipment and adaptable lesson formats. This not only eliminates transport-related barriers but also allows young people to engage with circus in familiar, low-stress environments. Similarly, the **UK-based organization Extraordinary Bodies** has created a model for fully accessible touring performances, ensuring that every venue—on stage and backstage—is designed to accommodate artists and audiences of all abilities.

To expand such approaches, the following recommendations should be considered:

-  **Invest in mobile circus infrastructure**, including modular equipment, foldable mats, sensory props, and accessible transport vehicles. These mobile units can serve rural areas, small institutions, or underserved urban zones.
-  **Fund accessibility renovations** for circus schools and spaces through public cultural infrastructure grants. These could include physical renovations and the acquisition of assistive technologies such as hearing loops, tactile floor indicators, and communication aids.
-  **Support partnerships with inclusive transport providers**, such as taxi cooperatives or school buses equipped for wheelchair access, with subsidies covering part of the cost for families and institutions.
-  Encourage **venue certification schemes**, similar to those in the performing arts or tourism sectors, which provide incentives and public recognition for circus schools that achieve high accessibility standards.

3. INTEGRATE INCLUSION INTO PLANNING AND FUNDING NORMS

Too often, the inclusion of people with disabilities in cultural activities is treated as an optional add-on rather than a core requirement. To truly resolve the issue of access, governments and funders must embed accessibility and inclusion into all stages of planning, funding, and evaluation.

This can be done by:

-  Making **accessibility a funding criterion** in public calls for cultural or youth projects, requiring applicants to address how their program will be inclusive of diverse needs.
-  Mandating that all publicly funded cultural venues develop and publish **accessibility action plans**, reviewed and updated every three years.
-  Creating **funding lines specifically dedicated** to inclusive outreach programs and access improvements, with streamlined application procedures and support for small organizations.
-  Including **disability inclusion benchmarks** in national strategies for youth participation, arts education, and social cohesion.

4. BUILD TRUST AND LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIPS

Finally, access is not only about physical space but also about trust. Many institutions and families remain hesitant to participate in circus activities due to fears of injury, lack of understanding of circus pedagogy, or concerns about overstimulation or behavioural challenges. To build trust, long-term relationships and co-design processes are essential.

Programs should:

-  Involve caregivers, teachers, and support staff in the design and evaluation of activities.
-  Provide **“open house” sessions** where institutions can observe or try out circus activities before committing to a program.
-  Create **multi-session formats** with gradual progression, rather than one-off workshops, allowing participants to become familiar with the space, staff, and routines.

In conclusion, improving access to adapted circus activities for young people with disabilities requires a shift from ad hoc, project-based initiatives to systemic, infrastructure-level change. By addressing institutional, physical, logistical, and attitudinal barriers through coordinated policy, funding, and practice, we can move from occasional inclusion to consistent participation—ensuring that circus becomes a space of belonging, empowerment, and joy for all.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS THE LACK OF SPECIALIZED TRAINING AND ADAPTED EQUIPMENT

The advancement of inclusive circus practices is hindered by two primary challenges: the scarcity of specialized training for educators and the limited availability of adapted equipment. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach that encompasses curriculum development, resource sharing, interdisciplinary collaboration, and sustainable funding mechanisms.

1. DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT STANDARDIZED, ACCREDITED TRAINING PROGRAMS

To professionalize inclusive circus pedagogy, it is essential to establish standardized training programs that are recognized across the European Union. These programs should be developed through partnerships between circus schools, universities, and training providers, ensuring a comprehensive curriculum that covers:

-  **Inclusive Pedagogical Techniques:** Strategies for adapting circus activities to accommodate various disabilities.
-  **Safety and Risk Management:** Protocols to ensure the well-being of all participants.
-  **Collaborative Practices:** Methods for working effectively with healthcare professionals, educators, and families.

The European Core Curriculum for Youth and Social Circus Pedagogy serves as a foundational model for such initiatives.

2. ESTABLISH AN OPEN-SOURCE REPOSITORY FOR ADAPTED EQUIPMENT DESIGNS

Creating a centralized, open-access repository of adapted circus equipment designs and usage guidelines will empower practitioners to replicate and customize tools to meet local needs. This repository should include:

-  **Design Blueprints:** Detailed schematics for constructing adapted equipment.
-  **Instructional Videos:** Demonstrations of equipment usage and maintenance.
-  **User Feedback:** A platform for practitioners to share experiences and improvements.

Organizations like Quat Props have pioneered the development of inclusive juggling equipment and educational resources, exemplifying the potential of open-source collaboration.

3. PROMOTE INTERDISCIPLINARY COLLABORATION FOR EQUIPMENT INNOVATION

Encouraging collaboration between circus artists, occupational therapists, engineers, and educators can lead to the co-design of innovative tools and methods. Interdisciplinary workshops and research projects can facilitate:

-  **Needs Assessment:** Identifying specific challenges faced by participants with disabilities.
-  **Prototype Development:** Designing and testing new equipment tailored to diverse abilities.
-  **Knowledge Exchange:** Sharing best practices across disciplines to enhance program effectiveness.

Such collaborations have demonstrated success in integrating therapeutic principles into circus training, thereby enhancing accessibility and participant engagement.

4. SECURE FUNDING FOR RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT, AND DISSEMINATION

To support the creation and distribution of adapted equipment and training materials, dedicated funding mechanisms should be established. Potential actions include:

-  **Grant Programs:** Providing financial support for organizations developing inclusive circus resources.
-  **Subsidies:** Offering subsidies for the production and acquisition of adapted equipment.
-  **Research Funding:** Allocating funds for studies that evaluate the effectiveness of inclusive circus practices.

European funding programs, such as Erasmus+ and Creative Europe, can serve as vehicles for these initiatives, promoting innovation and cross-border collaboration.

5. DOCUMENT AND SHARE BEST PRACTICES FROM PIONEERING ORGANIZATIONS

Highlighting successful models can inspire and guide new initiatives.

Documenting these practices through case studies, instructional materials, and training sessions can facilitate knowledge transfer and encourage widespread adoption.

By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can address the critical gaps in specialized training and adapted equipment, fostering a more inclusive and accessible environment within the circus arts community.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS INSUFFICIENT INSTITUTIONAL RECOGNITION AND SUPPORT

Despite the growing evidence of the transformative impact of inclusive circus practices on individuals with disabilities, the field continues to face challenges related to institutional recognition and support. To transition inclusive circus from isolated initiatives to a sustainable and integrated component of cultural, educational, and health systems, coordinated actions are necessary at multiple levels.

1. POLICY ADVOCACY AND STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

To elevate the status of inclusive circus within national and regional frameworks, targeted advocacy efforts should aim to:

-  **Integrate Inclusive Circus into Public Policies:** Advocate for the inclusion of inclusive circus in national strategies related to culture, education, youth development, and disability rights.
-  **Leverage Existing Frameworks:** Utilize platforms such as the European Pillar of Social Rights and the EU Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030 to position inclusive circus as a tool for social inclusion and cultural participation.
-  **Engage Stakeholders:** Collaborate with policymakers, cultural institutions, and disability advocacy groups to build a coalition that supports the institutionalisation of inclusive circus practices.

2. INTEGRATION INTO PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

Facilitating the incorporation of inclusive circus into public institutions requires:

-  **Establishing Legal Frameworks:** Develop clear guidelines and agreements that allow certified circus educators to operate within schools, hospitals, and disability support centres.
-  **Creating Collaborative Models:** Encourage partnerships between circus organizations and public institutions to co-design programs that meet the specific needs of participants.
-  **Providing Institutional Support:** Allocate resources for training institutional staff and adapting facilities to accommodate inclusive circus activities.

3. PROFESSIONAL RECOGNITION AND ACCREDITATION

To professionalize the field and ensure quality standards:

-  **Develop Recognized Qualifications:** Work with relevant ministries to create accredited training programs for inclusive circus educators, aligned with frameworks like the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).
-  **Standardize Competencies:** Define core competencies and learning outcomes for inclusive circus practitioners to facilitate mutual recognition across countries.

-  **Promote Career Pathways:** Establish clear career trajectories and professional development opportunities for individuals in the inclusive circus sector.

4. DEDICATED FUNDING MECHANISMS

Sustainable financial support is crucial for the growth of inclusive circus:

-  **Create Specific Funding Lines:** Establish grants and subsidies dedicated to inclusive arts, covering aspects such as equipment, accessibility measures, staff training, and program evaluation.
-  **Simplify Application Processes:** Design user-friendly funding application procedures to encourage participation from a diverse range of organizations.
-  **Monitor and Evaluate Impact:** Implement mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of funded programs, ensuring accountability and continuous improvement.

5. EUROPEAN COOPERATION AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

Cross-border collaboration can enhance the development and dissemination of best practices:

-  **Support Transnational Projects:** Encourage initiatives like the DiversAbility Circus project, which foster collaboration among organizations from different countries.
-  **Facilitate Mobility and Exchanges:** Promote the exchange of educators, artists, and participants to share experiences and methodologies.
-  **Develop Shared Resources:** Create centralized platforms for sharing curricula, training materials, and research findings related to inclusive circus.

6. RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE

Building a robust evidence base will support advocacy and program development:

-  **Conduct Longitudinal Studies:** Invest in research that examines the long-term impacts of inclusive circus on participants' physical, emotional, and social well-being.
-  **Evaluate Program Effectiveness:** Implement standardized evaluation tools to assess the outcomes of inclusive circus programs.
-  **Disseminate Findings:** Share research results with stakeholders to inform policy decisions and program improvements.

In summary, addressing the lack of institutional recognition and support for inclusive circus requires a multifaceted approach that combines policy advocacy, integration into public institutions, professionalization, dedicated funding, European cooperation, and research. By embedding inclusive circus into the fabric of cultural, educational, and health systems, we can ensure its sustainability and maximize its impact on individuals with disabilities across Europe.

CONCLUSION

The development of inclusive circus practices for young people with disabilities stands at a critical crossroads. Across Europe, passionate practitioners, educators, and organizations are pushing the boundaries of what is possible—demonstrating that circus can be a transformative tool for social inclusion, personal development, and community engagement. Yet these efforts remain too often isolated, underfunded, and unsupported by larger institutional frameworks.

This report has highlighted the systemic gaps that hinder the growth and sustainability of adapted circus: fragmentation of approaches, limited access to venues and institutions, lack of specialized training and adapted equipment, and the absence of structural recognition and support. While inspiring models of good practice exist, their replication and expansion require coordinated action, investment, and policy commitment at every level—from local municipalities to European institutions.

The recommendations outlined herein point toward a strategic and holistic approach: building cooperative networks, fostering inclusive infrastructure, creating accredited training pathways, embedding inclusive circus in national and European policy agendas, and ensuring long-term funding for innovation and impact. These are not only practical steps but ethical imperatives—grounded in the rights of young people with disabilities to access cultural, educational, and social opportunities on an equal basis.

As circus practitioners, educators, policymakers, and civil society actors, we now face a shared responsibility: to turn inclusion from an exception into a norm, from a project into a profession, and from a series of local experiments into a European movement. The vision of an inclusive circus is not merely a matter of artistic innovation—it is a matter of human dignity, participation, and belonging. Let this report be both a roadmap and a call to action for a more inclusive, creative, and equitable future.

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Let's build a more inclusive future for all—one act at a time.