

# Needs Analysis

## Inclusive Circus and Youth Work with Young People with Disabilities

*Findings from a participant survey carried out through the DiversAbility Circus partnership*

**This analysis draws on 113 responses collected across four partner countries: Hungary, Italy, Slovakia and Slovenia.** It is written as a public-facing summary for the project website and highlights what young people with disabilities told us about participation, support needs and interest in circus-based activities.

|                                                 |                                                   |                                                 |
|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| <b>113</b><br>responses                         | <b>4</b><br>partner countries                     | <b>89.1%</b><br>open to trying circus           |
| <b>91.0%</b><br>like movement at least a little | <b>58.3%</b><br>feel safer with someone they know | <b>57.4%</b><br>want clear, simple instructions |

## How to read this analysis

The survey was designed for young people with disabilities and gathered views on participation, support needs, communication, confidence and interest in circus activities. The national datasets were cleaned and merged into one combined file. Percentages are rounded, some questions allowed multiple answers, and the findings should be read as a strong indication of needs within the project network rather than as a statistically representative picture of all young people with disabilities.

## Participation by country

| Country  | Responses |
|----------|-----------|
| Hungary  | 50        |
| Italy    | 28        |
| Slovenia | 20        |
| Slovakia | 15        |

## Who responded?

The group is mixed in both age and support needs. Among respondents who gave their age, 54.1% were aged 10–25, while 43.1% were 25 or older. In terms of independence, 47.2% said they can do most things independently, 38.9% said they sometimes need a little help, and 13.0% said they need help most of the time.

Communication needs also vary. Most respondents communicate through speech, but a meaningful minority use communication devices, signs or gestures, pictures or symbols, or support from another person. This is an important reminder that inclusive activities cannot rely on spoken instructions alone.

## There is strong openness to circus, including among first-time participants

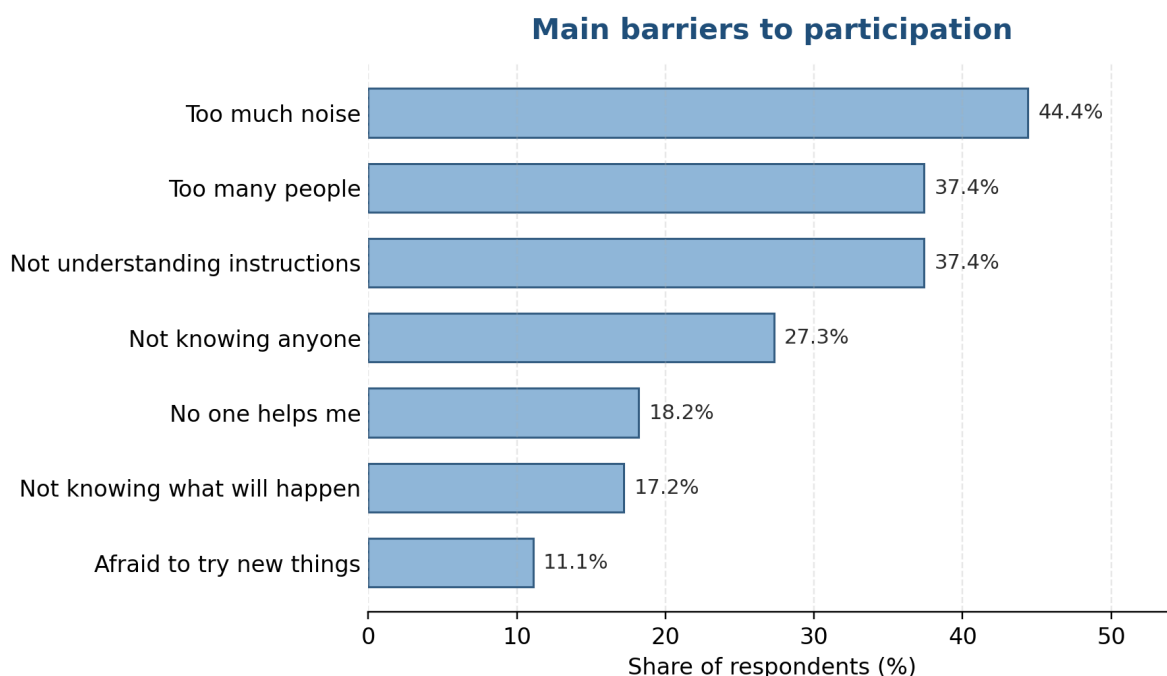
Nearly half of respondents (48.2%) had already taken part in circus activities, while 45.5% had not. Even so, interest is high: 56.4% said they would really like to try circus, and 32.7% said maybe. In other words, 89.1% were either clearly interested or open to trying it.

This is especially encouraging because interest is not limited to people who already know circus. Among respondents with no previous circus experience, most still said yes or maybe. The project therefore has strong potential both as an inclusive method for regular participants and as a welcoming first contact activity.

## Young people enjoy movement, choice and gradual participation

The survey shows a generally positive relationship to movement: 66.7% said they like moving their body a lot, and another 24.3% said a little. Group participation is also mostly positive, although not unconditional. Many like being in a group very much, while others enjoy it only sometimes or prefer more space.

The activities people most often selected were trying new things, playing with others, watching others perform, and throwing or catching balls. This matters because it shows that participation does not always have to begin with performance. Observation, playful interaction and step-by-step entry are also meaningful forms of taking part.



*Figure 1. Main barriers to participation reported in the survey*

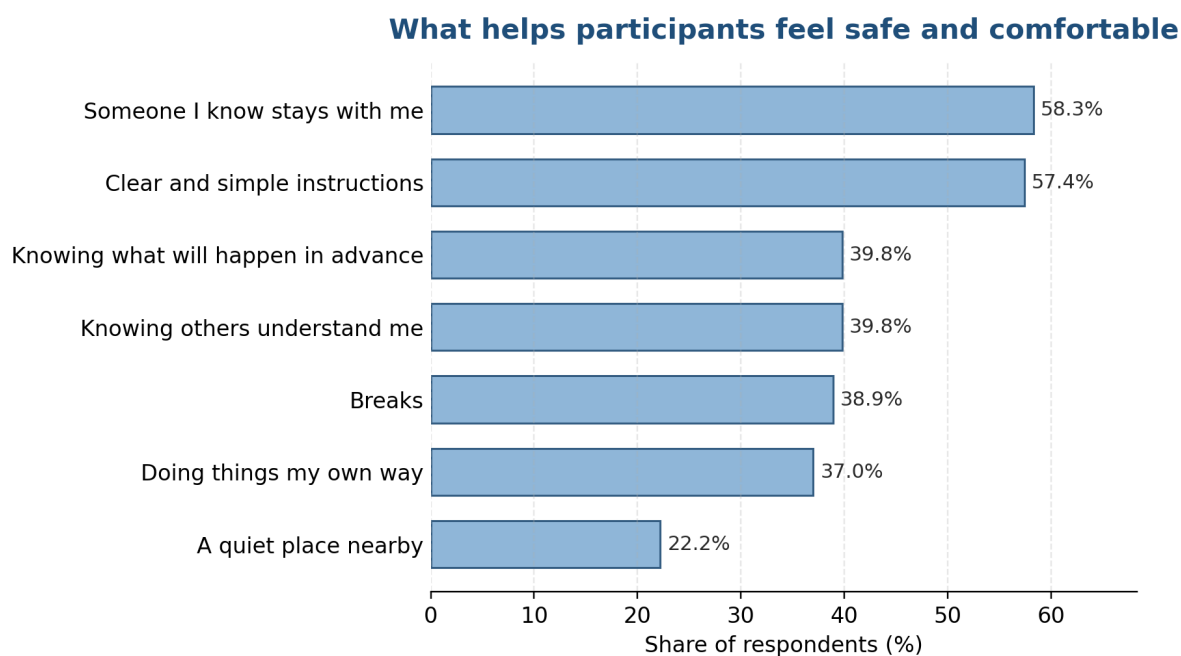
## **The main barriers are sensory, social and communication-related**

The biggest barriers are not a lack of interest in circus itself. They are mostly about the environment and how the activity is organised. The most common obstacles were too much noise (44.4%), too many people (37.4%), not understanding instructions (37.4%), and not knowing anyone in the group (27.3%).

These answers point very clearly toward the kind of inclusive design the project should promote: smaller and calmer groups where possible, simple and repeated explanations, a welcoming atmosphere, and enough support for people who are entering a new setting.

## What helps participants feel safe and comfortable?

Respondents were very clear about what inclusion looks like in practice. The strongest answers point to predictability, familiar support and flexible communication. Many participants said they feel safest when someone they know stays with them, when instructions are clear and simple, and when they know in advance what will happen.



*Figure 2. Conditions that help participants feel safe and comfortable*

Breaks, freedom to do things in one's own way, and access to a quiet space also matter. These are not minor details. They are practical design conditions that can make the difference between anxiety and participation.

## What would make circus more enjoyable?

The survey also gives a very concrete picture of what makes circus attractive. Respondents most often chose music, playing with friends, being able to choose what they do, watching first and then trying, and having an assistant when needed. This tells us that circus should be fun, social and adaptable rather than rigid or overly performance-driven.

In practice, this supports a flexible model of circus pedagogy: one that offers different roles, welcomes observation, allows personal choice, and makes room for support persons, small successes and different paces of learning.

## Country-level notes

The national samples are not equal in size, so country comparisons should be read carefully. Still, a few tendencies stand out. Hungary had the highest share of respondents with previous circus experience. Slovenia had the lowest prior experience, but many respondents were still open to trying circus. Italy showed strong interest despite limited previous experience, and Slovakia also showed very high openness overall.

Across all four countries, the broader message is consistent: interest is high, but participation depends on how safe, clear and adaptable the activity feels.

## **What this means for the project**

The findings strongly support a participant-centred model of inclusive circus. Young people with disabilities are largely open to circus-based activities, but they need sessions that are predictable, welcoming, clearly explained and flexible enough to allow different ways of taking part.

- activities explained with simple language, visual support and repetition
- step-by-step participation, including the option to watch first and join later
- attention to noise, crowd size and sensory overload
- space for breaks, quiet corners and support persons
- real choice so participants can do things in their own way
- familiar settings such as schools, centres and community spaces when possible

## **Conclusion**

Taken together, the survey confirms that inclusive circus should not be framed only as skill-building. It should also be understood as a space for fun, confidence, friendship and safe experimentation. The project outputs are therefore most useful when they help youth workers and facilitators turn these principles into practical session design.