

Needs Analysis

Inclusive Circus and Youth Work with Young People with Disabilities

Findings from a youth worker survey carried out through the DiversAbility Circus partnership

This analysis draws on 201 responses collected between 22 May 2025 and 21 July 2025 across five partner countries: France, Hungary, Italy, Slovakia and Slovenia. It is written as a public-facing summary for the project website and presents the main needs identified by youth workers around inclusion, disability and circus pedagogy.

201 responses	5 partner countries	90.0% see circus as beneficial
56.2% already use circus in youth work	39.8% already use circus with disabled youth	70.0% want training on adaptation

How to read this analysis

The survey was distributed through partner networks in the five project countries and asked youth workers about their experience, current practice, perceived benefits, barriers and training needs related to inclusive circus. The national datasets were cleaned and merged into one combined file. Percentages are rounded. Some questions allowed multiple answers, so totals in those sections do not add up to 100%. Because the sample sizes differ by country, the findings should be read as a strong indication of needs within the project network rather than as a statistically representative picture of the whole youth work sector.

Participation by country

Country	Responses
Hungary	68
Italy	55
Slovenia	36
Slovakia	29
France	13

Who responded?

The sample includes both experienced practitioners and people who are still building their confidence in this field. 158 respondents (78.6%) were aged 25–54, 149 (74.1%) identified as female, and 104 (51.7%) reported more than 10 years of experience working with young people. Most respondents were therefore not newcomers to youth work, but practitioners with established experience.

At the same time, the survey shows that disability-related youth work is already a reality for many of them. 179 respondents (89.1%) said they had already worked directly, often or occasionally with young people with disabilities. This means the survey is not only capturing curiosity about inclusion from a distance; it reflects the needs of practitioners who are already engaging with diverse groups and looking for more effective methods.

Circus is already present in youth work, but inclusive application is less developed

113 respondents (56.2%) had already used circus activities in their work with young people. However, only 80 (39.8%) had already used circus specifically with young people with disabilities. Another 53 (26.4%) had not done so yet but said they would like to. The gap is therefore not a lack of interest in circus itself. The gap lies in confidence, adaptation and access to suitable methods.

Among the respondents who already use circus, the most common disciplines are low-threshold and easily adaptable forms of practice. Juggling is the most frequent entry point (85.0% of circus users), followed by balance activities (64.6%), object manipulation (52.2%) and clowning or theatre (49.6%). This suggests that practical project outputs should focus first on accessible, adaptable disciplines that can be introduced with limited equipment and varied support needs.

Which disability contexts are youth workers already encountering?

Among the 181 respondents who described the disability contexts they work with, the strongest presence was in work with autistic young people (162 responses; 89.5%) and young people with intellectual or learning disabilities (148; 81.8%). Physical disabilities were also common (121; 66.9%), alongside mental health conditions (109; 60.2%) and sensory disabilities (99; 54.7%).

This is an important signal for the project. It shows that there is a particularly strong need for concrete methods that support participation by autistic young people and young people with intellectual disabilities, while also keeping the resources relevant for physical, sensory and mental health contexts. In practice, this points toward adaptation strategies that are flexible rather than narrowly specialised, so that facilitators can respond to mixed groups and different support profiles.

There is a strong belief in the value of circus-based inclusion

181 respondents (90.0%) said that circus-based activities could be beneficial for young people with disabilities, and 172 (85.6%) said they would like to learn more about how circus pedagogy can be used for inclusion and empowerment. This is one of the clearest findings in the survey: the concept already makes sense to youth workers. What they are asking for now is help with implementation.

Confidence levels are positive but not yet fully solid. The average self-confidence score was 3.66 out of 5, and 116 respondents (57.7%) rated their confidence at 4 or 5. Respondents who had already used circus with disabled youth showed higher confidence on average than those who had not, which reinforces a simple point: practice matters, and hands-on training is likely to be more useful than abstract guidance alone.

Main barriers identified by youth workers

The barriers reported by respondents are not primarily about resistance to inclusion. They are about how to make inclusion possible in real working conditions. The strongest barrier is a lack of training on how to adapt circus activities for different disabilities. This is followed by insufficient funding or resources, a lack of time or staff, limited access to adapted equipment, and the fact that circus is still not always recognised as a legitimate inclusive tool.

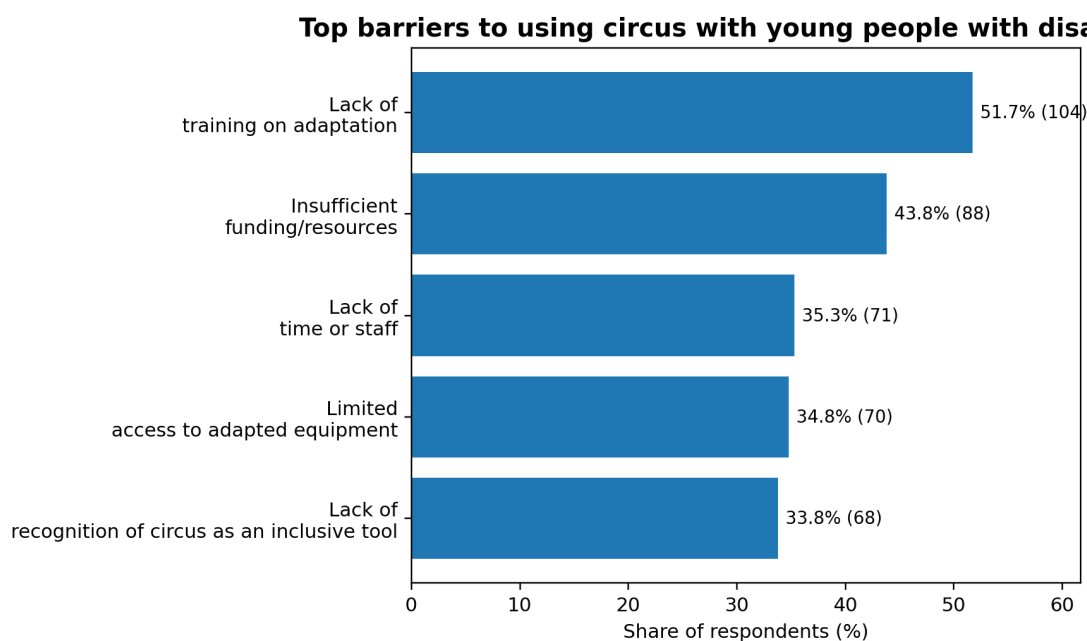


Figure 1. Top barriers reported by respondents. Percentages are based on the full sample (n = 201).

Taken together, these responses show that the need is both pedagogical and structural. Youth workers need better methods, but they also need tools that are realistic in terms of staffing, budget and equipment. This has direct implications for project design: materials must be practical, easy to transfer, and usable in non-specialised youth work settings.

What kind of training do youth workers want?

The demand is clearly practice-oriented. The most requested topic by far is how to adapt circus activities for specific disabilities. This is followed by inclusive group facilitation techniques, building inclusive programmes, and disability awareness and communication. Safety, risk management and accessible equipment are also important, but they appear as complementary needs rather than stand-alone priorities.

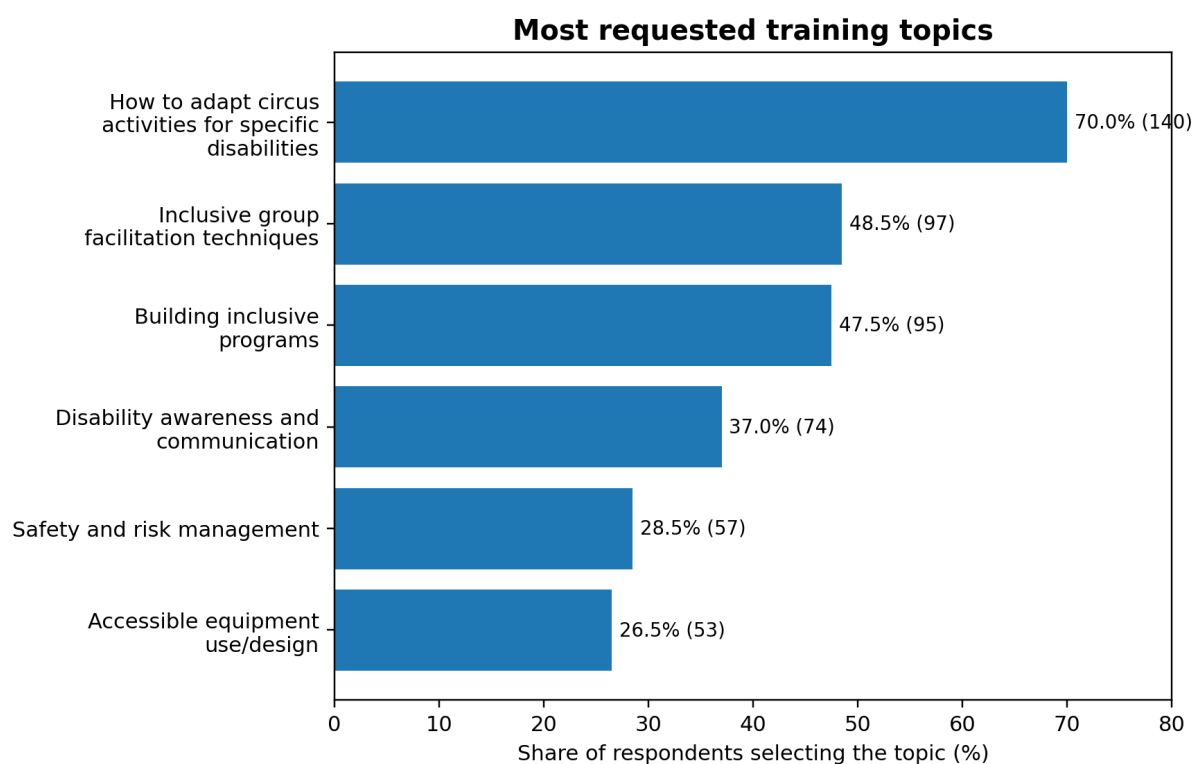


Figure 2. Most requested training topics. Percentages are based on respondents who answered the question (n = 200).

When it comes to format, the strongest preferences are for in-person training (52.5%) and blended learning that combines online and in-person elements (45.5%). Short guides, live online workshops and video tutorials are valued as supportive resources rather than replacements for practical learning. This confirms that project outputs should combine face-to-face learning with concise written tools and short visual resources.

What this means for DiversAbility Circus

- The project should prioritise practical adaptation tools. Youth workers are asking for concrete examples they can use, modify and transfer, not only general messages about inclusion.
- Outputs should focus on low-threshold circus disciplines such as juggling, balance, clowning and object manipulation, because these are already familiar, flexible and easier to introduce in diverse settings.
- Training should be hands-on and scenario-based, with clear guidance on how to adapt activities for autistic young people, young people with intellectual disabilities, and mixed groups with different support needs.
- The project should also address structural barriers by offering resource-light ideas, alternatives to specialised equipment, and realistic facilitation approaches for settings with limited staff or funding.
- To maximise transferability, the final package should combine in-person training, concise manuals, visual examples and simple tools that partner organisations can continue using after the project ends.

Overall message: Youth workers do not need more persuasion that inclusion matters. They need concrete, adaptable tools and practical training that make inclusive circus possible in everyday youth work. The survey confirms that DiversAbility Circus is responding to a real and clearly expressed need.