

**LIBRARIES AS INCLUSIVE HUBS:  
INTERNSHIPS AND INNOVATIVE CAREER LEARNING  
TOOLS THROUGH THE CAREER E-PORTFOLIO**

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**PROTOCOL  
FOR THE PROFESSIONAL  
INCLUSION OF PEOPLE  
WITH COGNITIVE  
DISABILITIES**



<https://www.bybliosproject.eu/>

## BYBlios

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The partnership included the following:



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# Protocol of inclusion

## Table of content

### 1. Introduction and objectives 1

### 2. Regulatory framework and project context 3

#### 2.1 At EU Level 4

#### 2.2 Italy 9

##### 2.2.1. Libraries and Professional Roles in Italy 9

##### 2.2.2. Legal and Regulatory Framework 10

##### 2.2.3. Disability and Job Placement in Italy 10

#### 2.3 Portugal 12

##### 2.3.1 Libraries and professional roles 12

##### 2.3.2 Disability and job placement 13

##### 2.3.3 Career guidance: guidelines and tools for people with disabilities 14

#### 2.4 Spain 16

##### 2.4.1. Libraries and professional roles mm16

##### 2.4.2. Disability and job placement 17

##### 2.4.3. Career guidance: guidelines and tools for people with disabilities 18

#### 2.5 Romania 20

##### 2.5.1 Libraries and professional roles 20

##### 2.5.2 Disability and job placement 22

##### 2.5.3 Career guidance: guidelines and tools for people with disabilities 24

#### 2.6. Germany 25

##### 2.6.1 Libraries and professional roles 25

##### 2.6.2 Disability and job placement 28



2.6.3 Career guidance: guidelines and tools for people with disabilities 30

### **3. Structuring the internship experience: key aspects 32**

3.1 Who is involved 34

3.2 Where the internship takes place 35

3.3 What the intern does 37

3.4 The role of the tutor 38

3.5 Access and onboarding procedures 39

### **4. National Internship Experiences 41**

4.1 Italy 42

4.1.1. Design Process: selection of the school library 42

4.1.2. Design Process: selection of participants 46

4.1.3. Description of the experience 48

4.1.5. Learning Outcomes 53

4.1.6. Main Challenges and points to pay attention to 54

4.1.7. Internship Evidence and Evaluation of the experience 55

4.1.8. First final reflections and noteworthy insights 60

4.2. Portugal 61

4.2.1. Introduction: Numbers and Locations 61

4.2.2. Country Case Study 64

4.2.3. Findings 70

4.2.4. Lessons learned for the Future 72

4.2.5. Impact on the Library and Community 73

4.2.6. Internship Evidence 74

4.3. Spain 74

4.3.1. Introduction: Numbers and Locations 74

4.3.2. Country Case Study 76

4.3.3. Internship Process Design 77

4.3.4. Main Challenges, Reflections and Noteworthy Insights 78



4.3.5. Lessons learned for the Future	80
4.3.6. Internship Evidence and Evaluation	81
4.4 Romania	82
4.4.1. Design Process: selection of the school library	82
4.4.2. Design Process: Selection of participants	83
4.4.3. Description of the experience	83
4.4.4. The importance of the relationship	87
4.4.5. Learning Outcomes	87
4.4.6. Main Challenges and points to pay attention to	88
4.4.7. First final reflections and noteworthy insights	90
4.4.8. Internship Evidence and Evaluation	90
4.5 Germany	92
4.5.1 Internship Design Process	92
4.5.2 Description of Experiences	95
4.5.3 Learning outcomes	96
4.5.4 Main challenges	98
4.5.5 Reflections and points of attention	98
4.5.5. Internship Evidence and Evaluation	100
<b>5. Monitoring and Evaluation</b>	<b>104</b>
5.1 Measuring Trainee Learning Outcomes	104
5.2 Qualitative Assessment Through the Portfolio	105
<b>6. Internship Implementation: Protocols and Lessons Learnt</b>	<b>107</b>
6.1 European Protocol of Inclusion (Byblios 2025, Veraldi – Fasciani)	107
6.1.1. SWOT Analysis	113
6.1.2. Adaptability and contextual flexibility	115
6.1.3. Coordination and roles at EU Level	116
6.1.4. Sustainability and transferability	118



6.1.5. Reflections on challenges and successes	120
6.2 National Focus: Step-by-Step Guides	125
6.2.1. Italy: 10-Step Guide	125
6.2.2 Portugal: 10-Step Guide	131
6.2.3 Spain: 10-Step Guide	134
6.2.4 Romania: 10-Step Guide	138
6.2.5 Germany: 10-step guide	142
6.3 Reflections and Future Directions	148
6.3.1 Why should we invest in inclusive internships?	148
6.3.1.1. Personal level	148
6.3.1.2. For the Community and Society	150
6.3.1.3. Social and Cultural Benefits	151
6.3.1.4. Economic and Fiscal Benefits	152
6.3.1.5. Benefits for companies and institutions:	153
6.3.1.6. Metaphor: the aqueduct and the hydroelectric power station	155
6.3.2. Why should we invest in libraries as spaces to improve employability of people with disabilities?	156
6.3.3 What is the biggest challenge we face?	157
6.3.4 What's the next step for improving internship practices?	160
<b>Chapter 7. Conclusions</b>	<b>163</b>
7.1. Comparative Reflections	163
7.2. Final Conclusions and Recommendations	164
<b>References</b>	<b>167</b>

# 1. Introduction and objectives

The Byblios project 2023-1-IT02-KA220-ADU-000161194 explores the evolving role of libraries, not only as spaces for learning and cultural participation, but also as inclusive environments that support the professional inclusion of people with disabilities. In a time marked by social transitions, demographic changes, and increasing attention to equity and accessibility, public and school libraries are uniquely positioned to offer meaningful opportunities for personal and professional growth to underrepresented groups.

The **WP 4 - Inclusive internships in libraries** focuses specifically on the design, testing, and documentation of an inclusive internship protocol that supports the active involvement of people with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities in library-based work experiences. The goal is to demonstrate how libraries can act as laboratories of inclusion, offering adapted roles, personalized guidance, and structured learning experiences that promote autonomy, skill development, and community participation.

To achieve this, the project integrates both methodological innovation and digital transformation. Alongside the development of a protocol for professional inclusion, carrying out internships includes the creation of a career e-Portfolio, a tailored digital tool to help candidates document their progress, reflect on their abilities, and design future career paths. This tool, designed to be intuitive and accessible, supports both learners and tutors in tracking progress, collecting evidence, and shaping inclusive evaluation strategies.

The main objectives of this work package are:

- Develop a protocol for inclusive internships in libraries
- Define an attitudinal profile for people with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities engaged in work-based learning;
- Design and test inclusive internship pathways in 5 countries (Italy, Portugal, Spain, Romania, Germany), involving at least 10 participants and multiple local libraries;
- Create a digital career e-Portfolio to support learning, evaluation, and self-narration of candidates, supported by training materials and storytelling formats;
- Empower libraries and librarians as facilitators of inclusive training and work experiences;
- Promote innovation in career education, especially for vulnerable groups, by integrating technology, narrative approaches, and inclusive pedagogies;

By combining fieldwork, co-design, and digital innovation, this part of the project contributes to a European model of inclusive career learning, opening new pathways for employability and social participation of people with disabilities, while also reimagining the mission of libraries in contemporary society.

## 2. Regulatory framework and project context

The Byblios project is grounded in a broad and evolving regulatory landscape that addresses both disability inclusion and the transformative role of libraries in contemporary society. This chapter outlines the institutional, legal, and conceptual frameworks that support the project's core objectives: promoting the professional inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities and enhancing the educational and social function of libraries through digital tools and innovative practices.

At the European level, the project draws on key references such as the WHO ICF framework, the ESCO classification, and a range of EU recommendations and directives that position libraries as accessible, digital, and inclusive spaces.

At the national level, the project engages with the legislative, educational, and cultural traditions of each participating country. In particular, each partner has provided a detailed description of their national context, focusing on three interrelated areas that are essential for the development and implementation of the protocol:



- The institutional role of libraries in each country, their evolving functions as learning and community spaces, and the professional profiles of librarians as defined by national regulations and training systems;
- National frameworks and policies for the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in the labour market, with specific attention to supported employment, inclusive training, and relevant legal instruments;
- The systems and strategies available to support career education and guidance for people with disabilities, including tools, methodologies, and institutional actors involved.

Through this structure, the project identified shared challenges and opportunities while respecting the diversity of national systems, ensuring that the protocol and digital tools are adaptable, transferable, and responsive to different territorial realities.

## 2.1 At EU Level

The European framework for inclusion, accessibility, and employment of people with disabilities is grounded in a set of coherent principles and classifications that guide both policy and practice across Member States. The Byblios project builds on these foundations to promote the role of libraries as inclusive spaces for career learning and professional integration.

The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF), developed by the World Health Organization, provides a universal language and framework for describing human functioning and disability. The ICF shifts the focus from a purely medical model to a biopsychosocial model, where disability is understood as an interaction between a person's health condition and contextual (environmental and personal) factors.

This framework is key to Byblios' approach. It informs the development of an attitudinal profile for trainees and supports the adaptation of internship roles based on functional

abilities, not diagnoses. It also underpins the design of enabling contexts, personalized tutoring, and supportive technologies, which act as environmental facilitators.

The ICF model supports the project's emphasis on creating enabling environments, such as inclusive library settings, where people with disabilities can actively participate in professional and educational life.

The European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) framework provides a multilingual classification of skills and occupations relevant to the European labour market and education systems. It is aligned with the European Qualification Framework (EQF) and promotes transparency, recognition, and mobility of skills across countries. It is crucial for:

- Designing task-based roles within library internships;
- Identifying transversal competences, such as teamwork, communication, and digital literacy;
- Linking learning outcomes with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).

By referencing ESCO, the Byblios project has:

- Defined relevant job profiles in the library sector, linked to accessible and adapted tasks;
- Identified transversal and digital competences that can be developed during internships;
- Ensured recognition and comparability of the learning outcomes across different national contexts.

The use of ESCO in the Byblios project ensures transparency and transferability of competences developed during internships and documented in the career e-Portfolio. The ESCO descriptors support the evaluation of learning outcomes in the e-portfolio tool, linking personal growth to formal competence models, and helping to validate learning across contexts while supporting employability pathways beyond the library setting.

European institutions have long promoted libraries as strategic tools for digital citizenship, education, inclusion, and access to culture. This “silent revolution” is guided by a wide array of policy instruments:

- 2006 Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning: Highlights the transversality of digital competence and “learning to learn” as foundational to personal and civic development—values deeply embedded in the library as a space of knowledge creation.
- DIGCOMP (2013): Defines 5 areas of digital competence (information, communication, content creation, security, and problem solving), all of which align with library activities and guide the design of the Career e-Portfolio for learners with disabilities.
- Europeana Project: Promotes digitization of cultural content and supports libraries in becoming digital heritage hubs.
- PSI Directive (Reuse of Public Sector Information): Encourages libraries to open their data for reuse, enhancing public access to knowledge.
- Copyright Exceptions for Libraries: Ensure access to and preservation of content while respecting intellectual property law.
- European Convention on Human Rights (Art. 10): Frames access to information as a fundamental right, reinforced by EU open-access policies.
- Creative Europe and Horizon 2020: Fund modernization and innovation in libraries, particularly in digitization, accessibility, and inclusion.

Byblios taps into this evolving regulatory ecosystem, transforming libraries into inclusive learning and work environments for people with disabilities.

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) has long advocated for libraries as agents of inclusion, democracy, and equal access. IFLA emphasizes the role of libraries in removing physical, informational, and cultural barriers. The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions underlines that:



- Libraries are neutral, democratic, and open spaces that support diversity and inclusion;
- They play a vital role in combating exclusion and empowering vulnerable groups through access to knowledge, technology, and training;
- IFLA encourages universal design principles, including accessible digital services and inclusive programming;
- Public libraries are increasingly seen as hubs for community engagement and lifelong learning, aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

According to IFLA, inclusive libraries must:

- Provide barrier-free access to spaces and services;
- Offer accessible formats and technologies;
- Promote active participation and representation of people with disabilities;
- Foster lifelong learning, inclusion, and citizenship.
- Embrace three dimensions of professional competence:
  - a. Librarianship: Curation of content based on community interest and needs;
  - b. Management: Planning accessible, inviting, and multifunctional spaces;
  - c. Teaching: Supporting learning through resources, relationships, and active engagement.

These competencies mirror the pedagogical approach of Byblios, where library internships are designed not only to support technical skill development, but also relational, communicative, and digital competences.

This aligns also with the Byblios vision of libraries as inclusive learning ecosystems, where internships for people with disabilities are not marginal or symbolic, but structurally embedded in the institution's mission. Libraries become training grounds for inclusion, not only offering services to people with disabilities, but actively engaging them as contributors and learners.

The 2030 Agenda, approved in 2015 by all UN Member States, offers a broad and transformative vision of sustainability, which is no longer limited to environmental protection but includes social inclusion, economic equity, and respect for future generations. This integrated and indivisible vision is expressed through 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which aim to end poverty, fight inequality and injustice, and tackle climate change by 2030.

The SDGs are interdependent and interconnected: achieving one often requires progress in others. For example, promoting quality education (Goal 4) contributes to gender equality (Goal 5), health (Goal 3), and decent work (Goal 8). The Agenda encourages a systemic approach and multi-level governance, involving local, national, and global actors.

The 2030 Agenda is based on five guiding principles, known as the "5 Ps":

- People – Eradicating poverty and hunger in all forms and ensuring dignity and equality.
- Planet – Protecting natural resources and combating climate change for the well-being of present and future generations.
- Prosperity – Ensuring prosperous and fulfilling lives in harmony with nature.
- Peace – Promoting peaceful, just, and inclusive societies, free from fear and violence.
- Partnership – Implementing the Agenda through solid global partnerships based on solidarity and cooperation.

One of the most innovative goals of the 2030 Agenda is Target 4.7, which states:

*"By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and nonviolence, global citizenship and appreciation of*



*cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.”*

This target highlights the key role of education—not only formal but also informal and non-formal—as a lever for social and environmental transformation.

Education for sustainable development must go beyond knowledge transmission and aim for transformative learning: a process that fosters awareness, critical thinking, and the capacity to act. It involves emotions, values, creativity, and participation, encouraging learners to reflect on their habits and imagine alternative futures. In this perspective, intergenerational justice becomes central: sustainability is not only about protecting nature, but ensuring dignity and opportunity for today's and tomorrow's generations.

## 2.2 Italy

### **2.2.1. Libraries and Professional Roles in Italy**

The role of the librarian in Italy is undergoing a profound and irreversible transformation: from a “silent and dusty guardian of memory” to a “dynamic expert” and a “manager of culture.” This shift reflects a broader redefinition of what a library is and what it represents — from a static place of preservation to a living space for production, mediation, and cultural participation.

The transition from an analog to a digital environment has radically reshaped the way knowledge is organised, shared, and experienced. Today, the library is no longer a “museum of books,” but rather an open laboratory — a hub of knowledge where information, technology, and people intersect. In this evolving context, librarians have become facilitators of learning, mediators between cultures, and promoters of active citizenship and social inclusion.

This new professional identity requires a wide range of interdisciplinary skills that go far beyond cataloguing or collection management: digital communication, cultural project design, information literacy, and sensitivity to the needs of diverse audiences,

including people with disabilities or fewer opportunities. The librarian of today — and even more of tomorrow — is therefore not only a custodian of memory, but also an innovator who renews and disseminates it. By embracing this role, libraries are being reimagined as inclusive and participatory spaces of continuous innovation, connecting knowledge, generations, and communities.

### **2.2.2. Legal and Regulatory Framework**

Italy's library system is regulated by a complex set of national, regional, and EU laws. Despite this comprehensive legal framework, a significant gap exists between the law's aspirational goals and practical implementation. This is attributed to a general skepticism toward investing in knowledge and a fragmented, non-unitary regulatory landscape across regions. This fragmentation is evident in a) lack of unified data: It's difficult to obtain reliable data on public and school libraries, which hinders effective policy design; b) flawed professionalization: there is no "unique or specific qualification" to become a school librarian. The role is often filled by teachers who are "used" as librarians when teaching roles are lacking, a practice that often disregards the required training and motivation for a modern librarian. This systemic flaw shows that progressive legislation can be rendered ineffective when implementation is decentralized, underfunded, and lacks standardized professional criteria.

### **2.2.3. Disability and Job Placement in Italy**

A "Copernican revolution" is underway in the Italian legal definition of disability, driven by Legislative Decree 62/2024 (applicable from January 10, 2025). This decree fundamentally redefines disability, moving away from a traditional "mere medical vision" centered on pathology to a bio-psycho-social model based on the ICF (International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health): disability is now understood as the result of the negative "interaction between people with behavioral and environmental impairments and barriers". This implies a deep shift in focus: intervention shifts from treating the individual's impairment to modifying the environment to remove barriers and create "facilitators". The reform's central component is the "personalized and participatory individual life project" which includes training and work as an "indispensable component" and is backed by a specific budget.

OECD research (2022) highlights a persistent "disability employment gap" and "disability skills gap", noting that people with disabilities are about 40% less likely to be employed than people without disabilities; in Italy, up to 2025, there are two main options for internships for people with disabilities:

1. Social Inclusion Internship (TIS): it aims at social inclusion and is a "step towards" the world of work, referencing the 2017 State/Regions Agreement and Law 328/2000.
2. Targeted Work Placement: refers to Law 68/99 and requires registration with the Targeted Placement Service and an agreement with the CPI (Centre for Employment).

The GOL program (Workers Employability Guarantee), financed by the PNRR, is a key tool for mainstreaming the employment of people with disabilities. It aims to strengthen skills of vulnerable workers through reception and orientation, training and retraining, support for job placement, and hiring incentives. However, there is no uniform approach due to large regional differences, and data on the program's impact is not yet available and this is a temporary funding program.

Barriers for people with disabilities in the world of work are

- a) physical (limited access to infrastructure and workplaces that are not designed to accommodate various disabilities, including those affecting mobility, vision, and attention),
- b) technological (Inaccessible technology and a lack of assistive technology (AT), which is essential for competitiveness) and most important
- c) social ones (prejudices and discrimination that impede social inclusion, encompassing physical, mental health, and communication disabilities).

## 2.3 Portugal

### ***2.3.1 Libraries and professional roles***

The development of public libraries in Portugal began in the early 19th century with the establishment of the Évora Public Library in 1805, followed by several key libraries across various towns. The expansion of public reading services continued until the late 20th century, marked by significant legislation aimed at enhancing access to libraries and promoting literacy. The General Directorate for Books, Archives, and Libraries (DGLAB) oversees the public library network, which currently includes 409 libraries and 70 mobile units, offering technical and financial support for their development. DGLAB fosters intermunicipal collaboration to enhance regional identity and social inclusion, aligning with international standards from organisations such as IFLA and UNESCO to promote reading. Additionally, the School Libraries Network Program, initiated in 1996, aims to establish libraries in state schools, ensuring students have access to educational resources and fostering a love for reading, especially in areas lacking public libraries.

Overall, Portugal's library system seeks to promote literacy, citizen participation, and cultural development while addressing challenges such as misinformation and territorial depopulation.

The career of a librarian in Portugal is regulated and valued, with a defined structure for progression and specific training requirements that cover both professionals working in school libraries and those in public, university, and specialised libraries. The career is regulated by legislation that defines qualifications, functions, and progression, as well as specific rules for professionals working in school libraries. The librarian career in Portugal falls under the category of Technical Superior, which encompasses professionals with specialised training in areas such as Library Science, Information Science, or Documentation. The minimum qualifications to work as a librarian include a degree or postgraduate qualification in Information Science, Library Science, Documentation, or Archiving. Many professionals also undertake specific courses or specialisations.



The management of the school library is carried out by a school librarian with an adequate profile, supported by a team that plays an essential role in promoting pedagogy and culture, making a decisive contribution to the library's accessibility and cross-cutting use by teachers and students. The school librarian is currently considered an information manager, facilitating access to both the documentation that exists in a library and to remote electronic resources, assuming a fundamental mediating role in its validation, storage, and dissemination. Besides this inter-relation role between the collection and its users, there is also a set of pedagogical tasks involved in participation in teaching and learning activities, as well as support for users' training in information research, processing, and content production and dissemination.

The applicable legislation, especially in public and school libraries, aims to guarantee the qualification of professionals, with the RBE and DGLAB playing a central role in supporting and developing the profession.

### ***2.3.2 Disability and job placement***

Portugal's extensive range of laws and measures aims to promote the employment of people with disabilities, safeguarding their right to equal opportunities in the labour market. This strong legislation encourages and supports the hiring of individuals with disabilities through mandatory quotas, financial assistance, job modifications, and internship programmes. These laws and regulations work together to reduce discrimination and foster inclusion, ensuring access to employment for all.

According to data from the Observatory of Disability and Human Rights in 2022, there was a positive evolution in the employment rate of people with disabilities (65%) in Portugal reflecting an increase of 6.3 percentage points compared to 2020. For the first time, there was equality in the employment rate of women and men with disabilities (65%). However, a significant difference (14.7 percentage points) persists between the employment rates of people with disabilities (65%) and people without disabilities (79.79%), despite this having decreased over the years. Regarding the unemployment rate, although improvements were seen in 2022 compared to 2021 (-2.4 pp), unemployment among people with disabilities (14.79%) continues to be higher in Portugal than among people without disabilities (9.1%)



Placement data from the Institute of Employment and Vocational Training does not reveal a significant increase in the hiring of people with disabilities. In 2024, there were 1,097 placements of people with disabilities registered as unemployed throughout the year, corresponding to 7% of the total number of unemployed people in December of the same year (n = 15,589)

### ***2.3.3 Career guidance: guidelines and tools for people with disabilities***

Public services in Portugal provide various support and responses dedicated to people with disabilities, promoting their autonomy and citizenship.

Guidance and counselling services are mainly organised under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Employment, Solidarity and Social Affairs. Currently, guidance services are provided by various players in a wide range of contexts throughout clients' lifespans. Since the creation of the Public Employment Service (PES) in 1965, guidance has been an activity in all job and training centres. In Portugal, career guidance for people with disabilities is promoted through resources such as the Practical Guide - Rights of People with Disabilities, published by the National Institute for Rehabilitation (INR, I.P.), available only in Portuguese on the portal of INR, also available in the Practical Guides section of ePortugal, on the "Rights of People with Disabilities" page.

The "Practical Guide - Rights of people with disabilities in Portugal" gathers relevant information for people with disabilities and for those who live with someone in a situation of permanent or temporary disability. The guide aims to promote autonomy, providing people with disabilities with all the relevant information on social benefits, employment support measures, vocational training, and social and tax benefits they need to make decisions and promote inclusion. The content of the 'Practical Guide - The rights of people with disabilities in Portugal' is organised in three parts:

- Information on fundamental rights and instruments for their development;
- Rights and guidelines for action at various stages of life, from birth to education, to employment and vocational training;



- Protection, social and fiscal benefits, transportation, culture, sports, tourism, leisure, and personal assistance and accessibility.

The final section of the guide also includes valuable contacts, an identification of acronyms, fundamental concepts, applicable legislation organised by theme, and references and sources of information. Also serving as a clarification of the correct terminology to adopt, contributing to the support of people with disabilities in the implementation of their rights and in signalling discriminatory practices based on disability. It also includes information on the network of Inclusion Desks and how to request a Medical Certificate of Disability for Multiple Purposes.

Inclusion in the job market is a constant struggle for many people, and among these challenges, people with intellectual disabilities often face significant barriers. In Portugal, considerable progress has been made in promoting diversity in the workplace; however, there is still a long way to go in integrating people with intellectual disabilities. 26% of the employers agree that the lack of digital skills is hindering the employment of persons with disabilities. As a more systematic approach, the Inclusion Resource Centres and the Institute for Employment and Vocational Training design individual lifelong learning projects based on skills assessments. For individuals with cognitive disabilities, several national and international training courses have been developed to enhance digital skills, including the use of social networks to connect with others and stay informed.

Organisations of People with Disabilities highlight a gap between the training programmes offered and the specific skills needed at work, recommending that training be frequently updated. If training does not have immediate or medium-term practical application in the daily lives of people with disabilities, the knowledge gained can be lost.

## 2.4 Spain

### ***2.4.1. Libraries and professional roles***

In Spain, the library system is composed of a diverse range of institutions that serve different segments of the population and fulfill a wide array of educational, cultural, and social functions. The main types of libraries include public libraries, which are municipally or regionally managed and accessible to all citizens; school libraries, integrated into primary and secondary education institutions; academic libraries, which support the needs of universities and higher education; special libraries, which serve specialized organizations or industries; and national libraries, such as the Biblioteca Nacional de España, which preserves the bibliographic heritage of the country.

In recent years, libraries in Spain have increasingly embraced roles that extend beyond the provision of information and literature, particularly in the domains of social inclusion and employability. Many public libraries collaborate with local governments and civil society organizations to implement programmes targeting vulnerable populations, such as the long-term unemployed, migrants, older adults, and individuals with disabilities. These programmes often include digital literacy workshops, employment orientation sessions, and cultural mediation activities aimed at strengthening community engagement and fostering social cohesion.

The library profession in Spain is also undergoing transformation in response to these evolving roles. Traditional positions such as archivists, documentalists, and reference librarians continue to be essential; however, there is a growing recognition of new and hybrid profiles. These include social mediators, digital facilitators, and community librarians, who focus on outreach, user-centered services, and the promotion of equal access to knowledge and learning opportunities. In many institutions, librarians receive specific training to work with diverse user groups and are often involved in interdisciplinary teams that include educators, psychologists, and social workers.

Importantly, there is growing institutional recognition of the library as a space for inclusion. Both national and regional library plans - such as Spain's Strategic Plan for Libraries and regional plans implemented by autonomous communities -



acknowledge the social and educational missions of libraries. These policy frameworks emphasize the importance of accessibility, lifelong learning, and the reduction of digital and cultural divides. Furthermore, guidelines issued by the Consejo de Cooperación Bibliotecaria (Council for Library Cooperation) explicitly encourage inclusive practices, participatory governance, and the adaptation of services for people with disabilities.

In conclusion, Spanish libraries are evolving into dynamic centers of learning, inclusion, and civic participation. Through their expanding roles, diverse professional profiles, and alignment with national and regional policy frameworks, they contribute significantly to the objectives of equity and inclusion promoted by European initiatives such as the Erasmus+ programme and, specially, the BYBLIOS project.

#### ***2.4.2. Disability and job placement***

In Spain, the employment of people with disabilities is governed by a comprehensive legal framework aimed at ensuring equal opportunities and promoting social and labour market inclusion. The cornerstone of this framework is Royal Legislative Decree 1/2013, which approves the revised text of the General Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and their Social Inclusion. This legislation consolidates earlier laws and mandates the right of people with disabilities to access employment under conditions of equality. It also establishes a legal quota system, requiring companies with more than 50 employees to ensure that at least 2% of their workforce is composed of individuals with legally recognized disabilities.

In addition to national legislation, various autonomous communities have introduced complementary regulations and initiatives tailored to local contexts. The Spanish Constitution (Article 49) and the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights further reinforce the principle of non-discrimination and the need for active policies in support of inclusive employment.

Several public and private organisations play a key role in promoting the labour inclusion of people with disabilities. The State Public Employment Service (SEPE) and the National Disability Institute (IMSERSO) are central government bodies involved in employment policy and social services. At the regional level, employment services

provide individualized support and coordination with employers. Furthermore, specialised entities such as ONCE Foundation, Fundación Adecco, Inserta Empleo, and numerous social enterprises and occupational centres offer job placement services, vocational training, and supported employment models, particularly for individuals with higher support needs.

Although libraries in Spain are not traditionally considered primary actors in job placement, some have begun to engage in pre-employment training and digital inclusion programmes that indirectly support labour market access for people with disabilities. In collaboration with local administrations and NGOs, a number of public libraries offer workshops on basic computer skills, resume writing, online job searching, and soft skills development—initiatives that are particularly beneficial for people at risk of social exclusion. These services are sometimes aligned with broader inclusion strategies at the municipal or regional level.

Despite the existence of laws and support mechanisms, people with disabilities continue to face significant barriers in accessing employment. These include structural discrimination, inadequate workplace adaptations, limited educational and training opportunities, and a lack of awareness or preparedness on the part of employers. Additionally, people with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities often encounter even greater challenges, such as social stigma and exclusion from mainstream employment channels.

In summary, Spain has made important advances in promoting the employment of people with disabilities through legislative measures and specialised services. However, persistent obstacles remain, requiring more integrated, cross-sectoral strategies. Libraries, as inclusive public institutions, have the potential to play a more active role in these efforts, particularly through their capacity to foster learning, empowerment, and social participation within the community.

#### ***2.4.3. Career guidance: guidelines and tools for people with disabilities***

Career guidance for people with disabilities in Spain is explicitly addressed within both national education and employment policy frameworks. The General Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and their Social Inclusion (Royal Legislative Decree 1/2013)

establishes the right to access vocational orientation and career counselling services on an equal basis. Furthermore, the Organic Law 3/2020 on Education (LOMLOE) underlines the importance of guidance throughout all stages of education, including for students with special educational needs, with the aim of supporting personal development, learning continuity, and labour market integration.

At the intersection of education and employment, the National Strategy on Disability, as well as various Autonomous Community-level inclusion plans, reinforce the importance of personalised guidance, transition support, and access to information for people with disabilities entering the workforce.

Career guidance in Spain is delivered by a broad ecosystem of actors. In the education system, guidance counselors in secondary schools and vocational training centres provide academic and vocational orientation, often in collaboration with families and specialised support staff. Public Employment Services (notably SEPE at the national level and regional employment agencies) offer career counselling, training programmes, and job-matching services for job seekers with disabilities. Additionally, non-governmental organisations—such as Fundación ONCE, Inserta Empleo, Fundación Adecco, and other specialised foundations—play a central role by offering adapted career services, skills training, and individualised accompaniment.

A range of tools and platforms have been developed or adapted specifically for people with disabilities. These include accessible digital job portals, sign language resources, easy-to-read materials, and individualised guidance pathways tailored to different types of disabilities. For example, the Por Talento platform (by Fundación ONCE) offers a comprehensive suite of employment tools and guidance resources in accessible formats. Regional employment services also increasingly incorporate Universal Design and digital accessibility standards into their platforms and counselling procedures.

While libraries are not conventionally seen as providers of formal career guidance, several innovative or inclusive practices have emerged in recent years. Public libraries in cities such as Barcelona, Madrid, and Seville have hosted career orientation workshops, digital skills sessions, and information fairs in collaboration with local NGOs and municipal employment offices. Some have also developed resource corners or accessible information points dedicated to employment and vocational training. These



initiatives, while not yet systematised nationwide, demonstrate the potential for libraries to serve as inclusive community hubs supporting employability and personal development.

Nonetheless, there are several gaps and areas for improvement. Coordination between education, employment, and social services remains uneven across regions, often leading to fragmented or duplicated efforts. There is also a need for greater outreach to underserved populations, particularly individuals with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities who are at risk of being excluded from mainstream guidance services. In the context of libraries, while promising practices exist, there is no formal policy framework that integrates libraries systematically into the national career guidance infrastructure. Enhancing the training of library staff in inclusive guidance practices, as well as developing partnerships with employment services and disability organisations, could substantially broaden their impact.

In conclusion, Spain has established a solid legal and institutional foundation for career guidance tailored to people with disabilities. Strengthening inter-institutional cooperation and recognising the inclusive potential of libraries would further enhance the accessibility and effectiveness of these services, in alignment with the objectives of the BYBLIOS project and broader European inclusion strategies.

## 2.5 Romania

### ***2.5.1 Libraries and professional roles***

School libraries in Romania function according a general framework (the Law 334 / 2002 - Law of Libraries) and a specific framework (Order 5556 / 2011 of Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sport – The Regulation of organization and functioning of school libraries and Centres for Documentation and Information).

According to the general framework, a school library is defined as “library organized within a learning institution at pre-university level, mainly servicing pupils and teachers in that institution and that, according to the law and organization regulations, can also function as public library” (Law 334, Article 1, paragraph f).



According to the more specific framework, a school library is defined as “a specialized department with the main goal of constituting, organizing, processing, developing and conserving book collections, periodic publications, other specific documents and databases, to facilitate its use by the beneficiaries in the purpose of information, research, education or recreation” (Order 5556, article 41). In this framework, it is mentioned that the school libraries should be taken to the “next level” by transforming them into “centres for documentation and information (CDI)”, defined as: “a modern structure for information and documentation, a centre for multi-disciplinary and multimedia resources, that offers to the beneficiaries a space for training, communication, exploitation of the documentary fund and ITC in education, a place for culture, opening, meetings and integration” (Order 5556, article 6). As seen from the definition, CDI is the more modern form of organizing this school department, as it involves not only books and periodicals, but also digital resources, using of ITC and other activities (such as trainings etc.) that are not traditionally associated with a library. The mentioned order establishes that each learning institution should have a school library or a CDI, but not both, and mainly the school board selects the type of department that is more effective according to local specificity (article 1).

The difference between school library and CDI reflects also in the staff that operates in the two structures, as CDI is operated by a “teacher documentarian” (with the statute of a teacher and all associated rights and obligations) while school libraries are operated by a “librarian” (that doesn’t have the statute of a teacher). Article 26, paragraph 1 of Order 5556 establishes that “CDI could hire both a teacher documentarian and a school librarian, if the school has the necessary resources”; needless to say, this almost never happens, as most of the schools in Romania are operating below the necessary number of personnel. More than that, many of the school libraries in Romanian schools have no librarian, and the role of the librarian is accomplished by a teacher based on voluntary work. This is mainly because the Order 5556 establishes (not very clear, though) that each school should have a school library or CDI, but it does not establish that each school should have hired staff for these departments.

Another important aspect regarding the school librarians in Romania is that since 2011 they need to have at least a bachelor degree, irrespective of the type of department,



school library of CDI: this is also present in the new law of education in 2023, at least for contracts for indefinite period (Law 138, article 176, article 193).

The shift from school libraries to CDI also involved an explicit reference to inclusion, as article 8 of the Order 5556 establishes that “CDI’s mission is to establish and develop an informational culture, to participate in ensuring *equal opportunities in terms of access to current information and documentation for students from different cultural, economic and social backgrounds* through formal, non-formal and informal activities, to develop students’ skills in the info-documentary field, to promote didactic innovation, to participate in the development of students’ key skills, to participate in the development and implementation of a local documentary policy, to support the implementation of educational policies on study levels, profiles, specializations and to contribute to the achievement of the objectives provided in the education reform process”. Therefore, in theory and legislation, CDI should have a relevant contribution to the inclusiveness in the school it operates.

### **2.5.2 Disability and job placement**

Employment for Romanian people with disabilities is regulated by the Law 448/2006 regarding the protection and promotion of rights for people with handicap, updated and republished in 2019, especially Chapter V. Orientation, professional training, occupation and employment.

According to this law (article 72, 73), the adults with disabilities have the right for professional evaluation and guidance, free of charge, realized by the Commission for evaluation of adults with handicap within the Direction General of Social Assistance and Child Protection, public institution in each county subordinated and financed by the County Council.

To promote the employment of adults with disabilities, same law (article 78) establishes that employers with staff bigger than 50 have the obligation of hiring persons with disabilities for at least 4% of the total staff; failing to do this is sanctioned with a payment of one minimum wage for each person with disabilities that should be hired and isn’t. Still, in practice, many employers prefer to pay this fine instead of hiring

adults with disabilities, as the recruitment of such persons is often very difficult, for various reasons related to social, cultural, educational factors.

Another important aspect established by the Law 448/2006 is the right of employees with disabilities to work less than 8 hours per day as a full-time job (article 83, paragraph f), if the Commission for evaluation decides so; again, in practice, this seldom happens.

The Law 76 / 2002 (regarding the unemployment insurance system and the stimulation of employment) establishes a general framework of financial stimulation of employers that want to hire adults with disabilities. According to this law (article 80, paragraph 2), all employers who, in relation to the number of employees, have fulfilled their obligation, according to the law, to employ persons with disabilities (4% of total staff), as well as employers who do not have this legal obligation, if they employ persons with disabilities for an indefinite period, receive monthly, for a period of 12 months, for each person with a disability, an amount of 2250 lei, with the obligation to maintain work or service relationships for at least 18 months. For reference, 2250 lei represents approx. 61% of the minimum wage in Romania (3700 lei in October 2024); therefore, basically, if an employer hires an adult with disabilities for the minimum wage, in the first year more than half of his salary is paid by the state. An important aspect explicitly mentioned in this law is that this support from the state remains active even if the adult with disabilities loses this statute in the 12 months of support.

Apart of this national support scheme, there are many local initiatives regarding various funding mechanisms to support hiring adults with disabilities, both through subventions for employers or compensations for the adults with disabilities that stay hired; since those mechanisms are usually funded through various projects financed by European Commission or other international grants, this support schemes lack consistency and predictability, as projects are implemented for different periods and many good initiatives cannot get constant financing after the project ends.

### ***2.5.3 Career guidance: guidelines and tools for people with disabilities***

In Romania, job placement is the responsibility of the National Employment Agency (member of EURES EUROpean Employment Services) and its structures in each county.



The County Employment Agencies are responsible for generating and updating a database with open jobs in the county (and even some information about open jobs in Europe published by EURES), organizing job fairs or other ways to connect employers with persons looking for a job, various services for adults looking for a job (professional information and advice, labour mediation, professional training etc.) or for employers looking to hire (information and counselling, professional trainings, start-up incentives etc.).

The County Employment Agencies don't have a specialized department for adults with disabilities, but they have a department for personalized accompaniment for young people at risk of social marginalization. This group includes persons between the ages of 16-26 that is in the child protection system or comes from this system; has disabilities; has no family or whose family cannot support him; has dependent children; has served one or more custodial sentences; is a victim of human trafficking. As one can observe, this department works only with young people with disabilities, so for the adults (older than 26) with disabilities the services related to job placement are the general ones, available for all adults.

In terms of young people with disabilities, the services provided by County Employment Agency are:

- personalized social support: information and professional advice, labour mediation;
- activities to inform and promote the interests of young people at risk of social marginalization among employers;
- subsidizing the workplace.

## 2.6. Germany

### ***2.6.1 Libraries and professional roles***

School libraries are the "wallflowers" of the German library landscape. The Federal Statistical Office does not list school libraries in its overview of libraries in Germany. The



office only provides information on academic and public libraries. Compared to 2010, the number of public libraries has steadily declined – from 9,900 to 8,100 in 2024. The number of loans has also decreased. Conversely, the number of people who read a book less than once a month has risen to 30.9 million.<sup>1)</sup> This corresponds to 36% of the German population (of 83.6 million) and reflects, among other things, changing reading habits thanks to access to free offers on the Internet.

Nevertheless, school libraries have been centrally recorded in the German Library Statistics since 2021. The published results for this year show a great diversity. School libraries are categorized into 1/ Independent school libraries, 2/ Networked school libraries, 3/ Branch libraries (of public libraries), and 4/ Combined public libraries with school libraries. Their number varies considerably across the individual federal states. Likewise, school libraries are represented differently in the various school types.<sup>2</sup> The data collection by German authorities is still in process. Employees are encouraged to register their school libraries. This may seem surprising, especially for the year 2025 in a developed industrial country. But it 'tells' us something about the importance that school libraries have long been given. The Schulmediothek portal states pointedly regarding the 2021 figures:

*"While, on the one hand, the call for greater support for students' reading, media, and information literacy skills is growing louder, state and municipal support for school libraries still has a lot of room for improvement. This is a huge waste of the potential that school libraries have for students' educational futures."<sup>3</sup>*

But a "wallflower" can shine and develop a great deal of potential. A lot has been done in recent years. Let's take **Berlin as an example**: According to the Association of School Libraries Berlin-Brandenburg, there are now 349 school libraries in Berlin. However, only 19 of those working there are employed. Only 2% of those working in school libraries hold a degree in librarianship or have completed a three-year training program as a media and information services specialist. Those with professional

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.icspoltore.edu.it/new/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.psoe.at/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://deutsche-kultur.provinz.bz.it/de/bibliotheken-und-lesen/rund-um-schulbibliotheken>



qualifications tend to be teaching staff (39%). Other employees receive support through JobCenter programs (10%). A considerable number volunteer for school libraries, such as parents or students themselves (14%).<sup>4</sup>. The actual staffing and financial situation of school libraries and their relatively low level of inclusion in the German library landscape therefore suggests that the inclusion of people with mental and physical disabilities in school libraries cannot be an issue in the first place. But this does not have to be the case. More on this can be found in chapters 2.6.2 Disability and Job Placement and 4.2.5.5 Reflections and Key Insights.

The question of recording school libraries and thus their public perception presupposes a **common definition**. What may seem self-evident is the result of a process in which relevant stakeholders coordinate. These standards are currently being defined for school libraries in Germany. Significant progress is expected from a conference in Leipzig in November 2025.

In Berlin, efforts are being made to establish a reliable foundation for the data collection of school libraries. According to Simone Frübing, school librarian consultant of the Treptow-Köpenick district office of Berlin, information on existing libraries at the respective schools will also be included in the annual school surveys in the future. A first test run is planned for November 2025. This approach is expected to generate more reliable information than is possible through voluntary entries in an online portal.

The legal situation has also improved: In 2021, the Berlin School Act was amended. School libraries were mentioned and their existence secured. Every new school building is now to be equipped with a library. However, the funding prospects for staff remain vague. Since Germany is federal and education falls under the responsibility of the federal states, they are also responsible for staff remuneration. School directorates have a certain budget: 97% is allocated to the teacher budget by the government. School principals can decide how the remaining 3% is used. It can be used, among other things, for language support, supporting teaching assistants or career changers in the field of media education, or for school libraries. In the state of Berlin, it is at the discretion of the management to determine which pedagogical standards are followed: Should a school library be run by volunteers or should the funds be used to hire teaching staff? One goal of this 3% regulation is to build multi-professional teams.

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<sup>4</sup> [https://ostbelgienbildung.be/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-2412/4590\\_read-32276](https://ostbelgienbildung.be/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-2412/4590_read-32276)

The current focus is on applicants who are qualified in media education or who even have both pedagogical and library training. This also raises questions about the qualifications of school librarians—and how this can be achieved.

And what about the **media budget**? A school library in the Treptow-Köpenick district of Berlin currently receives a media budget of €1,000 per year. This varies from district to district.

**Library and cultural space laws** also exist in other federal states, but only in nine out of 16.

To free school libraries from their shadowy existence and thus increase their visibility, a **coordination office for school libraries** in Berlin was established in 2021. Among other things, its goal is to create a database to record the holdings in all Berlin school libraries. A corresponding pilot project using the open-source software KOHA has already been implemented.<sup>5</sup> The coordination office also facilitates collaboration between school library consultants in Berlin.

Anyone active in the field of school libraries in Germany can find numerous inspiration and encouragement in **other German-speaking regions of Europe**. The "**School Libraries Austria Portal**"<sup>6</sup> provides access to information on school libraries, their associations, library teaching methods, and much more.

In **South Tyrol (Bolzano, Italy)**, almost every school has its own school library. The region is thus considered an outstanding "example of good practice"<sup>7</sup>.

In **eastern Belgium**, however, a different terminology has already been adopted: "school media libraries" are now being referred to. These are conceived as knowledge

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<sup>5</sup> [https://www.schulmediothek.de/startseite16.html?id=1046&news\\_id=1205](https://www.schulmediothek.de/startseite16.html?id=1046&news_id=1205) and <https://www.regeringen.se/pressmeddelanden/2024/11/nu-far-alla-elever-ratt-till-bemannade-skolbibliotek2/>)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.lebenshilfe.de/informieren/arbeiten>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.aktion-mensch.de/inklusion/arbeit/menschen-mit-behinderung-arbeitsmarkt>



and information centers, as well as reading and communication centers within the school.<sup>8</sup>

**Sweden** also offers hope: Since July 1, 2025, all Swedish students have been entitled to a school library with appropriately qualified staff.<sup>9</sup>

## 2.6.2 Disability and job placement

First, a note on **terminology**: We learned from our second intern that the word "disability" is perceived negatively. The focus is on a person and their deficits compared to "normal" people—as they are perceived. The intern suggested using the term "**disadvantage**" or "cognitive" and/or "physical disadvantage" instead. The word "disadvantage" signals that there are differences in a society, but these are not—yet—considered equal. *The focus is on society and its ability to integrate differences.*

School libraries are still barely noticed in Germany and their importance is underestimated, but they offer great opportunities for social and cultural inclusion – both for children and young people and for people who want to work there.

However, if people with intellectual disadvantages wish to work in this field, they can generally only enter into regular employment if they meet the **general requirements**. For professional staff in school libraries, this requires qualifications as a librarian, a media and information services specialist, or a teacher. This is further explained in the IFLA school library guidelines.<sup>10</sup>

Also mentioned are so-called "**paraprofessionals**" and volunteers, who can work in a school library under the supervision of specialized staff.<sup>11</sup> So-called paraprofessionals can also include **assistants**—and thus are more likely to be people who, due to cognitive disadvantages, require a job profile that accommodates these needs and simultaneously allows them to utilize their skills.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://isl-ev.de/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.arbeitsagentur.de/menschen-mit-behinderungen>, September 14, 2025)

<sup>10</sup> <https://asl-berlin.de/>

<sup>11</sup> Federal Statistical Office, <https://de.statista.com/themen/1189/bibliotheken/#topicOverview>, accessed 15.09.2025



Change processes towards greater inclusion among library staff can be initiated on both sides, the library and the employees:

- A library or school can create assistant positions specifically for people with disadvantages, whose requirements are designed accordingly. A time frame of 25 hours per week has proven to be effective for both internships. Based on that, this amount of hours is recommended for assistant or similar positions. See the internship descriptions in the next chapters (4.5. Germany). Employers, in cooperation with sheltered workshops, can offer a so-called outsourced workplace. In this case, the individual remains contractually bound to the supporting institution but works outside of it. Such a position is often temporary and is intended to enable the acquisition of "practical professional and social skills". Experience has shown that this model is primarily used in small and medium-sized enterprises.<sup>12</sup>

- For potential employees, people with cognitive and/or physical disadvantages, there are opportunities for **internships** and **outsourced work, as well as one-euro jobs or other JobCenter programmes tailored to their skills. A supervisor or job coach**, who can be used by people with disadvantages for individual support, also provides support in choosing the right option.

School libraries are entering new territory with the practical inclusion of staff with disabilities. This certainly requires a **healthy sense of stubbornness, courage, ideas**, a clear goal, and, at the same time, an openness to opportunities that arise along the way, unfazed by administrative, political, and other hurdles, to open doors to more inclusion.

### ***2.6.3 Career guidance: guidelines and tools for people with disabilities***

People with cognitive, physical, and mental disadvantages—commonly known as disabilities—can access a wide range of support options. Depending on the specific disadvantages/disability, they are also free to come together with others and take initiatives themselves.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://service-wiki.hbz-nrw.de/spaces/DBS/pages/84541466/Gesamtstatistiken> (accessed 16.10.2025).



Since the respective disadvantages can vary greatly, paths to employment are likely to be primarily provided through **information** and **case-specific counseling**. Given the heterogeneous group of people with disadvantages, carrier guidelines must be rather general.

The **Federal Employment Agency** offers information on job searches and vocational rehabilitation on its website, as well as specialized help and support and personal counseling<sup>13</sup>. You have to search specifically for support on **job center** websites.

In addition, a market of welfare organizations has emerged. In Germany, these include the Workers' Welfare Association, the German Caritas Association (Catholic Church), the German Red Cross, Diakonie Deutschland (Protestant Church), the Paritätische Gesamtverband (Parity Association), and others. They all also support people with disadvantages. Together, the Caritas Association and Diakonie form the world's largest employers' association. The neoliberal economic and social policies of recent decades have led to the economization of welfare organizations, too. For this reason, it is also advisable to obtain information from several providers.

In addition to welfare organizations, numerous associations and initiatives are active in supporting people with disadvantages. These include the Lebenshilfe association<sup>14</sup> and Aktion Mensch.<sup>15</sup>

Interest Representation Self-Determined Living in Germany e.V. (ISL)<sup>16</sup> and the Working Group for Self-Determined Living of Severely Disabled People e. V.<sup>17</sup> are associations of people with disadvantages who are trying to improve their situation through self-organization.

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<sup>13</sup> Association of School Libraries Berlin-Brandenburg, <https://www.agsbb.de/zahlen-fakten/>, (accessed on September 15, 2025)

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.berlin.de/sen/bildung/unterricht/medien/medienforum/koordinierungsstelle-schulbibliotheken>, accessed October 7, 2025)

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.schulmediothek.de/index.php?id=1225> (accessed 16.10.2025)

<sup>16</sup> (<https://www.bundestag.de/resource/blob/497904/14efe6fd351f31fc740d9b753412e906/wd-6-003-17-pdf-data.pdf>, September 15, 2025).

<sup>17</sup> <https://repository.ifa.org/rest/api/core/bitstreams/540c2aaf-6581-4b3c-9f34-89597a1ed22b/content>, page 25-29.



### 3. Structuring the internship experience: key aspects

The **protocol of inclusion** developed in the Byblios project represents a strategic tool to support the **professional inclusion of people with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities** in libraries. This protocol is the result of the work carried out within **Work Package 3 (WP3)**, built on two complementary activities: a **Participatory Action Research (PAR)** process and a **needs analysis**. The international PAR involved a variety of stakeholders - librarians, educators, public authorities, civil society organizations, and career guidance professionals - across five European countries (Italy, Portugal, Germany, Romania, and Spain) to explore the evolving role of libraries in response to major social transformations.

In parallel, the **needs analysis** engaged 119 librarians and 47 stakeholders in total to assess the **future skill needs of library staff**. This activity aimed to rethink the librarian's profile and to identify potential **career developments**, highlighting emerging priorities such as **digital competencies** and **mentoring skills**.

The **protocol of inclusion** was structured as a response to the priorities, opportunities, and barriers identified in this research phase. It offers a framework for organizing

[illegible]

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## 3.1 Who is involved

The first fundamental aspect defined in the protocol of inclusion is **“Who is involved,”** which outlines the roles, profiles, and selection processes related to the internship experience.

This section focuses primarily on the **candidate trainee** and is articulated through a detailed "Candidate Trainee Profile-Role" form. The profile gathers essential **personal and socio-demographic information** (such as name, country, age, education level, life conditions, and employment status), as well as **medical and functional diagnoses**, if applicable, using references such as DSM-V and ICF frameworks. It further explores whether the individual is **under the care of services** and what **additional support or certifications** may be required.

A core part of this section aims to understand the candidate's **skills, strengths, and motivations** in relation to the **internship role**, exploring areas like communication, digital, and social skills, alongside self-efficacy and adaptability. Interns are encouraged to reflect on their **weaknesses, aspirations, and potential barriers**, helping to set realistic expectations and tailor support accordingly. The section also captures prior **experiences** (e.g. volunteering or work), and **environmental factors** such as family, school, and accessibility.

The **recruitment process** involves associations, local organizations, or stakeholder networks, ensuring a personalized and supportive approach to **matching candidates to internship roles**.

Overall, this variable ensures a human-centered design, aligning individual profiles with inclusive learning and work environments in the context of the library.

## 3.2 Where the internship takes place

The second key aspect of the protocol of inclusion addresses **“Where the internship takes place,”** focusing on the characteristics of the host institution and the broader

learning environment. This dimension is detailed in the **"Library Context and Internship"** section, which provides a comprehensive overview of the **physical, organizational, and educational setting** in which the internship unfolds.

The form begins by identifying the **host country, city, and library or institution**, followed by a **description of the internship experience**, including its **duration, number of hours per week**, and the **types of activities** the intern is expected to engage in. These may include assisting with cataloguing, supporting reading promotion events, contributing to digital archiving, or welcoming visitors.

A fundamental aspect of this section is the **team structure**, highlighting who will accompany the intern, including the **dedicated tutor** and other key staff members. The protocol prompts the host organization to describe the **internship team**, specifying their roles in supporting, supervising, and evaluating the intern. Additionally, it requires the definition of the **skills and competencies required** for the position, which might include communication abilities, basic digital literacy, interpersonal skills, or willingness to work in a team.

To ensure adequate support, the protocol includes a dedicated space to outline the **training and support mechanisms** available to the intern. This may involve a preparatory onboarding phase, ongoing mentoring, daily briefings, or access to technical tools or soft skills development. Each internship must be framed by **clearly stated goals and learning outcomes**, tailored to the intern's individual profile. These learning outcomes cover not only task completion but also **personal development, autonomy, communication, and problem-solving**.

The **evaluation and feedback system** is another crucial part of the internship environment, ensuring that both the intern and the host institution engage in a **reflective process**, supported by regular feedback moments and final assessments. In terms of **compensation and benefits**, the section allows for the indication of whether any financial support (e.g., meal vouchers, transport reimbursement) is provided, even if the internships are mostly non-paid.

Finally, the section concludes with a description of the **application and matching process**, where the host institution indicates how candidates are selected and how the



compatibility between the intern's profile and the proposed activities is ensured. Altogether, this comprehensive approach ensures that each internship is **inclusive, structured, and supportive**, providing a **safe and meaningful learning environment** adapted to the needs of interns with intellectual disabilities.

### 3.3 What the intern does

The third aspect, "**What the intern does?**" focuses on the **tasks, responsibilities, and learning objectives** assigned to the intern during the experience. In the **protocol of inclusion form**, this dimension is clearly articulated within the **Library Context and Internship** section, where host institutions are required to detail the **main activities and duties** of the intern. These tasks are adapted to the intern's profile and capacities and are designed to be **meaningful, achievable, and progressively challenging**. Activities may include assisting library users, supporting book lending and returns, helping to organize reading corners, participating in the setup of exhibitions, or helping with digital archiving and cataloguing under supervision.

The protocol emphasizes that each task must be **accompanied by specific learning objectives**, encouraging personal and professional development. These objectives typically aim to foster **responsibility, autonomy, communication, collaboration, and time management**. The responsibilities are described in simple, accessible language to ensure clarity and alignment with the intern's abilities and interests. The document also prompts host institutions to frame tasks within **a supportive and inclusive setting**, allowing interns to feel involved, useful, and gradually more confident in their role.

Importantly, the activities are not only operational but also **educational**, helping interns develop **soft skills and social interactions** in a real work environment. By aligning daily tasks with personalized learning goals, the protocol ensures that the internship serves both as a **practical contribution to the library** and as a **structured learning journey** that supports the intern's **career development and self-efficacy**.



## 3.4 The role of the tutor

The tutor plays a central role in ensuring the quality, consistency, and inclusiveness of the internship experience. Acting as a mentor, the tutor provides **continuous guidance, support, and evaluation** throughout the internship, helping the intern navigate their responsibilities and learn in a safe, structured environment.

The mentoring process is closely supported by the **career e-Portfolio**, a digital tool hosted on Padlet<sup>18</sup>, where progress is documented through learning goals, reflections, multimedia evidence, and feedback. The e-portfolio encourages active self-assessment and enables tutors to tailor their support to each intern's evolving needs.

The cross-national data collected through the Byblios project reveals a strong awareness among librarians of **the importance of tutoring and mentoring skills** in supporting inclusive internship experiences. A large majority of respondents across countries **recognize tutoring as a central task of their role**, and most feel confident in providing mentorship during internship pathways. Notably, there is a high level of openness to welcoming and guiding trainees with intellectual disabilities, reflecting a **positive attitude toward inclusion**.

However, the data also suggests a **growing need for structured support and training in mentoring practices**, particularly in areas such as personalized guidance, communication strategies, and the use of digital tools like the career e-Portfolio. Librarians involved in tutoring recognize the need to strengthen their **mentoring skills, digital competencies, and communication abilities to effectively support interns with intellectual disabilities**.

These findings confirm that librarians are well-positioned to act as inclusive mentors, provided they are **equipped with appropriate resources and pedagogical frameworks**. Investing in these aspects, through dedicated **training courses, resource development, peer tutoring systems, and the involvement of other professional**

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<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, pp. 29-39

**figures during the initial phases** – is a fundamental step toward transforming positive attitudes into effective and inclusive mentoring practices. This investment benefits not only the trainees, but also the entire library ecosystem, fostering a culture of support, inclusion, and continuous learning.

Tutors are seen as crucial in fostering inclusion, eliminating stereotypes, and promoting mutual learning within the library team. The mentoring relationship is not only about supervision but about **building trust**, promoting **autonomy**, and ensuring that the intern feels like a valued member of the **library community**.

### 3.5 Access and onboarding procedures

Access and onboarding procedures in the Byblios Protocol of Inclusion are designed to ensure both **legal compliance and inclusive support** for interns with intellectual disabilities, while also minimizing bureaucratic barriers. The “Internship Documentation” section of the protocol outlines a comprehensive framework, beginning with key legal and compliance requirements such as **adherence to labor laws** regarding internships for people with disabilities, **confidentiality agreements**, **health and safety regulations**, and **minimum wage laws**. Specific attention is given to **disability accommodation and compliance**, ensuring that legal protections are fully respected throughout the internship.

The protocol also includes **provisions for insurance and liability coverage**, including general liability, compensation, and accident insurance, supported by a tailored risk assessment plan.

The program documentation consists of a written outline of the internship, **an agreement between parties**, **an accommodation policy**, **emergency contact and medical forms**, and **tutor support tools**, including guidance sheets.

A designated person inside the Byblios project is responsible for overseeing onboarding, monitoring activities, and ensuring the internship aligns with the educational goals of the project. The protocol also details **coordination mechanisms**, such as **formal partnership agreements** and **individualized support plans**, alongside



**budget and funding strategies** to cover adaptive technologies, job aids, mentorship stipends, and potential grants or compensation arrangements.

To facilitate the onboarding process, an **intern orientation packet** could be provided, containing essential materials such as a **code of conduct** and **expectations**. The protocol defines a clear **feedback and reporting structure**, including feedback forms, reporting procedures, and the use of the e-portfolio for record keeping.

At the conclusion of the internship, **end-of-program documentation** such as completion forms and certificates or letters of recommendation are prepared, followed by evaluation and reporting to stakeholders, including a post-internship report and presentation of results to library administration. Finally, a **data analysis** component links onboarding to impact assessment, combining initial surveys and final interviews to evaluate learning outcomes, improve practices, and support future iterations of the protocol.

## 4. National Internship Experiences

This chapter presents the national implementation of the BYBLIOS protocol of inclusion across five European countries: Italy, Portugal, Spain, Romania, and Germany. Each country adapted the common framework to its local educational, social, and cultural context, while maintaining shared objectives: to promote inclusive internships for young people with intellectual disabilities within libraries, to strengthen collaboration among key stakeholders, and to explore the transformative role of libraries as spaces for participation, learning, and community engagement.

Through these case studies, the chapter highlights both common patterns and distinctive approaches emerging from each national context. The analysis focuses on the main phases of the internships — from preparation and implementation to monitoring and evaluation — illustrating the successes achieved, the challenges faced, and the lessons learned.

Special attention is given to how the presence of interns reshaped daily library practices, enhanced awareness about inclusion, and generated meaningful social and professional impacts for all actors involved. Together, these experiences demonstrate

that inclusion in libraries is not only possible, but can serve as a model for other cultural and educational institutions across Europe.

## 4.1 Italy

### 4.1.1. Design Process: selection of the school library

The internship was designed following a **person-centered**, inclusive and research-driven methodology. At its core, the project recognized that inclusion cannot be achieved through standardized solutions, but rather through a careful balance of structure, flexibility and continuous reflection. In fact, the entire initiative was grounded in a **participatory action research** (PAR) framework. This meant that the tutor continuously observed, reflected and adjusted the design of tasks as the program unfolded. Rather than treating the internship as a fixed pathway, the process was dynamic and iterative: if a trainee found a task too complex, it could be broken down into smaller steps; if an unexpected strength emerged, responsibilities could be expanded accordingly. In this way, learning outcomes were not only measured but actively co-constructed, with each adjustment feeding back into the design of the following day.

The internships were conducted in the school library of the **Istituto Comprensivo di Spoltore**<sup>19</sup> (PE), situated in the town of Spoltore, in the Abruzzo region of central Italy. The selection of the school and its library as the internship site was a natural process. The library coordinator had already been engaged during the focus groups and showed strong enthusiasm for the project from the very beginning, while the school principal offered immediate support and openness. This highlights a key element for the success of such initiatives: the **context**. The presence of a receptive and collaborative institutional environment is not only a facilitator but also a prerequisite for ensuring meaningful participation and sustainable outcomes.

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<sup>19</sup> Seligman, Martin EP. "Learned helplessness." (1973): 165-169.

The library is structured into three main areas, designed to adapt to children's ages and the different activities of borrowing, returning, and exploring books.

1. Lending/Returning Room. This room is primarily dedicated to younger children and contains books for early readers. One of the two computers used for lending and returning books is located here. The main convenience is that children can complete all their tasks in the same room: choose a book, return it if necessary, and borrow a new one, without having to move anywhere else.

2. Multipurpose Room. This room features shelves with books designed for slightly older children, who can explore and independently choose their favorite titles. The ample space and layout of the shelves encourage freedom of movement and personal discovery of the books.

3. Corridor / Atrium. The corridor, which almost coincides with the atrium, houses shelves divided by thematic section: Adventure, Geronimo Stilton, Classics, Comics, Friendship, Mystery, and so on. This area is dedicated to older children and offers them the opportunity to freely browse the titles.

At the entrance to the corridor is the reception desk/front office, with a second computer for loans and returns, especially useful for older children. Next to the desk is a box for returns, so children can leave their books and immediately explore the shelves without having to go back.

The physical and organizational characteristics of the school library played a central role in shaping the internship experience. Thoughtfully designed spaces, technological resources, and structured workflows provided a supportive environment that facilitated both skill acquisition and social participation for the interns. At the same time, certain structural and operational limitations highlighted areas where adaptive strategies were necessary, allowing trainees to develop problem-solving skills and resilience.

### **Facilitators (spatial and organizational features of the library)**

+ **Accessibility and layout.** Firstly, the fact that this was a public school allowed us to ensure compliance with all accessibility standards: a ramp for disabled students,

support from ATA staff... The layout of the rooms on the same floor and the accessibility of the building encouraged safe mobility, movement, and active exploration (e150 Products and Technology for the Design and Construction of Buildings for Public Use). Spacious layout encouraged safe movement and reduced sensory overload, promoting active exploration and engagement → d460 Moving around in different locations.

+ **Structured areas by age and activity.** Areas structured by age and activity (lending/returning room, multipurpose room, corridor/atrium) ensured predictability, promoting understanding and reducing cognitive load, facilitating the completion of assigned tasks. The thematic organization of books supported visual orientation and the organization of the library spaces, → d840 Apprenticeship / d825 On-the-job training (since the structured environment strengthens the learning context).

+ **Spatial features.** With regard to aspects related to the building's physical and structural characteristics, the library is a bright space, abundantly illuminated by natural and artificial light, with bright and welcoming colors, a dynamic and stimulating atmosphere, and organized to ensure full accessibility for all users. (e150 Products and Technology for the Design and Construction of Buildings for Public Use)

+ **Technology and devices.** The library has got two computers, one for each intern, two label scanners/readers, and ultra-broadband Wi-Fi. All rooms are connected via LAN and Wi-Fi. This allowed us to focus on two important indicators: first, training and skill acquisition related to the Bibliowin platform (e130 Products and Technologies for Training); Second, we linked what we learned to the work of a library assistant, as well as to the documentation of the work performed. (e135 Products and Technologies for Work).

+ **Social aspects.** The direct involvement of the children and the Committee of Volunteer Mothers allowed the interns to interact with both library users and colleagues and collaborators. The possibility of having a smaller room and vending machines with small snacks and coffee on the same floor also allowed us to work on the relational aspect. → d750 Informal Social Relations (since book choices were discussed with peers, children, or volunteers, thus connecting the space to social participation) and e325 Acquaintances, peers, colleagues, community members (facilitating relational dynamics between colleagues, volunteers, and tutors).

## Barriers (spatial and organizational characteristics of the library)

- ***Spatial limitations.*** Some shelves were a bit high and difficult for the interns to reach, limiting their full independence in consulting and rearranging the spaces (e150 Products and technology for the design and construction of buildings for public use). However, this allowed them to work on problem solving and support requests from colleagues, volunteers, and tutors.
- ***Logistical challenges.*** Having to move between two or three different spaces could be an advantage in some cases because it encouraged the interns to move; in others, it posed logistical challenges (d460 Moving to different locations - Limited mobility).
- ***Cognitive demands of cataloging.*** Another limitation was that the book labels were small and contained many numeric codes, which could be cognitively demanding and slow down the loan/return process. → e130 Products and Technologies for Education (since the cataloging tools were not fully accessible). The solution was to purchase a magnifying glass, but this was not as successful as hoped. Consequently, there were some delays in the shelving task.
- ***Technological interruptions.*** Moreover, sometimes one scanner didn't work or was unavailable and it occasionally interrupted the workflow and caused delays → e135 Products and Technologies for Employment. The solution was to insert the codes in an analogical way, one by one in the bar.
- ***Crowded and noisy moments.*** Sometimes challenged the trainees' emotional regulation, requiring external mediation → e325 Acquaintances, colleagues, community members (children and mothers).

These elements were not only obstacles, but also provided meaningful opportunities to practice problem-solving, coordination, and collaborative strategies. Overall, the library's spatial and organizational features functioned as facilitators for skill development, social interaction, and reflective learning, while minor constraints offered valuable experiences for adapting strategies and reinforcing autonomy within the learning environment.

#### **4.1.2. Design Process: selection of participants**

Firstly, the selection of participants was guided by the principle of reasoned sampling, a methodological choice particularly suited to the field of cognitive disability, where individual variability is substantial even within the same diagnostic condition. A randomized approach would not have ensured either meaningful engagement or alignment with the project's objectives. Instead, the focus was placed on identifying candidates whose profiles were relevant to the goals of the internship, whose families demonstrated interest and support, and whose functional abilities allowed them to benefit from and contribute to the experience. **Within this framework, two young women with Down syndrome were selected.** They were included in the broader category of persons with cognitive disabilities, yet met the primary functional requirements necessary to engage with library tasks in a meaningful way. These requirements were defined with reference to the ICF framework, ensuring an evidence-based and internationally comparable assessment. Key areas of competence included:

- Use of digital devices (ICF: e135): ability to operate computers, scanners, and telephones, including logging into platforms and navigating software interfaces.
- Reading skills (ICF: d140): ability to decode instructions, book labels, and classification codes.
- Writing skills (ICF: d145): ability to produce short written notes or input data in the library system.
- Numeracy skills: capacity to understand and apply numerical information, particularly for book codes and shelving.
- Spatial orientation: ability to navigate the library environment, recognizing sections and organizing materials according to classification systems.

The selection process was carried out in collaboration with local associations and supported by a family already engaged in the project. Rather than conducting a formal

interview, the first meeting functioned as an observational assessment, during which practical abilities, autonomy in performing tasks, communication skills, and motivation were carefully evaluated. This preliminary evaluation confirmed that both candidates were able to satisfy the functional requirements and had the potential to progress within the internship framework.

Moreover, the internship was designed to provide a structured and supportive environment in which trainees could actively contribute to the daily operations of the school library while progressively developing their professional and personal skills. The intern will support the daily operations of the library, assisting children in borrowing and returning books, managing library resources, and contributing to the organization and documentation of library activities. Interns will develop competencies in library operations, digital literacy, student engagement, and organizational skills. They will gain confidence in supporting library services, managing resources, and contributing to educational initiatives. In particular, responsibilities and duties were adapted from the ESCO descriptors for the librarian profile, simplified to ensure accessibility and alignment with the abilities of interns with cognitive disabilities.

#### Core responsibilities:

- Organize Library Materials: support in shelving, arranging, and maintaining the visibility and accessibility of books according to thematic and age-based categories.
- Manage Loans and Returns: operate the *Bibliowin* system for lending and returning books, including scanning borrower cards, identifying and recording borrowed items, and verifying previous loans.
- Assist Visitors: welcome children and guide them through basic library procedures, offering help in a friendly and inclusive manner.
- Maintain Library Environment: contribute to keeping the library tidy and functional, ensuring that materials, furniture, and devices are properly arranged at the end of each session.



- Collaborate with Others: work alongside volunteers, staff and peers, fostering teamwork, communication and social interaction.
- Use Basic Technology: practice digital literacy by operating computers, scanners, and online platforms (e.g., *Bibliowin*, Padlet) to support library tasks and documentation.

Through these activities, the interns were able to develop practical competencies in library operations, digital literacy, student engagement, and organizational skills. Moreover, the structured nature of the tasks enabled them to build confidence in supporting library services, managing resources, and contributing to educational initiatives, while also strengthening their problem-solving abilities, communication skills, and social participation.

#### **4.1.3. Description of the experience**

The internship lasted a total of 40 hours, with two meetings per week, usually on Mondays and Fridays. We initially held two-hour meetings, but later reduced the duration to 1–1.5 hours per session. This adjustment not only accommodated the library's schedule and matched the interns' attention span, but also allowed us to extend the internship over a longer period—from February to May—ensuring a more gradual and effective learning experience.

The internship program was supported by a **multi-layered mentorship and supervision structure**. The university tutor, a sociologist and social worker, provided guidance on task organization, facilitated reflection on the work performed, and supported the interns' understanding of their role within the library context. Teacher Chiara, as the on-site librarian and reference figure, offered step-by-step explanations of library procedures and remained a constant presence throughout the experience. Volunteer mothers actively participated in role-playing activities and relational support, creating a safe and welcoming environment. At times, school collaborators contributed, particularly during moments of high student flow.

The trainees' performance was continuously monitored through:



- Direct observation by the university tutor, noting task completion, autonomy, and interaction with children and staff.
- Padlet entries, where trainees reflected on their learning and shared visual documentation.
- Feedback from library staff and volunteers, providing additional context and identifying areas for support or development.

The valuation was done at the beginning and at the end of the internship, while in the middle there was continuous monitoring. To evaluate the effectiveness of the internship and monitor the progress of participants, we adopted a dual assessment strategy combining both quantitative and qualitative dimensions. This approach ensured that learning outcomes were captured not only in terms of measurable skills acquisition, but also in relation to personal growth, autonomy, and social inclusion. The quantitative assessment relied on the ESCO framework, adapted and simplified through artificial intelligence to match the cognitive profiles of the trainees, while the qualitative assessment was carried out through the analysis of the digital portfolio (Padlet), where experiences, reflections, and self-evaluations were collected.

Together, these complementary methods provided a comprehensive picture of the trainees' learning outcomes, making the evaluation both standardised (aligned with EU reference systems) and person-centered (reflecting the unique developmental trajectories of each participant).

**Initial training and guidance.** The internship began with an orientation session that was designed to provide a structured introduction to the internship experience. The day began with a welcome session, during which the university tutor, Teacher Chiara, the two interns and the volunteer mothers were introduced. This was followed by a short exchange about any previous experiences with internships, aimed at contextualizing the placement and reinforcing expectations. For the initial training the interns were guided through the library and school spaces. Teacher Chiara (responsible for the school library) presented the different areas of the library, explained the organization of shelves by genre and introduced the role of the assistant librarian, focusing on the tasks of lending and returning books. During this session, the



university tutor recorded a video of the activities, so that the interns could later revisit the explanation and consolidate their learning at their own pace. A key moment of the orientation was the explanation of the connection between an internship and a real work experience, highlighting responsibility, professionalism, and the acquisition of transferable skills.

### Task-Based Activities

**TASK 1: Book Lending.** The first task involved teaching trainees how to manage book lending independently. Using the **Bibliowin circulation system**, trainees logged in with personal credentials, scanned library cards and book codes and completed the lending process. This activity developed **technical skills**, sequential processing, and memory recall (ICF: b144, d220), as well as attention focusing (d160) and problem-solving abilities (d175). Initially supervised closely by the tutor, trainees gradually gained autonomy, demonstrating their ability to execute tasks independently while adhering to library procedures.

**TASK 2: Book Returns.** The second task focused on book returns. Trainees learned to scan returned books, update records in the system, and prepare for the next transaction. This task reinforced accuracy, sequencing, and attention to detail, while also giving trainees practice in procedural adherence and independent decision-making (ICF: d177, d220). Over time, they were able to manage returns with minimal supervision, demonstrating confidence and competence in core library processes.

**TASK 3: Shelf Organization.** Shelf organization was divided into two subtasks:

- **TASK 3.1 – First-Reading Section:** Trainees arranged books for younger children according to size, visibility and accessibility. This task enhanced **fine motor coordination** (ICF: d440), spatial awareness (d460), and logical reasoning, while also fostering a sense of responsibility for maintaining a welcoming and orderly environment.
- **TASK 3.2 – Other Sections:** Trainees were trained to interpret book codes, associate them with the correct shelf, and organize materials in other thematic sections. Through repetition and guided practice, they learned to navigate the



library independently and apply systematic shelving strategies, strengthening both **spatial orientation and executive functioning skills**.

**TASK 4: Checking Previous Loans Before Lending.** Trainees learned to verify whether children had returned previous books before issuing new loans. This task reinforced attention to detail, sequential decision-making, and procedural compliance, ensuring accuracy and accountability in circulation activities. It also helped trainees apply problem-solving skills in real-time when discrepancies arose (ICF: d175).

**TASK 5: Communication and Promotion.** Trainees participated in library promotion activities, including drafting content for social media. One of the trainees independently drafted a post on Canva for the official Instagram page of the Istituto Comprensivo di Spoltore Library. She selected a book to recommend (“Disabile a chi?” by her friend Demetra Emanuele and Simone Pavone ), chose the cover image for the post, wrote a caption explaining the importance of the book and why it should be read by teachers, parents and authorities. The caption highlighted the message of awareness about disability, reflecting personal engagement and critical thinking. The tutor supervised the technical aspects, such as graphics and post formatting, while she managed the content creation independently, demonstrating both expressive and digital literacy skills.

**TASK 6: Environmental Maintenance.** Maintaining the library environment was a critical task. Trainees organized workstations, returned devices such as scanners and computers to their proper places, tidied up, and checked for clutter. This routine promoted organizational skills, accountability, and respect for shared spaces, while reinforcing autonomy and procedural memory (ICF: d210, d220).

**TASK 7: Reflection and Documentation (Padlet / e-Portfolio).** Trainees discussed the day with the tutor and then uploaded photos, short reflections, or emoticons on the Padlet/e-portfolio to narrate their daily experiences. This practice allowed them to reflect on their learning, document achievements, and express feelings about their tasks. In addition to the reflective component, communication skills were exercised through a practical social media activity.

**TASK 8: Digitization and Book Scanning.** This task, introduced later in the internship, involved handling and digitally scanning special or valuable books and drawings. Although this task was only partially acquired, it provided an opportunity to practice precision, care, and digital recording skills, under close supervision.

#### ***4.1.4. The importance of the relationship***

Social interaction was a core component of the internship. Trainees engaged closely with children, library staff, and volunteers, practicing **formal and informal relational skills** (ICF: d740, d750). Regular check-ins and debriefings with the tutor provided opportunities to reflect on both successes and challenges, enhancing **self-awareness, confidence, and problem-solving skills**. The daily rhythm of the internship was carefully structured to balance guidance with autonomy. Each morning began with a short **briefing**, during which objectives were reviewed, tasks were assigned, and the expected outcomes were clarified. This moment created a sense of orientation and responsibility, preparing the trainees for the activities ahead. The **execution of tasks** then followed, initially with close supervision but gradually allowing for greater independence as confidence and skills developed. The learning process was not only technical but also relational: throughout the day, the interns interacted with **children, volunteers, and library staff**, encounters that became valuable opportunities to practice communication, empathy, and collaboration. These exchanges often went beyond the functional aspects of the internship, nurturing a genuine sense of belonging within the library community. Moreover, an important dimension of the daily routine was the **reflective practice** carried out through Padlet. Here, the trainees documented their experiences by uploading photos, adding short written reflections, or sometimes simply selecting emoticons to capture their mood. This simple but meaningful activity encouraged them to pause, look back on what they had done, and translate it into personal expression, reinforcing both memory and self-awareness.

#### ***4.1.5. Learning Outcomes***

Through this structured, task-oriented, and reflective approach, trainees achieved a combination of **technical, cognitive, and social learning outcomes**:



- **Technical skills:** Operation of library software, device handling, and spatial organization of materials.
- **Cognitive skills:** Attention focusing, sequential processing, problem-solving, and decision-making.
- **Social and relational skills:** Interaction with children and adults, teamwork, empathy, and communication.
- **Reflective skills:** Use of Padlet/e-portfolio to document experiences, evaluate performance, and enhance metacognition.
- **Autonomy and confidence:** Progressive independence in task execution, managing real-world responsibilities within a supportive environment.

The experience demonstrated that inclusive, structured internships, supported by layered supervision, clear task design, and reflective tools, can effectively support skill acquisition, personal growth, and active participation for individuals with cognitive disabilities. The integration of ICF-based assessment and ESCO-aligned competencies provided measurable outcomes, while the research-action methodology ensured continuous adaptation to the trainees' evolving needs. This approach offers a model for designing inclusive educational and vocational programs that are both practical and evidence-based.

#### **4.1.6. Main Challenges and points to pay attention to**

Throughout the internship, several challenges emerged which are important to acknowledge for future replication of the project. One of the first aspects was the **diversity of the interns' profiles**. While this required flexible supervision and differentiated task design, it also turned into a strength: the contrast in abilities and styles enriched the experience, offering a wider lens on how inclusion can adapt to different personal resources. This heterogeneity should therefore be seen not as a limitation, but as an added value for designing inclusive environments. The **social environment** represented both an opportunity and a challenge. The daily interaction



with children, volunteers, and staff was a powerful driver of learning, yet it also introduced elements of unpredictability and stress. Managing the flow of social exchanges, especially in moments of higher activity, required structured support and pacing to ensure that the interns could maintain focus and confidence. Another area that required attention was the **reflective component**. The use of tools such as the Padlet e-portfolio encouraged documentation through photos, emoticons, and short reflections. However, ensuring continuity and depth in reflective practice was not always easy, and required ongoing encouragement. Despite these challenges, the reflective process proved crucial in consolidating learning and fostering metacognitive awareness. Beyond the practical and social dimensions, structural barriers also emerged. The **limited time frame** of the internship constrained the potential for consolidation of skills, especially considering the repetition needed to fully internalise certain tasks. Additionally, the **legal and contractual framework** for including young people with cognitive disabilities in structured internships remains complex, requiring clearer guidelines and stronger institutional support. These constraints make the question of **replicability** particularly relevant: while the pilot demonstrated strong potential, scaling it up will depend on addressing legal uncertainties, extending time availability, and ensuring sustainable partnerships with schools, families, and local associations. In conclusion, the challenges encountered highlight areas for growth and careful planning. Far from being obstacles, they offer insights into how inclusive internships can be refined, consolidated, and expanded in future initiatives.

#### **4.1.7. Internship Evidence and Evaluation of the experience**

The internship took place in a **school library in Italy**, serving children aged **6 to 10 years**. The space offered a welcoming and educational environment where the two trainees supported daily library activities — book lending, returns, organization, and assistance to young readers.

Over the course of the internship, a **clear evolution** was observed in the behaviour of both the trainees and the children who frequented the library. Initially, the children were curious but somewhat hesitant; over time, they began to interact more naturally with the two young women, showing genuine affection and inclusion.

The children often expressed curiosity by asking simple but meaningful questions such as: *“What are their names?”*, *“Are they friends or sisters?”*, *“They look alike!”* — a

remark both tender and amusing, since both trainees wear glasses and share some typical facial traits associated with Down syndrome. During the internship, the children also expressed their growing bond with the trainees through **drawings and small artworks**. Many of these depicted the two young women together with the library tutor — often smiling, wearing glasses, and surrounded by books.



*The different spaces of “our library”: upstairs and downstairs*



*Library: magic and fantasy. Books give me so many adventures and teach me new things. The interns are in action in the front office and giving books from the shelves.*



*Library staff: teacher Chiara (library manager), volunteer mothers, BYBLIOS interns, and the University tutor*

These drawings represented a **spontaneous and touching form of inclusion**, showing that the children not only recognised the trainees' presence but also **internalised their role** within the library community.

A **qualitative evaluation** of the internship was carried out using a **digital portfolio hosted on Padlet**. This tool allowed the trainees to document their experiences in a **multimodal way**, combining photos, short written reflections, emojis, and comments about the activities completed.

The **e-portfolio** served multiple functions:



1. **Self-reflection and personal growth**

It encouraged the trainees to reflect on their progress, recognise challenges, and celebrate achievements in real time.

2. **Visual and narrative documentation**

It provided a rich, accessible record of the internship — available to tutors, families, and supervisors — fostering motivation, engagement, and a sense of ownership over their learning journey.

3. **Qualitative insight beyond performance**

It allowed the evaluation team to capture **emotional, relational, and behavioural dimensions**, such as social interaction, empathy, and sense of responsibility — key elements when working with individuals with cognitive disabilities.

Moreover, at the end of each day, a dedicated moment was set aside to collect the trainees' impressions and reflections on the activities carried out. During this time, the entries were uploaded to the Padlet — either with assisted guidance or, in some cases, independently — allowing the trainees to document their progress in real time. On their Padlet pages, the two interns reflected not only on the activities and tools used (scanner, computer, platform *Bibliowin*) but also on the **people they worked with** and the **relationships built**.

During the internship in Italy, trainees were able to build strong relationships with both the library staff and their university tutor.

- One of the trainees repeatedly said, *"Mi sono divertita con la fantastica Chiara!"*, referring with affection to her university tutor from Università d'Annunzio (*"I had so much fun with the amazing Chiara!"*). This highlights how the presence of a supportive mentor can significantly enhance engagement and motivation.

She stated, *"Menomale che c'è la Maestra Chiara, lei sa sempre tutto"* (*"Luckily we have Teacher Chiara, she always knows everything"*) and *"Se non sai qualcosa devi chiedere alla maestra Chiara, lei è la responsabile della biblioteca"* (*"If you don't know something, you have to ask Teacher Chiara; she is the head of the library"*). These comments illustrate not only the importance of



a reliable point of reference within the library but also the positive impact of personalized support from the university tutor, who, in this case, complemented the guidance of the library staff.

- The second trainee, who was less verbally expressive, nonetheless found ways to communicate her positive feelings through smiles, emojis and heart icons, which she often posted alongside photos of her activities on the digital portfolio. Her enthusiasm and engagement were evident not only in her online interactions but also in person: *“She would greet everyone warmly with a smile and was always ready to participate in small social moments, like enjoying a coffee and croissant during breaks”* (Teacher Chiara - Responsible for the school library). These small gestures reflected her sense of belonging within the library environment and highlighted the importance of informal social interactions in supporting inclusion and building confidence.

These simple but authentic expressions provide **powerful qualitative evidence** of the trainees’ engagement, emotional participation, and well-being during the internship.

#### **4.1.8. First final reflections and noteworthy insights**

The internship in the school library of the Istituto Comprensivo of Spoltore proved to be a highly enriching and transformative experience, both for the trainees and for the supervisors. The results were presented to the library administration and other stakeholders to inform future internship planning and potential adjustments to support systems and highlight the effectiveness of inclusive practices and adaptations for trainees with cognitive disabilities. This experience can also provide a basis for scaling the program or integrating similar approaches in other libraries or educational contexts. The success of the program underscores that the quality of mentorship and supervision is as crucial as the activities themselves. Finding professionals who are prepared to welcome diversity, understand individual abilities, and tailor support accordingly is fundamental for achieving meaningful learning outcomes. Beyond skill acquisition, the internship cultivated confidence, motivation, social engagement, and a sense of responsibility in the trainees, demonstrating that inclusive, well-supported educational experiences can have lasting impact both on personal development and on the broader community. We hope that this experience can serve as a starting point,



inspiring other schools, libraries, and organizations to create inclusive, structured, and empathetic learning opportunities for people with cognitive disabilities, promoting equity, participation, and professional growth.

## 4.2. Portugal

### 4.2.1. Introduction: Numbers and Locations

A total of 10 young people were selected; however, two did not participate, while eight did start. One intern gave up due to health reasons after two weeks, another after two months because she was selected for a professional internship as a Geriatric Assistant, which aligned with her professional training. **The other six interns remain under the Job Placement Support Programme.** Three were placed in the Public Municipality Library (Raul Brandão Library), four in the largest school cluster (Agrupamento de Escolas Francisco de Holanda), and one in the Desincoop Library.

All these libraries are located in Guimarães, a city in Braga District in the northern region. The two interns who were selected but did not participate in this project are from Caldas das Taipas, a village nine kilometres from the city centre. However, without the support of the school librarian, it was not possible to include them—all the others live in an urban area.

Since the beginning of the Byblios project Desincoop has engaged the Guimarães Municipality, responsible for Public Libraries and also for School Libraries. Guimarães is the second municipality in the country with the most school libraries. The Public Libraries of the Municipality of Guimarães, including the Raul Brandão Municipal Library and its branches, are public services and form part of the Library and Documentation Division (DBD) of the Library, Archive, and Documentation Department (DBAD) of the Guimarães City Council.

The current Raul Brandão Municipal Library has its origins in the Library and Literature Support Service of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. In 1964, the management of the Art and Recreation Circle (CAR) requested support from the Calouste Gulbenkian



Foundation. In 1966, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation's Permanent Library No. 127 was inaugurated at the CAR headquarters. In 1975, this library was relocated to the old Town Hall building, where it remained until 1992. In May 1987, emphasis was placed on the project to create a Municipal Library, which had long been desired by the population and was so necessary for all those who enjoy reading and a leisure space. On 7 March 1992, the Raul Brandão Municipal Library was inaugurated in a 19th-century building in the historic centre, opposite the new Guimarães Town Hall. Its patron was a great writer and playwright who lived in Guimarães from 1886 to 1901.

A partner of Desincoop in implementing the Byblios project was naturally CERCIGUI, building on previous collaborations that resulted in the protocol written and signed in 2023 by the two cooperatives. Both parties are dedicated to addressing the identified needs through the following activities:

- Advice on advocacy and free access to their (PwD) rights;
- Development of content, training materials, training and qualification programmes;
- Support for all young people with disabilities in the transition from school/training to the labour market;
- Individual and group coaching sessions;
- Placement in internships with professional mentoring, during which they will have the opportunity to develop the communication and interpersonal skills sought by employers;
- Development of employment opportunities for persons with disabilities;
- Establishment of partnerships with employers.

CERCIGUI was established in 1977 and currently serves more than 500 individuals with various disabilities and their families through a range of services and programs, including two occupational centres, two residential homes, home care, and a professional training centre.



The Vocational Rehabilitation and Training Centre aims to enhance the socio-professional integration of people with disabilities, with a minimum age requirement for work. This centre, with over 20 years of history, has developed several actions throughout its existence that promote the acquisition and development of personal, professional, social, and relational skills among its target audience, thus contributing to the building of a more inclusive society. version.

School Cluster Francisco de Holanda (AEFH) comprises four schools: Santa Luzia Primary School, the first primary school established in the city, located in the Parish of Azurém, and Pegada Primary School. Egas Moniz Middle School (EB2/3), located in the Parish of Urgezes, was created through Ministerial Ordinance no. 1210, on the 3rd October 1995—Francisco de Holanda Secondary School, designed by Regal Decree, on 3rd December 1884.

AEFH includes all levels of education, from pre-school to secondary, with several course choices, ranging from Science and Humanities (CCH) to vocational courses. Francisco de Holanda also offers several certified courses for adult learners, as well as courses that validate and certify skills through its Qualifica Centre. The school cluster comprises 2,429 students, 211 teachers, and 62 auxiliary staff.

DESINCOOP and AEFH have been local partners for over ten years and have together developed several ERASMUS+ projects. DESINCOOP organises non-formal activities with AEFH students, and also receives them for internships, as well as develops professional aptitude tests.

Desincoop's consolidated partnership with these three entities, the Municipality, CERCIGUI and AEFH, was fundamental in all phases of implementation, from defining criteria for selecting future interns, to the type of mentoring to be implemented, and activities to be developed in each of the libraries. Another essential aspect of the selection process was to seek out young people with complementary profiles, especially for the peer-to-peer work they would be developing.

Each organisation appointed a mentor to supervise the young people; however, on a day-to-day basis, the librarian teachers and operational assistants at the schools where



they were placed, as well as the librarians at the Public Library, provided invaluable support.

#### **4.2.2. Country Case Study**

Before the internship began, a collection of activities that might fit this profile of a librarian assistant was compiled, serving as a starting point. Since we didn't know the young people, we considered spending time in other areas of the library, such as the Raúl Brandão Municipal Library.

However, the internship period was short. In fact, right at the beginning, we had the Easter holidays and the need to implement plan B. This was to gather everyone in one place and find a group activity they could participate in. It was also thought that it would be helpful for them to understand that working in a library often involves preparing materials for events and activities, and that it's not always desk work, as one might imagine. Being a librarian assistant also consists of maintaining the spaces in good condition and, in addition to tidying, may often include tasks related to the hygiene of the spaces and the books.

In the case of school libraries, this depended on the dynamics of each library. The needs of students in a primary school differ from those of a school with secondary students, due to the larger space, number, and diversity of students. There, librarians and other teaching and non-teaching staff also played a role.

The experience at Desincoop was quite diverse because our books are donated; it's necessary to check their condition, register, organise, and prepare everything for classification at the Raúl Brandão Library, along with European project activities and local community engagement activities. For the Desincoop intern, it was undoubtedly significant to connect with the Raúl Brandão Library and gain a better understanding of where he wanted to be and build his path to achieve this goal. Today, he's no longer alone at Desincoop; he has colleagues who are still benefiting from this measure. However, our goal is for them to find a place where they feel safest and most fulfilled.

Byblos focuses primarily on school libraries as spaces for lifelong learning and training. From the very beginning of this project, we argued that they are, but not exclusively, because other libraries also fulfil this function. And, in line with this argument, we



decided not to have two interns, but rather to select all we could to place in school libraries and the Public Library. We already had one intern since the project was approved. This was useful for us to anticipate what other internships could be in practice and what challenges we might encounter. This was also the reason for having a select group of mentors (one in each library) and a large group of tutors (representing the local partners).

In the first phase of the project, we attempted to involve other School Groups and had even selected two young people from one school. However, we lost this opportunity due to the health issues of the librarian teacher, and therefore, it was not possible to continue.

We concluded that it would be helpful for the young people to work in pairs; an intern had been with us for some time, and we felt he would benefit from having a partner. We selected two young people with distinct characteristics in each location. If one could be reserved and calm, a more extroverted one could be an asset, and for this one to be restrained by a quieter one as well.

We also considered that the young people, who, in addition to having different personal profiles, had varying skill sets and training backgrounds. In terms of skills, we were concerned with identifying those that could complement each other and encourage peer learning. Another aspect was that they were of different ages, which allowed us to illustrate these persistent training paths - internship, inactivity, training, and how often other transition measures were repeated in some cases. We also wanted to show that even the work experiences were short and irregular.

And there was always the chance, as confirmed by our findings, that someone would give up, which could contribute to discouragement. Therefore, we always had to think of plan Bs, and it was indeed a consensual decision that we had a large number of young people involved. There were 10, 8 started, and 6 reached the end of the application period.

Thus, following the internship, a select group was formed by the Desincoop representative, the AEFH representative, the special education coordinator, and a representative from the Raul Brandão Municipal Library. This group, in turn,

coordinated with the librarian teachers, non-teaching staff, and other librarians. This restricted group also collaborated with colleagues from CERCIGUI, especially when a situation required their specialised intervention in terms of employment support. To this group were added representatives from the municipality, whose responsibilities in terms of hiring human resources were expanded, although it was challenging to coordinate their agendas. Our goal was to pave the way for labour integration, hence the importance of having this representation.

Weekly supervision and group discussions were complementary to daily support in using Padlet.

The tasks the interns performed in the libraries that hosted them ended up being more extensive than initially anticipated. This was partly because the young people insisted on the same learning experiences during the weekly meetings, but also because they were able to perform them, which in some cases was a surprise to both the staff involved and the families who informed us of the changes they noticed were occurring in their children.

As it is impossible to detail them in this document, we present a list of the most relevant ones, which involved the development not only of skills but also of greater knowledge.

- Padlet records
- Recording book check-ins and check-outs
- Registering new donated books
- Organising books on the shelves
- Answering the phone
- Preparing materials for activities
- Implementing activities with children
- Participating in experience-sharing meetings
- Restoring library furniture

- Researching to organise literary visits
- Recording book recommendations for social media
- Preparing events abroad
- Participating in a book stand at GreenFest
- Conducting interviews
- Participating in a book stand at the Book Fair
- Training in CANVA
- Preparation of materials such as posters, booklets
- Organising awareness campaigns on the rights of people with disabilities
- Organising an event to publicise and share results (database, program, invitations, participation as panel facilitators)
- Organising a database with groups of schools and their principals, and municipal and school libraries from the 16 municipalities in the Braga district
- Sending invitations via Mailchimp
- Organising the registration file on Google Form
- Selecting sentences in international documents
- Translating sentences in Deepl
- Selecting sentences in the bibliography
- Organising awareness campaigns about libraries
- Designing bookmarks with messages
- Participating in the Municipal Forum for People with Disabilities meeting
- Offering bookmarks with messages to the 6,000 participants of the Cidade Berço Half Marathon
- Organising a press release

- Registering posts on Facebook
- Translating documents in DeepL

The decision to involve more young people than expected in the application was made only after we had, to implement this project, secured motivated partners and mentors who believed in the project and its potential to bring learning to both librarians and young people. As mentioned in one of the Focus Groups, the mere fact that library users encounter these young people collaborating in the libraries daily is a huge step toward changing mindsets and attitudes. Another important aspect was that we selected young people with potential who wanted to make a change in their lives.

In terms of organising the support, the Monday meetings were implemented, and the young people felt, as they said in the interviews, that they weren't, as in other internships, working individually; they were a group with clearly defined goals in mind. It demonstrated that they have skills, that they can acquire even more, and, as they said in the video, they want a chance. Feeling that they weren't alone, that they could make friends—some already knew each other, but their relationship wasn't always friendly—was also a motivation we worked on by creating situations that went beyond presence and collaboration in the libraries, such as: having lunch at a restaurant, visiting other spaces together like the bookstore, which is our partner in this reading cause, participating in events voluntarily: preparing for the literary visits, the Book Fair, Green FesT, the birthday parties...

All these factors helped them feel that this short internship encompassed larger objectives beyond their own needs, such as valuing the role of libraries. We had some conversations about the concept of territorial development and the role of these structures. Recently, when building the database to publicise the event to share the project results, this dimension of citizenship became even more evident. Today, they know how many municipalities the district of Braga has, how many schools, how many libraries, that there are parishes with the same name in different municipalities, that some municipalities have many libraries and others with fewer, but perhaps because the populations are farther from urban centers, school libraries are even more critical there and deserve a different level of care.



These young people feel much more autonomous and valued, even if there are times when they need to draw attention to themselves or be more assertive in certain aspects of their personality, not necessarily in terms of work, but in areas that can be improved. Even at work, it was vital for them to understand what it's like to work under pressure, having to meet deadlines, the implications for our work when we depend on others, the backup plans to complete our tasks, knowing how to negotiate and accept changes in plans, having to improvise, and not giving up. As they say... Never give up!

They were rewarded for these months, in which many things seemed impossible. They were given the responsibility of organising an event, learning to make decisions, not stepping on anyone's toes, respecting hierarchies, but also knowing how to defend their points of view. They gained more self-confidence by presenting their work to political leaders, their families, and other organisations that came into contact with the BYBLIOS project for the first time. It was also crucial for us to work on a dimension: getting families on our side. They also needed to believe, as we do, that we're paving the way in a different territory, and that this takes time, patience, and perseverance, but we'll get there.

Challenges are only worthwhile when we start questioning what we've done and, the next day, we move forward and change. Testing and learning from mistakes are probably the most effective ways to learn how to intervene and do our best. Learning from colleagues—no one is better; we all have different paths and experiences—but above all, we must be willing to give, to share.

One of the obstacles in the case of the Public Library was that they were not prepared or had not received training in the area of special needs, unlike school libraries, which already have students with this specificity, and librarians have received training in this area or more specific guidance for these students.

Regarding the interns, the main obstacle was using Padlet. Almost all of them have severe difficulties with writing, but they wish to include texts in their profiles, like all the other interns. Regarding other publications, they shared materials and supported each other. It was almost impossible to argue that it was an individual task. These groups demonstrate a willingness to help one another. Initially, they had strained relationships due to past experiences, but they learned to be more tolerant and are now good

friends. Making friends was a common motivation to accept this partnership because they felt a painful isolation in some cases, with consequences for their mental health.

### **4.2.3. Findings**

Working with young people with intellectual disabilities in libraries requires more than simply assigning tasks; it demands creating an inclusive environment where adaptations to the space, communication, and staff support are carefully considered. Success depends on observing closely, listening attentively, and valuing each individual's potential. Such internships are a mutual learning experience: while trainees gain skills, autonomy, and confidence, staff and the wider library community also learn to work with empathy, flexibility, and respect for individual needs. This approach transforms the library into a space where contribution is meaningful, interactions are rich, and both practical and social learning can flourish.

In particular, we have found that:

- Young people with intellectual disabilities can work in libraries in a variety of roles, but this requires an inclusive environment with adaptations to the space and communication, as well as staff training to address individual needs. When interacting with young people with intellectual disabilities, it is essential to use clear and visual language and allow sufficient time for them to understand.
- It was a mutual learning experience, providing valuable assistance in preparing and organising materials for the activities. It was crucial to encourage the autonomy and skill development of these young people, as well as to motivate them to feel valued as contributors in the library environment. We didn't overprotect; instead, we offered help only when necessary and valued each student's understanding. The interaction, empathy, and harmony within the work group were very positive.
- Observe deeply, find what's unsaid. There's a wealth of information to work with in silence and in our gaze, just as there is in the noise that sometimes disturbs, but also conveys a message. And never forget that we are all human beings, with weaknesses and a wealth of potential for discovery.



- Digital technology is already an integral part of our lives, and we must maximise its benefits. This project included an inclusion protocol, and despite the issues it may raise in terms of confidentiality, personal protection, and their rights, we must remember that, above all, we are professionals, and ethics guide us. Facts and information are essential when they serve to create conditions for the self-determination of the people we work for and with. Recognising this means moving beyond a defensive attitude, such as the idea that we cannot share information simply because “we are not allowed to”. Instead, professionals must understand where the real boundaries lie and use information responsibly as a tool for collaboration. When we document carefully and share knowledge appropriately, everyone benefits: the young person gains better support, and we, as professionals, save time and effort by avoiding duplicated work. Often, the key to a solution is already there: hidden in a note, a record, or a small detail that sparks the right idea.
- The feeling that we should be starting a project when it's already ending. We often realise that reality is a long-term challenge and that a project must be consistent; therefore, it is essential to leave open windows and allies to continue what has been achieved.

#### **4.2.4. Lessons learned for the Future**

To ensure the success and sustainability of internships for young people with intellectual disabilities, it is essential to establish clear structures and shared responsibilities among all stakeholders. This involves providing staff with detailed information about each intern, preparing them through targeted training, and defining the roles of both internal mentors and external tutors. Active involvement of parents is also key to support schedules, attendance, and logistical arrangements. Based on these principles, the following recommendations can guide future initiatives:

- The cooperation between the different stakeholders is crucial to share knowledge about the intern profile, even if some data are an obstacle to data protection. The individuals engaged are professionals acting in accordance with an ethical code that supports their behaviour.



- Parents' involvement is also required to agree on adherence to schedules, justification of absences, and notice in case of absence, as well as the use of transportation and presentation of supporting documents for expenses.
- Recommendations for future initiatives like this focus on providing more detailed information about each intern to staff. This will ensure more appropriate and tailored tasks and interactions.
- Preparation of the staff who will welcome the young person through a short training on how to deal with intellectual disability, permanent support from an external mentor or a special education professional.
- Develop an activity plan with increasing difficulty, recording the challenges encountered and the strategies used to overcome them. Select interns, preferably in pairs, to support each other, taking into account the specifics of the tasks they will be assigned.
- Conduct a daily assessment with the young person to ensure that identified problems are not forgotten or accumulated, and motivation is maintained or encouraged.
- Involve young people in various activities, such as events or external activities, so that they feel part of the organisation and are involved in the results and success of the initiatives.
- It would be beneficial for this type of internship to have both an internal mentor and an external tutor, each with clearly defined responsibilities, who could support one another in integrating the young person beyond the internship period. Organisations and their teams have responsibilities across huge geographic areas, which in many cases prevent them from providing adequate support.
- It would be crucial for the external tutor to mentor a limited number of young people to build a relationship of trust. If there is any incompatibility with the organisation's mentor, the young person can count on someone else, the external mentor, to help resolve the issue.

#### ***4.2.5. Impact on the Library and Community***

Inclusive internships not only benefit the trainees but also have a significant and often unexpected impact on libraries and the wider community. The presence of young people with intellectual disabilities encouraged libraries and host organisations to rethink and adapt daily tasks, ensuring that interns were consistently engaged in meaningful activities. As a result, responsibilities such as answering the internal phone, assisting readers, recording book deliveries, and managing requests were redistributed, creating more efficient workflows and alleviating routine pressures for existing staff. Interns also contributed to preparing and tidying spaces, allowing librarians to focus on higher-level tasks and strategic initiatives.

Beyond operational support, the interns helped amplify the library's visibility through online promotion of activities, reading recommendations, and campaigns emphasizing the role of libraries in the community. In Portugal, this visibility extended to families, who began sharing publications and actively participating in the library network. Their involvement brought a more humanized perspective, highlighting the everyday concerns and priorities of families while fostering stronger connections between the library and the local community.

Through these experiences, it became evident that inclusive internships create a mutually enriching environment: they provide practical support to libraries, broaden the social and cultural impact of the institution, and strengthen relationships with users, families, and the community at large.

#### ***4.2.6. Internship Evidence***

All the interns are still using their Padlets and during the summer months they evaluate what they have done and individual interviews were recorded. From the questions of these interviews, were collected some aspects of individual answers and a vídeo was done, with their voices and photos illustrating all the internship process. The vídeo was presented in Guimarães, during a public event totally organised by interns under the supervision of their tutors. The presentation of each round table was done by one of the interns and the biographies of the participants by each of them. All the interns made a press dossier after this event.

## 4.3. Spain

### ***4.3.1. Introduction: Numbers and Locations***

For the fulfillment of BYBLIOS project's objectives in Spain, two internships were carried out involving individuals with Down syndrome, both supported and monitored by the Qualificalia Analytics S.L. team, in partnership with the Down Valladolid Association. These internships took place in the city of Valladolid, located in the autonomous community of Castile and León, and were embedded within the broader framework of the City Council's inclusion and employability initiatives for people with disabilities.

The internships were hosted in public libraries, municipal institutions that play a central role in community life and public service. These institutions were chosen specifically for their accessibility, community orientation, and openness to inclusive practices. Both Trainee 1, an older adult man, and Trainee 2, a young adult woman, carried out their professional activities as library assistants, participating in tasks related to document handling, shelving, user support, and library maintenance.

Because both internships were conducted within the urban context of Valladolid, there were no rural locations involved in this particular phase of the project. Nevertheless, the experience provides a valuable example of how urban public institutions can successfully integrate individuals with intellectual disabilities into structured work environments, especially when supported by both local government and specialized organizations.

A total of two library institutions were involved in the internships, with each hosting one intern. The programme relied on a collaborative support model, which included a dedicated tutor from Down Valladolid Association, in collaboration with a Qualificalia's member, for each trainee, providing daily accompaniment, task supervision, and individualized monitoring. In addition to the tutors, library staff played a significant and proactive role in ensuring the successful integration of the interns. They provided ongoing feedback, adapted task complexity to the trainees' evolving capacities, and offered regular updates to the supervising organization.



In total, four main partners were directly involved in the implementation of the internships:

1. Down Valladolid Association, which coordinated the initiative alongside with the BYBLIOS partner, trained the interns, and supplied professional job coaches
2. Valladolid City Council, which facilitated institutional access and supported the internships through its inclusion programmes.
3. Public library staff, who acted as workplace mentors and task supervisors.
4. The trainees' families, who participated in follow-up meetings and supported the interns outside the workplace context

The positive collaboration between these actors ensured that both internships progressed smoothly and provided meaningful, real-world experiences for the trainees. The feedback gathered from the library staff has been constructive and optimistic, indicating a strong willingness to repeat similar internship opportunities in the future and reinforcing the role of public libraries as inclusive community institutions.

#### **4.3.2. Country Case Study**

##### **Internship Implementation and Outcomes in Public Libraries: Insights from Down Valladolid's Inclusive Practices**

The internship programme for people with Down syndrome, carried out by the Qualificalia Analytics' team in collaboration with the Down Valladolid Association, whilst engaging with public libraries in the city of Valladolid, was carefully designed to ensure meaningful, structured, and inclusive engagement for the participants. This initiative, supported by the Valladolid City Council, forms part of broader local policies aimed at promoting the social and professional inclusion of individuals with intellectual disabilities.

In Spain, the internship process was not fully conducted in real time, as the Qualificalia Analytics' team joined the BYBLIOS project at a later stage. Nevertheless, as a project partner, Qualificalia took full responsibility for managing and executing the process at



the national level. To align with the deadlines already set by the other partners, the team carried out two case reconstructions, with the valuable collaboration of a Down Syndrome Association. Given that they had already carried out different internships in libraries for people with cognitive disabilities, we worked with them in order to apply the case of two different interns whose experiences were of strong and meaningful use for the development and success of the project aims.

On account of this, Qualificalia's team plays a key role in composing the reconstructions of the internships aforementioned, having various meetings with the people working in the Down syndrome Association, filling out the appointed documents marked by the coordinators of the Erasmus+ project, documenting best practices that feed back into the overall quality assurance cycle. This bidirectional flow - between the EU coordination level and Spanish team - ensures that the project remains both unified in vision and responsible to local realities.

### ***4.3.3. Internship Process Design***

The Valladolid City Council is committed to promoting the inclusion of people with disabilities in the labor market, particularly within its public centers such as libraries. The process begins with a tailored assessment of each candidate's abilities and needs, ensuring suitable job placements. The Council collaborates with local disability organizations to provide training and support, fostering an accessible and inclusive work environment. In public libraries, this includes adapting workstations and tasks to match individual capabilities, while offering ongoing mentorship and resources. Through these measures, Valladolid ensures equal employment opportunities and empowers people with disabilities to contribute actively to the community.

#### **Activities Carried Out by the Interns**

Trainee 1 and Trainee 2 performed a range of structured, supervised tasks, adapted to their individual capabilities. These included:

- Shelving and organizing books and media.
- Assisting with basic library maintenance (e.g., tidying reading areas).



- Labeling and handling materials.
- Participating in the preparation of activities or displays.
- Providing basic guidance to library users under supervision.

These activities were carefully selected to promote skill development, autonomy, and confidence, while ensuring that the interns felt integrated into the day-to-day rhythm of the library.

## Support and Supervision

Both interns received daily, on-site support from a Down Valladolid association's professional acting as a job coach. This person helped interpret tasks, reinforced routines, and facilitated communication with library staff. In parallel, the library teams actively participated in supporting the interns by offering practical guidance, adapting tasks when needed, and providing ongoing feedback.

Coordination meetings were held regularly between Down Valladolid association and library representatives to monitor progress, address any emerging issues, and ensure the wellbeing of the interns.

### ***4.3.4. Main Challenges, Reflections and Noteworthy Insights***

The internship experience offered a unique opportunity to explore both the potential and the challenges of inclusive work environments. By observing the trainees' progress and reflecting on the practices implemented, it became possible to identify the factors that contribute to successful inclusion, as well as the obstacles that require attention in future initiatives. This reflection allows for a deeper understanding of how structured support, collaboration, and adaptability can shape meaningful learning experiences for young people with intellectual disabilities.

## Successes and Strengths

Several aspects of the internship process worked particularly well:

- The close collaboration between all stakeholders (Down Valladolid association, libraries, and the Valladolid City Council).
- The daily presence of a job coach, which ensured consistency and security for the trainees.
- The positive and inclusive attitude of library staff, who welcomed the interns as part of their team.
- The clear task design and structure, which enabled the interns to experience tangible progress.

Both Trainee 1 and Trainee 2 demonstrated notable improvements in autonomy, communication, and workplace confidence over the course of their internships.

## Challenges Encountered

Some of the challenges identified included:

- The need for task simplification and visual aids in certain moments, especially at the beginning of the internship.
- Maintaining balance between guidance and independence, as over-support could reduce opportunities for self-reliance.
- Navigating the occasional underestimation of capabilities by some external observers unfamiliar with inclusive practices.
- These challenges were mitigated through adaptive strategies and open communication between all actors involved.

## Key Learnings

The experience reaffirmed the importance of:

- Individualized support tailored to each intern's needs.
- Ongoing staff training on inclusion and intellectual disability.
- The value of flexibility and patience in inclusive workplace environments.
- Recognizing and celebrating small achievements as critical milestones.

The internship highlighted that success depended on close collaboration among stakeholders, consistent support from the job coach, an inclusive attitude from library staff, and clearly structured tasks. While challenges such as task complexity, balancing guidance with autonomy, and external underestimations arose, they were effectively addressed through adaptive strategies and communication. The experience confirmed the value of individualized support, ongoing staff training, flexibility, and recognition of incremental achievements.

#### **4.3.5. Lessons learned for the Future**

This section focuses on lessons learned and practical guidance for future internship programmes. It highlights essential strategies for organisers to create supportive and inclusive environments, while also examining the positive impact that interns can have on libraries and the wider community.

##### **Recommendations for Future Organisers**

Future internship organisers should pay close attention to:

- Establishing clear communication protocols between institutions.
- Investing in preparation and inclusion training for host staff.
- Ensuring consistent support without creating dependency.
- Building in time for reflection and feedback from both interns and hosts.

**Impact on the Library.** The internship had a positive and tangible impact on the participating libraries. Staff reported greater awareness of inclusive employment practices and a strengthened sense of team solidarity. The presence of the interns also encouraged reflections on accessibility and diversity in library services.

**Impact on Community.** From a community perspective, library users responded positively, with several regular patrons expressing appreciation for the interns' presence and engagement. The internships contributed to challenging stereotypes and promoting a culture of inclusion within the library as a public space.

#### **4.3.6. Internship Evidence and Evaluation**

To provide evidence of the completion of internships in Spain, and to serve as an evaluation of these experiences, it is essential to present some of the most notable reflections shared by the interns during the conducted interviews.

These interviews were conducted as post-reflection sessions, providing the interns with an opportunity to evaluate their learning experiences and, above all, to express their genuine feelings after working in these library settings. They engaged with numerous concepts and tasks that were previously unfamiliar to them, and these are some of their responses:

“ Sometimes people  
can't find a book,  
but I can. That  
makes me feel proud. ”

“ I like when  
people thank  
me. It makes  
me feel like  
what I do  
matters. ”

“ I would repeat  
the experience.  
Now I am working  
at a cafe and I find  
it more challenging.  
I like it though, it  
makes me feel good. ”

What could be concluded from these statements, which are clear examples of satisfaction with the work realized in the libraries, is that the interns felt welcomed and efficient during the process. They became familiarized with several duties which they might apply to other occupations. In fact, the intern who is currently working at a cafe mentioned that everyday interaction with customers was more natural since they had to interact with many people in the library.

Overall, a primary objective of these practices and this project is to support adults with mental and cognitive disabilities in fulfilling their inherent need for belonging and inclusion. In this case, we engaged with a young adult girl and a male adult. They both are looking forward to working and contributing to society and gaining new skills which will enhance their professional prospects.



## 4.4 Romania

### ***4.4.1. Design Process: selection of the school library***

The internship in Romania was designed in collaboration with representatives of both public and school librarians, as an adapted way to facilitate access to information, work procedures, specific rules in both types of libraries, therefore familiarizing the trainees with a more general view of the role and tasks of librarians.

Regarding the school library, the selection took into consideration 2 main criteria: accessibility and availability (openness). The school Library in Ion Basgan School in Focsani was chosen based on location in Focsani (easy access for trainees and for members of the implementation team that supported librarian during the internship) and based on the interest and openness of school management and teacher documentarian to organize the internship. Also, we took into account the fact that the teacher documentarian from that school has a large experience in working with pupils with special educational needs after working for many years as a librarian in the biggest special school in Vrancea County.

In terms of public libraries, there was not an actual selection as in Focsani there is only one big public library that provides services at county level, the “Duiliu Zamfirescu” Library of Vrancea County; still, when deciding to implement the internship in this library we took into consideration the same criteria of accessibility and availability, including this library in our internship only after repeated discussions with management and librarians to conclude on the real interest in becoming part of this innovative solution.

Therefore, activities were implemented in the Documentation and Information Centre at Ion Basgan School in Focsani and in Duiliu Zamfirescu Library of Vrancea County, with direct involvement from experienced librarians (one in the school library (the only existing one) and two experienced librarians in the public library) and under supervision of staff in CJRAE Vrancea (school counsellors with background in psychology and special education). Protocols for collaboration were established with both libraries, stating, among others, the responsibilities of Library and librarian during the internship.



#### ***4.4.2. Design Process: Selection of participants***

Selection of interns was based on their interest in the proposed topic of internship, on the interest of their families regarding this opportunity and the potential impact of internship, and, also, based on the existing basic competencies of potential interns (reading, writing, social independence and special orientation abilities etc.).

To identify adequate interns, we had the support from local NGOs active in youth work and from the biggest special school in our county (Elena Doamna Centre for Inclusive Education), allowing us to get in contact with potential candidates, to present the opportunity of participating in this internship and identify young people interested in this experience.

Therefore, two interns were selected, one boy and one girl, 19 years old, both having mild intellectual disability associated with hearing deficit (partially compensated nowadays through hearing prosthesis). One of the interns is able to fully communicate verbally, the other has some difficulties in expressing verbally, but fully understands spoken language. Both of them graduated special school and are familiar with additional support in education and extracurricular activities, learning by doing etc.

Initially, a third participant was selected, with the same characteristics as those two already mentioned, but she dropped out after two weeks, mainly due to the fact that she had to take care of younger siblings; the internship was already in progress, so replacing her was not possible.

#### ***4.4.3. Description of the experience***

The internship was structured as a 46 hours experience, distributed in 23 days among 2 months, 3 days in each week, 2 hours each day; 34 hours were done in a school library (usually Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday) and 12 hours in a public library (usually Monday, Wednesday and Friday).

The internship was implemented by experienced librarians (in the school library – teacher documentarian) with full time support from school counsellors from CJRAE Vrancea, with more experience in providing assistance and support for young people with special educational needs. The schedule and activities were established and

coordinated by the two librarians, as they were considered experts in their activities, selecting the contents and skills to be developed etc., while the school counsellors provided assistance especially in relation to the methods to be used, in facilitating the communication and relationship etc.

The trainees were monitored in all activities in relation with their activity, especially in their relation with the beneficiaries, and were provided additional support when needed so that the quality of library's work was not affected by the internship process and all activities were implemented at usual standards, irrespective of the involvement of interns in some processes. Special attention was given to the relation with pupils in the school library, considering the age of the beneficiaries (primary and lower secondary school, so children 6 to 15 years old), with the main condition that no interaction between interns and children was allowed without supervision from librarian and / or school counsellor.

During the internship, some level of “supervised autonomy” was planned and implemented, allowing the interns to implement some specific activities without step-by-step supervision and instructions, allowing the interns to make some decisions, to plan and implement some activities; still, during those activities, they were continuously monitored in order to facilitate their success in the activities and to provide assistance in case of impasse.

Both librarians and school counsellors provided step-by-step feed-back for the interns, focusing especially on the small successes, solved tasks and acquired skills or knowledge, a positive feed-back linked to building self-confidence, to establishing a positive relation and work climate, to encouraging interns to continue their efforts in the internship process.

### **Initial training and guidance**

Initial training included an informative session (organized in each library at the beginning of activities in that space and with that librarian) dedicated to:

- presentation of the library, with reference to the activities implemented by the librarians;



- presentation of library as physical place, with space orientation and different places where public is allowed;
- presentation of basic work procedures, especially book lending and returning, communication with beneficiaries etc.;
- presentation of internship objectives, planned activities, expected results and expected activities to be implemented by interns;
- establishment of basic rules to be respected by the interns.

This initial session was conducted, in each library, by both librarian and school counsellor, with a special focus on specific roles of each adult in the learning experience and the cooperation among the working team: interns-librarian-school counsellor.

### Task-Based Activities

**Task 1: job-shadowing.** In each of the two libraries, the first sessions were dedicated to active observation of librarian's activities, their role, the way they communicate with beneficiaries, the way they register book lending and books returned, the IT software used etc. Librarians provided step by step information and interns were encouraged to ask questions, to ask for additional information etc. During this process, small disturbances in the activities with the beneficiaries were allowed, with librarians shortly explaining to the beneficiaries that an internship is in process and asking for more patience and understanding. At the end of this task, a small session was dedicated to feed-back to be sure that interns fully understood the basic information about the job the librarian does.

**Task 2: book lending and book returning.** Interns were involved in lending and receiving books to and from the beneficiaries; at the beginning, with step-by-step support from librarians, at the end, more independently, but under supervision. Interns were taught to use the electronic registering tools, using the credentials of the librarian (as providing their own credentials would have been a very difficult process due to bureaucracy and necessary approvals), under strict monitoring from the librarian. By the end of the internship, some autonomy was provided to the interns, but,



considering the internal rules and work procedures within the library, monitoring was done all the time, even in a “more discrete” form.

**Task 3: organizing the books.** Interns were directly involved in placing the books in their place on specific shelves, in organizing the shelves etc. Considering the low potential impact of errors in this process, a bigger autonomy was given to the interns in this process, facilitating initiative, responsibility, special orientation, and providing the librarians with a constant source of positive feed-back (as the task is simpler and potential of success is bigger).

**Task 4: maintaining the library.** Interns were constantly involved in tasks like organizing the workplace, keeping everything in place and in order etc., based on a routine established and practiced each day.

**Task 5. “didactic” activities.** Considering the role of the librarian from the school library (teacher documentarian), the interns participated in some of the more “didactic” activities organized with children, assisting the teacher documentarian in their activities according to their possibilities and skills. This was a specific aspect linked to the specific role of librarian in public schools in Romania, but since this is one of the most important tasks of teacher documentarian it couldn't be missed from the internship schedule. Of course, the involvement of interns in this kind of activities was very limited since they lack the didactic competencies, but, still, they contributed with what they could to those activities. The teacher documentarian valued their specific skills, for instance the ability of using sign language, and organized a small activity with children on other ways of communication and interns taught the kids some simple words in sign language. This activity was beneficial for the children, as it was interesting and yet teachable, but also for the interns, who felt valued and encouraged to communicate with beneficiaries (as they are able to communicate using words also, not dependent on sign language).

**Task 6. reflection and self-reflection.** The interns were encouraged to constantly reflect on the activities and what they learned, but also to self-reflect on their feelings during the activities, their emotions and developed skills. A special time was allocated at the end of each week for feed-back, important not only for the librarians in order to adapt future activities, but also for the interns, to better understand the role and



impact on each activity, to motivate them for further activities and, potentially, for seeking a future job in a library.

#### ***4.4.4. The importance of the relationship***

The entire internship was planned and implemented focusing on relationship. On the one hand, librarians were advised to develop a positive relationship with the interns and were provided by the school counsellors with specific methods and information on how to better interact with interns and to create a positive work climate adequate to the specific needs of the young people with some level of mild intellectual disability. On the other hand, the activities were designed and implemented according to the objective of developing social and communication skills for the interns, therefore focusing on positive relations.

The relationship was directly targeted also by the feed-back sessions and informal communication during the activities, with librarians and school counsellors constantly encouraging the interns to express their needs relating to better communication.

#### ***4.4.5. Learning Outcomes***

The internship process allowed interns to achieve various learning outcomes, such as:

- information and knowledge regarding the role and activities of librarians in schools (teachers documentarian) and in public libraries, as well as the differences between those two roles;
- skills: cognitive (attention, focusing, multi-tasking, decision making etc.), technical (use of IT tools, registries etc.), social (communication, interaction with different target groups, teamwork) and personal skills (autonomy, responsibility, self-confidence, feed-back skills etc.);
- attitudes: interest in librarian jobs and responsibilities, motivation for work and respecting tasks, interest and motivation for finding a job and being involved in a productive activity etc.

#### **4.4.6. Main Challenges and points to pay attention to**

During the implementation of internship, the organizers had to face several challenges and difficulties that need to be taken into consideration when replicating this experience.

First, and probably most important, there is the **challenge of finding librarians that are really committed and receptive into working with young people with (mental) disabilities** and that have the necessary minimum skills to work with such interns. Of course, when trying to plan such activities, almost none of the librarians would admit that they are not interested / not able to share their work experience with people with disabilities, but, when activities start one could find that different stereotypes or lack of specific skills could seriously affect the quality of implemented activities and the outcomes of learning process. Therefore, adequate time and resources need to be allocated to proper selection of librarians that will mentor the interns, to in-depth discussion with the potential candidates in order to ensure that the librarians that will take the job are able to do it.

Secondly, organizers had to face the **bureaucratic challenges**, as the internship for young people with (mental) disabilities, at least in Romania, doesn't have a specific legal framework and there are different laws and regulations to be taken into account, sometimes contradicting, sometimes leaving unclear aspects. This might differ from country to country, or even from region to region, but it will be an important effort for anyone replicating the internship, as it will involve serious analysis of legislation and a strong institutional support. Correlating this aspect with the previously mentioned need for attention in selecting the librarians coordinating the internship, we could say that not only the librarians need to be properly selected, but also the libraries, as lack of managerial support would make this bureaucratic challenge even more important. This challenge might be especially relevant in case of school libraries, where interns will come into direct contact with children, and this interaction needs to be carefully regulated and monitored and, therefore, the librarian managing the internship will need to take these very important responsibilities.

Thirdly, the organizers had to face the challenges of **time management**, as we intended to create an internship long enough to contribute to the development of the



interns' skills, but in the same time short enough to respect the limitations set by our interns' possibilities of focus and learning and the limitations set by the library and the librarians. We think, based on our results, that 2 hours per day (with a break), three times a week could be a reasonable and effective length, but taking into consideration that our interns had only mild cognitive disabilities and they did the internship in two different libraries (different experiences that kept them motivated and involved).

Fourthly, there was the challenge of **continuous adaptation of the activities**; the internship was very carefully planned, but still there were many situations where activities needed adaptation, based on observations from librarian and / or school counsellor and on feed-back from interns. Organizers needed to conduct a very realistic continuous evaluation of implemented activities in terms of outputs, attractivity, utility etc. and to adapt the schedule in order to change and / or add some activities to ensure deeper learning and reaching internship results.

Nevertheless, an important challenge in the specific context of Romania was to **gain and maintain interns' interest and motivation**. This is especially important in countries (such as Romania) where the profession of librarian is strongly regulated and becoming a librarian is dependent on university degree (that is very difficult to obtain by young people with cognitive disabilities, even if only mild ones). Also, not having other categories of staff in the libraries (such as assistant librarians or such positions that won't require university degree) makes it even more difficult for young people with mild cognitive disabilities to be interested in such internships, as they are very reluctant into believing that they will ever be able to become a librarian. Our solution was to focus the dialogue with the interns on the learning experience itself, as a way of developing some skills that they will need in any job they will have, as a way of having a first contact with the job market (as neither of the interns had previous work experience), as a way of assuming responsibility for their own training and future.

#### ***4.4.7. First final reflections and noteworthy insights***

Our experience proves that the challenges in organizing internships for young people with disabilities in public libraries can be successfully managed, but, still, expanding our results in future similar initiatives need careful planning, attention to selection of



libraries, librarians and interns, intensive analysis of legal framework and permanent monitoring (mentoring) and adaptation.

Organizing internship in different libraries, in our case one school library and one public library, can enhance the learning experience and provide different insights related to specific tasks, roles, activities of the same professionals – librarians, and can also contribute to keeping the interns motivated and interested for a (relatively) longer period of time.

Success of the internship is conditioned by the ability of staff involved to keep the interns interested and motivated, to provide positive feed-back on regular basis and to be able to adapt their “teaching” experience to the specific needs of young people with disabilities, and we strongly believe that this could be an example for organizations working with young people with disabilities in designing their own internship experiences, maybe in the same context, maybe taking into consideration other professions and other categories of beneficiaries.

*“Librarians are more and more like artists,  
providing a creative work for a smaller or bigger community, so,  
like artists, librarians should “know their audience” and give  
them what they need / want” (librarian)*

#### **4.4.8. Internship Evidence and Evaluation**

This section presents the evidence collected to evaluate the internship experience in Romania, focusing on qualitative insights and personal reflections. Given the nature of the internship and the participants’ profiles, the evaluation emphasised a person-centred approach, capturing the interns’ growth in skills, autonomy, and social participation rather than relying on purely quantitative measures. A key tool for this evaluation was the digital portfolio hosted on Padlet, which allowed interns to document their experiences, reflections, and achievements throughout the internship, including uploading photos that visually captured their activities and interactions.



The interns reported enjoying the teacher-documentarian role the most, appreciating the opportunity to work with children and engage in creative tasks. They also highlighted that exposure to both the school and public library environments offered valuable learning from different experiences, helping them acquire new skills and adapt to varied professional contexts.

Library staff also benefited from the internships, gaining new insights from observing and working alongside the interns. The experience contributed to a stronger understanding of inclusive practices and reinforced respect for the individual needs of young people with disabilities. As one intern noted:

*“Both ladies (our note: the librarians coordinating the internship) made us feel important, listened...and trustworthy; we were allowed to do things, to handle the books, to use the computer, scanners and devices... and this doesn’t usually happen to me”*  
**(intern)**

This feedback underscores the importance of a supportive and engaging environment, which promotes confidence, autonomy, and a sense of belonging. It also reflects the impact of personalized guidance and the creation of an environment in which interns felt trusted and capable.

Overall, the Romanian internship demonstrates that a qualitative, reflective evaluation — centred on portfolios, regular discussions, and direct feedback — provides a rich understanding of learning outcomes. It captures both the professional and personal growth of interns, while also highlighting the mutual benefits for library staff and the broader community.

## 4.5 Germany

### 4.5.1 Internship Design Process

The exploratory interviews with library staff and stakeholders at the beginning of the BYBLIOS project led to the conclusion that libraries should be contacted first, as it was assumed that a larger number of people with disabilities would be interested in an internship than libraries could offer. Because the situation of school libraries in Berlin is precarious, we also contacted public libraries in Berlin and the surrounding state of Brandenburg.

The library staff surveyed in Brandenburg demonstrated an openness to new experiences, including offering internships. In the interviews, questions about financial situation, staffing, and time pressure were less prominent than in the surveys with staff at Berlin libraries.

The Berlin district of Pankow, which has eight public libraries, has a working group - called "Working Group Diversity Pankow" - specifically dedicated to diversity-related issues: for example, promoting inclusion, accessibility, equal opportunities and intercultural initiatives. In this context, a Weltgewandt employee presented the BYBLIOS project. A library director subsequently expressed her openness to an internship in principle. Later she explained that, as a result of the project presentation, all libraries in the district now intend to offer internships for people with disabilities. In practice, however, and with regard to the BYBLIOS project, this was not the case.

Internship 1 (I 1) took place from June 11 to July 4, 2025 (three weeks) at the Bernau City Library, a public library. Internship 2 (I 2) took place from August 25 to September 30, 2025 (five weeks) at the Berlin Friedrichshagen Reading Club, a school library.

#### **How were the library and interns brought together?**

For **internship 1**, the library arranged contact with the Robinson School, a school with a special educational focus on intellectual development. Weltgewandt received a positive response from the director after just 1.5 hours of emailing the internship offer. The 19-year-old student presented herself to the library staff in two interviews. She was

so motivated that she also brought the library documents to the human resources staff member at the mayor's office to expedite the conclusion of the internship contract. The internship was agreed upon for three days per week and eight-hours each day.

The student also demonstrated **high motivation** during her internship. She was open, curious, and eager to learn, and felt under-challenged at the school where she was studying.

Her impairment consisted of **learning difficulties**: her memory is reduced, especially her short-term memory, which has gaps. Her mathematical abilities are also poorly developed. This means she has cognitive impairments. The intern was able to compensate for these difficulties with her communication skills.

The **library itself** reopened two years ago after extensive renovations. It is now designed as an open learning space. This means less floor space, more reading corners, and dedicated rooms for children and young people. Both floors are wheelchair accessible. The children's and young people's areas, in particular, are not intended as quiet zones. This sometimes places demands on the communication skills of staff when they encounter visitors who are new to this 'social' understanding of the library.

The intern had two **contacts**: the head of the library and the employee responsible for trainees.

For **Internship 2**, a visit by the European project partners in April 2025 and a podcast conversation with the school library specialist consultant of the Treptow-Köpenick district office of Berlin proved beneficial. This helped to explain the project's goals and build trust. After a willingness to implement an internship as part of the project was signaled, a Weltgewandt employee contacted a larger foundation with eight workshops for people with disabilities. An internal e-mail received a response within three days from a supervisor who had been looking for an internship for a 47-year-old man with mild intellectual disabilities for some time.

**The internship was planned extensively.** Initially, a meeting took place between the school librarian consultant at the Treptow-Köpenick district office of Berlin and the director of Weltgewandt eV. This was followed by an on-site discussion with the prospective intern's supervisor, the school librarian, and a Weltgewandt employee at



the school library. The discussion focused on goals, possible activities, and paths to employment in the library sector after the internship.

A meeting then took place with the prospective intern in the context of a workshop for people with disabilities. Over three hours, the school librarian and the prospective intern were able to get to know each other in the presence of the Weltgewandt employee and the supervisor. The internship date was agreed upon, duties discussed, and formalities (internship contract) were agreed upon. Particular attention was paid to possible employment after the internship, for example, as an **outsourced workplace**. A further discussion then took place between all participants in the school library itself. The contract was then signed with the management of the school to which the Friedrichshagen Elementary School Reading Club belongs. The working time was set at 25 hours per week.

This second intern was also **highly motivated**. He loves reading, has a wide range of interests, goes to libraries himself, wants to learn new things, return to work, and "belong."

He completed an apprenticeship as a painter and varnisher and later completed his military service. Since a serious accident, he has suffered from **cognitive impairment**. His sense of balance is reduced, and he has trouble walking.

The contact persons during the internship were the school library staff and the school library consultant of the Treptow-Köpenick district of Berlin..

"The reading club of the Friedrichshagen primary school is located on the first floor and not accessible by an elevator. Although spread across three rooms, they exude the almost intimate feel of a living room. Children can browse books while sitting on comfortable large cushions. They can also meet for robotics classes or play chess. They can also sit at a large table and immerse themselves in books or homework.

#### **4.5.2 Description of Experiences**

##### **What were the activities?**

The interns' **tasks** were similar:

- Organizing and sorting – analogue

- Arrange books on the shelves according to the library's call number system,
- Record and sort out books that are considered outdated,
- Fill gaps in bookshelves,
- Book care (dusting),
- Sort stocks alphabetically,
- Sorting stocks thematically: labeling with different colors (Internship 2)
- Spatial rearrangement of the library shelves (Internship 2),

- Organizing and sorting – digitally

- Gain insights into working with the Bibliotheca system (Internship 1),
- Working with the KOHA library system: entering and inventorying holdings; sometimes entire class sets (Internship 2),
- Observe how loans and returns of media are recorded (Internship 1),

- Communicate

- with contact persons, team members, library visitors, children, colleagues from other libraries
- assist library visitors in finding specific books,
- answer children's questions and select the appropriate media for them.

- Excursion to other (school) libraries

**How were the activities supported?**

Both internships were supervised by Weltgewandt staff. The interns were supported at least once a week in documenting their activities with pictures and comments on their own Padlet. In addition, discussions were held about learning experiences and successes, difficulties, further questions, and learning aspirations.

At the end of each internship, a longer discussion was held with the interns, their contact persons, and any supervisors for evaluation. For the second intern, this was combined with developing initial plans for an outsourced workplace in a library.

### **4.5.3 Learning outcomes**

According to both interns, the learning outcomes are:

- **Knowledge of the workflows** in a library, experience in the 'classic' fields of organizing and sorting,
- deeper understanding of **the library as a learning place** within a school; significantly more positive view of school gained (I2),
- **Development of digital knowledge** : Introduction to the digital research and accounting systems Bibliotheca (I1) and KOHA (I2), independent recording and accounting of titles in KOHA (I2), enjoyment of working on the computer,
- **Development of communication skills** through interaction with people from different generations and social contexts,
- **Strengthening social skills**: noticeable development of a "positive (or constructive) error culture"<sup>20</sup>, frustration tolerance and positive thinking (I2); working in a team at eye level, based on respect and appreciation, encouragement to ask questions instead of resignation,

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20 Positive (or constructive) error culture:

- Mistakes are considered natural and inevitable in learning and innovation processes.
- Analysis and sharing of mistakes are encouraged to understand what went wrong.
- It promotes trust, collaboration, and professional growth.

- **Strengthening self-confidence** through the acquisition of knowledge, personal positive experiences, and the experience of being part of a team: "I no longer let people tell me what to do." (I2)
- **Identification with working** in a library: pursuing an activity after which one "came home feeling positively exhausted" (I2).
- **Decision to work in a library** confirmed (I2) or insight that the work would be very appealing, but in the long run more of a "Plan B" because it would offer "too little action" (I1).
- Travel time to and from the library was experienced positively: the intern was able to improve his independent spatial orientation; the trip enabled him to process his experiences.

The **contact persons** and **supervisors** stated:

- The internship demonstrated once again that diversity is an opportunity. (I1)
- **The intern suggested a different understanding of impairment or disability. He advocated using the term "disadvantage."**
- "The thorough preparation contributed to the success of the internship." (I2)
- "Without Weltgewandt and without this project, none of this would have happened." (I2)
- "If everything goes well, then a door will be opened wide for him to work as an assistant in a school library in the future." (I2)
- School libraries could be considered niches, at least for now in Germany. They offer a protected space. This is just right and sensible for students with cognitive disabilities. This makes it easier for them to grow into the field of library work. Because the pressure to perform in public libraries is high. (I2)



#### **4.5.4 Main challenges**

As indicated in Chapter 2, the topic of inclusion in libraries has so far been rarely discussed in Germany with regard to the employment of people with disabilities. Probably for this reason, and especially in light of the frequently mentioned limited financial resources and staffing situation of school libraries as well as public libraries, a longer period of time was needed to make the internships possible.

Both interns found it challenging **to ask follow-up questions** to get something explained again. Intern 1 had to deal with dyscalculia and poor memory. Intern 2 found it a learning challenge. He described how he had to endure following the three-step process, for example, when scanning books: 1. Watch how the work is done, 2. Have the processes demonstrated, 3. "get active and do things yourself." He and his contact person both agreed that a great deal depends on good communication. They also had fun. Both are convinced, in general, that "work has to be fun."

The contact persons stated that the **supervision** required for the intern was definitely **higher than for other interns** who were not physically or cognitively disadvantaged. Many things had to be explained repeatedly. Furthermore, they had to check more closely whether the tasks were being performed as explained.

As a learning effect and a positive twist, they emphasized that the contact person needed more **patience** than with other people. **Constant communication** was necessary and one had to be aware of what one expected the intern to achieve. This could "only really be achieved by trying things out together."

#### **4.5.5 Reflections and points of attention**

It is the **commitment of individuals** who can give a constructive spin to a situation that seems less than optimistic. This was evident during internship 2 at the school library, the reading club of the Friedrichshagen primary school. One of the contacts, the school library specialist advisor for the district, and the intern's supervisor at the supporting institution, a workshop for people with disabilities, cooperated seamlessly and never lost sight of the goal of securing an outsourced workplace for the intern after the internship. With a keen sense of opportunities arising in a changing environment, the school library advisor developed a corresponding perspective. This is



beneficial because every new school in Berlin is now required to be equipped with a school library. Five new schools are expected for the school year 2026/2027.

With a so-called **outsourced workplace**, the person concerned – the intern – remains contractually bound to the supporting institution for people with disabilities but pursues employment outside of that facility. Such an outsourced workplace is temporary. It provides an opportunity to gain work experience and is designed to facilitate the transition into the primary labour market.

Since long-term planning is necessary to ensure financial security for such a position, a **follow-up internship** was agreed upon from December 1, 2025, to February 25, 2026. It will also serve to establish further contacts and build trust with **stakeholders**. Steps toward inclusion, which also includes employment in a school library, can hardly be taken without their involvement. These include school principals, directors and staff of the school administration, the coordination office for school libraries at the Berlin-Brandenburg Media Forum, and others. They are also among the recipients of information and dissemination about the BYBLIOS project, including the experiences gained from the internships.

The **balance between action and reflection** was crucial to the success of both internships. The interns were able to familiarize themselves with the tasks involved in a library and, at the same time, acquire skills that extend beyond the immediate context of a library. Reflecting on how the internship was going, what was missing, what was learned, what questions arose, and, last but not least, the appreciative attention paid to the interns themselves was particularly beneficial.

#### ***4.5.5. Internship Evidence and Evaluation***

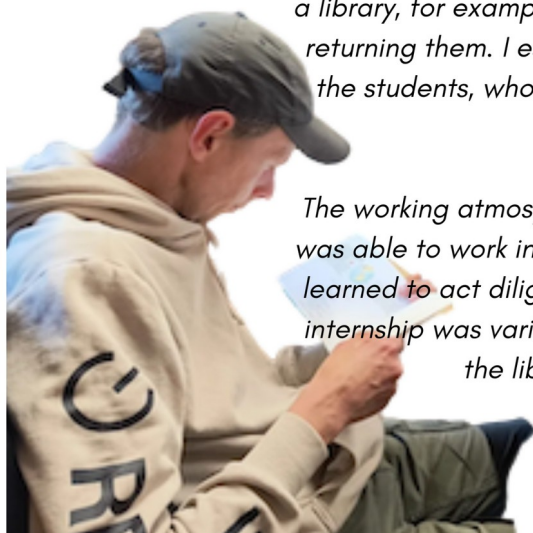
The evaluation of the internship in Germany relied on a qualitative and reflective approach, centred on the digital portfolio hosted on Padlet. Interns used the platform to document their experiences, upload photos, and reflect on their learning, creating a rich record of personal growth, practical skill development, and social engagement.

Feedback from both interns and supervisors highlighted the value of the experience for fostering understanding, confidence, and inclusion.





*"My internship in the school library was a very educational and enjoyable experience. I gained a lot of insight into the organization and administration of a library, for example, in sorting books, borrowing, and returning them. I especially enjoyed the contact with the students, whom I was able to help find suitable books.*



*The working atmosphere was calm and friendly, and I was able to work independently as well as in a team. I learned to act diligently and responsibly. Overall, the internship was varied and showed me how important the library is to school life."*

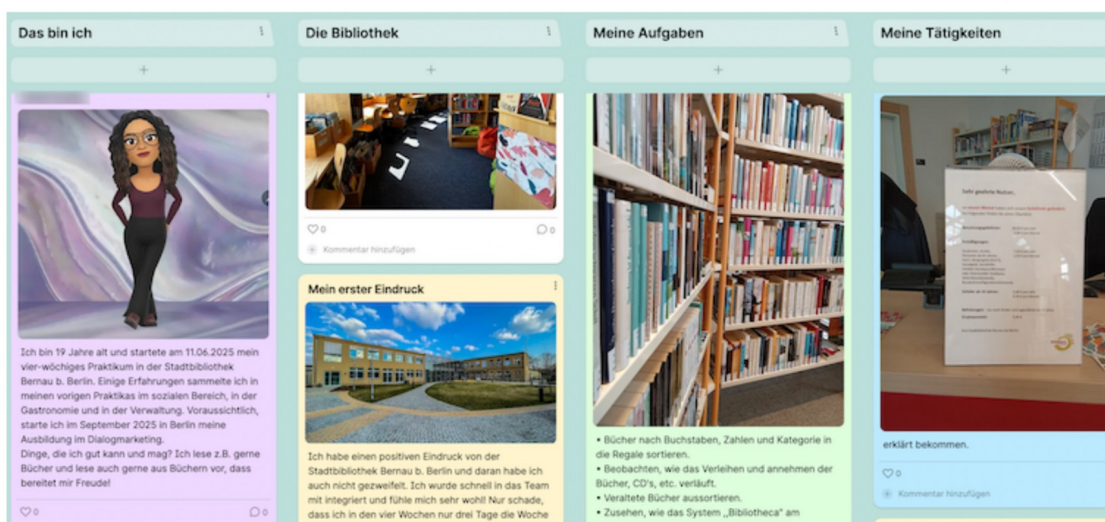
Intern 2



*"The intern made us as a team more aware of inclusion in libraries.  
We now see some things differently."*

*Director library of intern 1*

Photo: screenshot padlet intern 1





*"Without Weltgewandt and  
without this project, none of this  
would have happened."*

*Supervisor of intern 2*

*Photo: intern 2*

Overall, the German internship shows that a combination of reflective tools, supportive environments, and careful preparation can generate meaningful learning outcomes. Interns developed both professional skills and personal confidence, while supervisors gained insights into inclusive practices, demonstrating the mutual benefits of this approach for individuals and institutions alike.



## 5. Monitoring and Evaluation

### 5.1 Measuring Trainee Learning Outcomes

To evaluate the effectiveness of the internships and monitor the progress of participants, we focused on qualitative assessment. For this, we created a digital portfolio using Padlet, where trainees could record their reflections, experiences, and self-evaluations. In addition, periodic briefings and talks were held with the interns, giving them space to express their opinions, share their perspectives on the internship, and contribute to shaping their own learning journey. These reflections were incorporated directly into the Padlet portfolio, making it a living record of their experiences and personal growth.

Moreover, feedback from library users and staff consistently highlighted the positive impact of the internships on both the library environment and the wider community. Observers noted that the presence of interns not only supported day-to-day operations but also brought energy, curiosity, and new perspectives into the space. Library users appreciated the assistance, interaction, and attention provided by the trainees, while staff observed improvements in workflow, engagement, and the overall atmosphere. These responses underline that inclusive internships benefit not only the participants but also enhance the social, cultural, and relational dynamics within the institutions themselves. In Italy, for example, children's curiosity and engagement in the school library highlighted how interns can enrich the environment, foster meaningful interactions, and create a more vibrant and inclusive space. The children often asked

simple yet thoughtful questions, such as “What are their names?” or “Are they friends or sisters?”, demonstrating interest and forming early social bonds.

## 5.2 Qualitative Assessment Through the Portfolio

The qualitative evaluation relied primarily on the digital Padlet portfolio, which allowed trainees to document their experiences in a multimodal way, combining photos, written reflections, emojis, and personal commentary. The portfolio served several interrelated purposes:

- **Self-reflection:** Trainees could recognise their own progress, identify challenges, and celebrate achievements in real time, fostering autonomy and self-awareness.
- **Narrative and visual record:** The portfolio created a tangible representation of the internship, accessible to peers, families, and supervisors, reinforcing motivation and ownership of the learning journey.
- **Capturing social and emotional dimensions:** Beyond task completion, the portfolio highlighted interactions, emotional engagement, and a growing sense of responsibility — elements essential for trainees with cognitive disabilities.

In Italy, trainees reflected on these experiences through Padlet, documenting both the activities and the relationships they developed with users and staff. One intern repeatedly expressed her appreciation for the guidance and support of her tutor, while the other communicated her feelings through emojis, heart icons, and photos, illustrating the diversity of ways in which engagement and satisfaction can be expressed. In Spain, trainees noted that **small contributions**, such as helping users find books, **created a sense of purpose and pride**. One commented that assisting someone who struggled to locate a book “made me feel useful,” while another said, “I

like it when people say thank you because it makes me feel like what I do matters.” In Portugal, interns continued to use Padlet throughout the internship, evaluated their work during the summer months, and contributed to a **video presentation documenting the entire process**. This public event in Guimarães was entirely organised by the interns, who presented round tables, shared biographies, and compiled a press dossier, demonstrating **active engagement and ownership of the learning process**. In Romania, interns highlighted the trust and responsibility afforded to them, noting how being allowed to handle tasks and use library tools made them feel **valued and empowered**. Finally, in Germany, supervisors observed that the internships promoted diversity, challenged traditional perceptions of disability, and opened potential pathways to future employment.

By integrating the Padlet portfolio into the assessment framework, we ensured that learning outcomes reflected not only practical skills, such as lending or returning books, but also personal growth, social participation, communication, and relationship-building. This person-centered and reflective approach provided an inclusive and authentic representation of each trainee’s development, capturing the unique experiences, achievements, and trajectories of all participants.

## **6. Internship Implementation: Protocols and Lessons Learnt**

### **6.1 European Protocol of Inclusion (Byblios 2025, Veraldi - Fasciani)**

This European Protocol for Social Inclusion for People with Cognitive Disabilities represents the scientific and operational synthesis of the experiments conducted within the BYBLIOS project (2023–2025).

It is a model empirically validated in five countries (Italy, Portugal, Spain, Germany, Romania) through inclusive internships in library settings, based on the principles of the ICF (WHO, 2001), ESCO (European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations), and European recommendations on lifelong learning and equal opportunities.

The objective is to provide a replicable, transferable, and scientifically validated protocol to promote the occupational and social inclusion of people with cognitive disabilities through practical and community-based learning experiences.

## SUMMARY SHEET

To replicate the experience of inclusive internships in libraries (public or school), it is necessary to start with the **context analysis**: analyze environments, resources, and roles to create welcoming and motivating spaces for all those involved.

**1. Define clear and realistic objectives:** the internship must have measurable results, consistent with individual capabilities.

**2. Create strong local partnerships:** cooperate with associations, schools, libraries, and families to ensure support and shared responsibility.

**3. Select interns with targeted criteria:** based on motivation, basic skills, and interpersonal skills.

**4. Train tutors and librarians:** offer short courses on inclusive communication, mentoring, and special needs management.

**5. Personalize the activity plan:** adapt tasks and timeframes, enhancing individual skills and interests.

**6. Promote ongoing support:** observation, periodic review, and positive feedback throughout the program.

**7. Engage families and caregivers:** maintain an ongoing dialogue that strengthens trust and continuity of the experience.

**8. Evaluate and document progress:** use visual and narrative tools such as e-portfolios and logbooks.

**9. Communicate and share results:** disseminate best practices through storytelling, public events, and European networks of inclusive libraries.

This framework summarizes the contributions of the sections dedicated to Italy, Portugal, Spain, Romania, and Germany in an integrated vision, unifying best practices in a shared and internationally replicable model.

## ***European Protocol for Professional Inclusion in Libraries (Byblios Model– 2025 by Veraldi-Fasciani)***

### **Foundations and Objectives**

The protocol promotes the employment inclusion of young adults with cognitive disabilities through internships in public and school libraries.

The objectives are:

- Develop professional and interpersonal skills.
- Foster autonomy and self-esteem.
- Raise awareness among library staff and the community about the value of diversity.
- Create a sustainable and replicable model at the European level.

### **1. Context analysis:**

Conduct a thorough analysis of the context before starting the internship: analyse environments, resources, and roles to create welcoming and motivating spaces for all those involved.

- Examine physical environments, available resources and roles of all participants (interns, tutors, families, library staff and other stakeholders).
- Identify potential barriers such as accessibility issues, gaps in resources or unclear institutional role definitions.
- Use the findings to tailor the program to the needs of each intern and optimize collaboration among all actors.

### **2. Governance and Partnership**

The protocol requires cooperation between:

- Promoting organization (associations, schools, social cooperatives).
- Host library (public or school).
- Individual tutor (librarian trained in inclusion).
- Family/caregiver as an active participant in the process.

A formal agreement defines roles, objectives, duration, and assessment tools.

### **3. Selection and Involvement of Interns**

Selection is based on a carefully considered sampling process, taking into account:

- Level of autonomy and basic digital skills.
- Personal motivation and interpersonal skills.
- Family availability and aptitude for group work.

Therefore, an introductory interview and a brief preliminary familiarization experience in the library are required.

### **4. Preliminary Training**

Mandatory training for:

- Tutors and library staff → on the principles of inclusion and accessible communication.
- Interns → on basic library, digital skills and soft skills (communication, problem solving, team work...).

Training is not only technical, but also experiential and reflective: it helps trainees learn by doing and thinking about what they do, with tools that foster personal

growth and awareness of their skills.

### **5. Individualized Internship Design**

Each internship is tailored to individual capabilities:

- Modular and flexible activity plan.
- Ergonomic and accessible environment (colors, signage, visual routines).
- Gradual introduction of tasks.
- Active and constant supervision by the tutor, with weekly review meetings.

### **6. Monitoring and Continuous Support**

Monitoring is based on:

- Direct observations and standard ESCO/ICF forms.
- Periodic feedback from the tutor, family, and intern.
- Continuous review of the training plan.

The methodology is reflective and dialogic, based on participatory action research.

### **7. Multidimensional Evaluation**

The integrated evaluation system includes:

- Personal e-Portfolio with self-assessment.
- Observation forms on technical, social, and behavioral skills.
- Storytelling as a tool for advocacy and sense-making.

The final evaluation is collegial and documented in a narrative report.

## **8. Communication and Relationships**

Throughout the program:

- Involve families, volunteers, and library users.
- Promote respect and shared responsibility.
- Counteract stigma and prejudice through shared experiences and public narratives.

Communication must be positive, person-centered and empowerment-oriented.

## **9. Closure, Validation, and Continuity**

Conclusion of the internship:

- Public restitution ceremony with family members and the community.
- Certificate describing the skills acquired.
- Collection of best practices in a common European archive.
- Possibility of continuation through volunteering or inclusion in inclusive library networks.

## **10. Sustainability and Dissemination**

The protocol promotes the replicability of the model through:

- Open guidelines and methodological documentation.
- Sharing of experiences via common digital platforms.



- Transnational events between libraries and local governments.
- Using storytelling and social media to strengthen public awareness and accountability.

This Unified Protocol has been scientifically validated by the research group led by Prof. Roberto Veraldi from the University “Gabriele d’Annunzio” of Chieti-Pescara, following a two-year pilot program conducted in the participating countries: Spain, Portugal, Romania, Germany, and Italy.

It provides a coherent European framework focused on cultural and professional inclusion and can be adapted to different educational and social contexts while maintaining its participatory methodological structure and its focus on personal and community empowerment.

### 6.1.1. SWOT Analysis

To better understand the potential and challenges of the Inclusion Protocol, a **SWOT Analysis** has been carried out. This analytical framework identifies the **Strengths**, **Weaknesses**, **Opportunities**, and **Threats** associated with the implementation of the model across different European contexts. The purpose of this analysis is to support strategic planning and ensure the model’s sustainability and transferability.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Participatory and inclusive approach based on the ICF model and action research.</li><li>• Active involvement of families, tutors, local authorities, and social cooperatives.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• High dependence on tutors’ availability and competence.</li><li>• Regional variability in funding and resources.</li></ul>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on empowerment, digital skills, and personal autonomy.</li> <li>• Flexible, low-stress learning environments (school and public libraries).</li> <li>• Multidimensional evaluation tools (e-portfolio, observation grids, storytelling).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organizational complexity due to multiple stakeholders.</li> <li>• Potential overload for librarians not trained in inclusion.</li> <li>• Limited transferability to ordinary work contexts</li> <li>• Difficulty in providing a legal and professional position for trainees (who were sometimes only placed as volunteers)</li> </ul>
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growing European focus on inclusion and social responsibility of cultural institutions.</li> <li>• Replicability in schools, museums, archives, and civic centers.</li> <li>• Innovative use of digital tools and storytelling to overcome stigma.</li> <li>• Transnational cooperation (Italy, Spain, Portugal, Germany, Romania) and EU funding.</li> <li>• New professional roles in libraries (TUTORS as inclusion mediators).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Persistent stereotypes and prejudices about cognitive disability.</li> <li>• Political and regulatory uncertainty affecting sustainability.</li> <li>• Risk of episodic rather than continuous experiences.</li> <li>• Low public awareness of inclusive employment's cultural value.</li> <li>• Digital divide limiting autonomy.</li> </ul>



### **6.1.2. Adaptability and contextual flexibility**

- How is the protocol flexible enough to adapt to different national frameworks and local contexts?

The EU-level internship protocol is designed with built-in flexibility to respect and respond to the diverse legal, educational, and social frameworks across member states. Rather than imposing a rigid model, it provides a shared set of principles, values, and quality standards that can be interpreted and applied within each national and local context.

This contextual adaptability ensures that the internships remain relevant, feasible, and impactful - while still upholding the core EU objectives of inclusion, empowerment, and equal opportunity for individuals with intellectual disabilities.

- How are institutional differences (e.g., school libraries vs. public libraries) addressed?

The EU internship protocol accommodates institutional diversity - such as the differences between **school libraries** and **public libraries** - through a flexible, context-sensitive approach. While the core principles (inclusion, accessibility, structured learning) remain consistent, implementation is adapted to fit the operational realities, target users, and educational functions of each type of institution. For example, public libraries in Spain, managed by municipal authorities, often emphasize community engagement and lifelong learning, allowing interns to participate in outreach, user assistance, or event coordination. In contrast, school libraries, embedded within educational institutions, may offer opportunities aligned with pedagogical support, organization of learning materials, or classroom-related tasks. These institutional contexts are considered during internship planning, with roles and responsibilities tailored to each setting. Supervisors and tutors are trained accordingly, ensuring that both the intern's experience and the library's operational needs are met in a balanced, inclusive manner. By recognizing and adapting to these differences, the protocol ensures that the internships are both meaningful and sustainable across various institutional environments. In particular, in Romania we tested our Protocol of Inclusion in both situations and we can say that organizing internship in different libraries can enhance the learning experience and provide different insights related to specific tasks, roles, activities of the same professionals – librarians, and can also contribute to keeping the interns motivated and interested for a (relatively) longer period of time.



Also, the internship in both types of libraries contributed mainly to developing similar competencies for the young interns, but with different tools. In school libraries, due to the smaller scale of the institution (only one librarian), there was a “warmer” connection between librarian and interns, and due to the direct involvement of librarian (teacher documentarian) in learning activities, the tasks could be a little more creative, more diverse, therefore more attractive for the interns. In the public library, a huge institution with dozens of librarians, the internal procedures are more strict and tasks for interns were less creative and more structured, according to those procedures, but that was an opportunity for the interns to practice intensely the core tasks of librarians and to better understand a functioning of a big library and how the overall library activity is dependent on each staff doing their job.

### **6.1.3. Coordination and roles at EU Level**

- What roles do the project partners play in ensuring consistent implementation?

Within the BYBLIOS Erasmus+ project, coordination at the EU level is essential to ensure a consistent, high-quality implementation of inclusive internship programmes across participating countries. Each project partner plays a specific role in contributing to a coherent framework while allowing for national and local adaptation.

At the European level, project partners collaborate to develop common tools, such as training modules, evaluation criteria, and inclusive guidelines, ensuring that all institutions share the same foundational approach. Regular transnational meetings, joint work packages, and shared digital platforms facilitate communication, monitor progress, and support mutual learning.

Through this collaborative structure, all partners contribute to maintaining consistency, inclusiveness, and impact across the entire Erasmus+ BYBLIOS initiative.

- How do partners share tools, practices, and results to improve quality?

To ensure continuous quality improvement, the BYBLIOS Erasmus+ project



fosters a structured and collaborative exchange of tools, practices, and outcomes among all partners. This is achieved through several key mechanisms:

1. Common digital platforms: partners use shared online platforms - mainly Google Drive - to upload and access training materials, internship guidelines, inclusive communication resources, and assessment tools. This ensures transparency, easy access, and real-time updates across countries.
2. Regular transnational meetings and peer learning: consortium meetings and peer learning events for partners to present experiences, identify challenges, and share innovative practices. These sessions allow direct feedback and cross-cultural exchange, strengthening cohesion and relevance.
3. Pilot evaluations and comparative analysis: each partner pilots the tools and methods in their own context, then contributes results to a collective evaluation process. Comparative analysis helps identify which strategies are most effective and adaptable, leading to refined practices that benefit all partners.

Through this systematic exchange, the BYBLIOS project promotes not only the harmonization of quality standards, but also the mutual enhancement of local practices - creating a dynamic cycle of continuous improvement across the partnership.

#### **6.1.4. Sustainability and transferability**

- How can the EU-level protocol be used beyond the Byblios project?

The EU-level internship protocol developed within the BYBLIOS Erasmus+ project is designed with long-term sustainability and broad transferability in mind. Its structure, grounded in inclusive values, adaptable tools, and evidence-based practices, allows it to be adopted and scaled well beyond the lifespan of the project itself.



1. **Alignment with EU policy frameworks.** The protocol is consistent with broader European strategies - such as the EU Disability Strategy 2021-2030 and the European Pillar of Social Rights - ensuring it remains relevant and supportive of long-term inclusion goals. This alignment facilitates policy uptake at regional, national, and institutional levels.
2. **Open-access tools and guidelines.** All core materials developed by the BYBLIOS project which hold confidentiality and avoid sharing personal data - internship frameworks, tutor training resources, evaluation templates, and accessibility checklists - are made available in open-access formats. This allows other municipalities, libraries, educational institutions, and civil society actors across Europe to easily adopt or adapt them.
3. **Institutional integration and policy influence.** The protocol can be embedded into local and regional public employment and education programmes. Its tested effectiveness in public libraries serves as a model for other public institutions seeking to implement inclusive internship pathways. Policy recommendations developed through the project also support integration into national strategies.
4. **Scalability to other sectors and contexts.** Although piloted in the library sector, the protocol's core components - such as individualized task design, tutor support structures, and accessibility measures - are applicable across sectors. This makes it transferable to museums, schools, municipal services, and even private organizations committed to inclusive employment.
5. **Community of practice and ongoing exchange.** The network established through BYBLIOS encourages ongoing collaboration beyond the project period. Partners can continue sharing updates, refining practices, and expanding the protocol through Erasmus+ follow-up projects or national funding schemes.

In essence, the BYBLIOS protocol offers a replicable and adaptable model for inclusive internships - supporting systemic change across the EU. Its sustainability lies in its

ability to evolve, inform policy, and inspire other initiatives committed to equal opportunities and dignity in the workplace.

- What are the recommendations to scale or replicate inclusive internships in libraries across Europe?
1. Adopt a common, flexible framework
  2. Engage public authorities and policy makers
  3. Strengthen cross-sector partnerships
  4. Ensure capacity building and staff training
  5. Implement universal design and accessibility standards
  6. Create inclusive role descriptions and learning plans
  7. Establish robust evaluation and documentation tools
  8. Promote awareness and visibility
  9. Leverage European funding and networks
  10. Embed internships in institutional strategy

### **6.1.5. Reflections on challenges and successes**

- What are the most relevant common challenges partners faced?

Across all participating countries, several common challenges emerged during the implementation of the internships and the broader participatory action research process.

One of the earliest and most demanding tasks was securing **institutional commitment**. Convincing some libraries or host interns with cognitive disabilities



required patience, clear communication and trust-building. Equally challenging was motivating staff members to act as tutors—a role that demands time, preparation, and sensitivity. In some cases, such as in Italy, this was successfully addressed by combining the presence of a library reference person with the support of an internal university tutor, ensuring both professional and pedagogical guidance.

In the case of Spain, as aforementioned, the internships could not be carried out in real time and had to require the help of a local Down syndrome association. They offered us aid and guidance through the course of reconstructing two cases of interns who developed a similar process of library internships in the past. On that account, there were obstacles from the start and our Spanish team faced the challenges of finding optimum cases of library internships which engage with the social and job inclusion of people with cognitive disabilities. During the course of becoming acquainted with the needs of the project, the social workers and/or social service professionals who were in charge of controlling and supervising the internships of the two forenamed interns offered valuable feedback and comments.

Another recurring issue **concerned expectations and attitudes toward disability**. Many young people with intellectual disabilities have grown up in environments where their abilities were underestimated, leading in some cases to a sense of **learned helplessness**<sup>21</sup> and a lack of confidence in their own potential. Building self-efficacy required sustained encouragement, the setting of small but meaningful goals, and continuous positive reinforcement from tutors, colleagues, and peers. At the same time, attitudinal barriers within institutions also emerged. Persistent stereotypes, uncertainty, or discomfort in interacting with people with disabilities occasionally limited genuine inclusion. Overcoming these barriers demanded not only individual awareness but also collective responsibility—through ongoing staff training, structured opportunities for dialogue, and visible leadership commitment to fostering an inclusive and respectful workplace culture. In this way, inclusion evolved from a well-intentioned objective into a shared daily practice rooted in empathy, collaboration and mutual

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21 Learned helplessness: A condition in which a person, after repeated failures or experiences over which they have no control, stops attempting solutions, believing their efforts are ineffective. In the context of inclusion, it occurs when environments that undervalue capabilities hinder the development of autonomy and confidence.  
Seligman, Martin EP. "Learned helplessness." (1973): 165-169.

growth.

Beyond the institutional level, a number of **structural and systemic barriers** further complicated the implementation and sustainability of the internships. In several contexts, the networks of collaboration between libraries, schools, employment services, and disability organizations were weak or only partially developed. This **fragmentation** often meant that each institution operated within its own logic, without a shared framework for inclusion or a coordinated strategy for supporting young people with intellectual disabilities along their transition from education to employment. As a result, valuable information about trainees' needs, progress, or potential accommodations was sometimes lost between institutions, reducing the overall coherence and continuity of support. The absence of **formalized collaboration mechanisms** - such as regional agreements, memoranda of understanding, or structured referral systems - also limited the ability to create clear and sustainable pathways connecting vocational training with real work experiences. In practice, much of the success depended on individual commitment and informal contacts rather than on established institutional partnerships.

Against this backdrop, the **Byblios project actively sought to address these gaps** by fostering dialogue and cooperation among local actors. Where collaboration networks were missing, the project worked to **build new connections** between libraries, schools, and social or employment services, promoting mutual understanding and the sharing of good practices. In contexts where such partnerships already existed, Byblios contributed to **strengthening and formalizing them**, encouraging more structured coordination and joint planning. These efforts helped create a more integrated ecosystem of support, ensuring that inclusion was not treated as an isolated initiative but as a shared responsibility embedded in the wider community fabric.

Finally, the project highlighted the importance—and difficulty—of shifting from assistance-based thinking to a capacity-based approach. This paradigm shift demands communication efforts across all levels, a willingness to take measured risks, and the recognition that inclusion is not a charitable act, but a mutual learning process that strengthens institutions, communities, and the individuals involved.

- *What worked well across multiple countries?*



Despite the differences in national frameworks and institutional contexts, several strategies and approaches consistently delivered positive results across the BYBLIOS partnership:

1. **Common EU Framework with Local Adaptation:** the shared internship protocol provided a clear, quality-assured structure, while allowing partners to adapt it to national legislation, institutional models, and local resources. This balance ensured both consistency and relevance.
2. **Knowledge Sharing Within the Partnership:** regular transnational meetings, shared toolkits, and the exchange of good practices helped partners learn from each other's successes and adapt effective solutions to their own contexts.
3. **Continuous Feedback and Support:** regular check-ins between interns, tutors, and support staff helped address challenges quickly, reinforced progress, and strengthened motivation.
4. **Accessible Communication and Tools:** the use of plain language, visual aids, assistive technology, and adapted instructions during the focus groups' meetings and interviews with librarians and stakeholders enhanced understanding and participation for interns with varying needs.
5. **Practical, Hands-On Learning in Real Work Environments:** providing meaningful, tangible tasks in everyday library operations - such as organizing collections, assisting visitors, or supporting events - boosted interns' confidence, skill development, and sense of contribution.

These common strengths created a replicable model for inclusive internships that not only worked in diverse European countries but also proved adaptable to different types of libraries and public institutions.

● What were some successful tools or strategies shared across partners?

- |    |   |                   |                 |
|----|---|-------------------|-----------------|
| 1. | <b>Inclusive</b>  | <b>internship</b> | <b>protocol</b> |
|    | A shared EU-level protocol outlining minimum quality standards, accessibility requirements, and adaptable internship structures. Partners used it as a baseline |                   |                 |



while adapting to national and local contexts.

2. **Tutor training modules**  
Comprehensive training packages for tutors and supervisors covering disability awareness, communication techniques, reasonable accommodations, and inclusive task design.
3. **Individual skills and needs assessment tools**  
Structured assessment forms and checklists used before internship placement to identify strengths, support needs, and suitable roles for each intern.
4. **Personalized learning plans**  
Templates for creating individualized plans that combine learning objectives, practical tasks, and agreed support measures—ensuring alignment between intern capabilities and institutional needs.
5. **Accessible communication guidelines**  
Shared best practices on using plain language, visual aids, pictograms, and digital accessibility features to support understanding and engagement.
6. **Onboarding and orientation materials**  
Adapted orientation booklets and visual guides explaining library spaces, staff roles, and daily routines—helping interns integrate quickly into the workplace.
7. **Feedback and evaluation templates**  
Standardized tools for documenting progress, gathering feedback from interns and tutors, and evaluating learning outcomes at regular intervals.
8. **Task adaptation strategies**  
Guides on modifying tasks to different ability levels—e.g., breaking activities into smaller steps, using assistive technology, or allowing flexible timeframes.
9. **Peer learning and exchange sessions**  
Regular transnational partner meetings (online and in-person) where successful practices, case studies, and lessons learned were presented and discussed.
10. **Visibility and awareness campaigns**

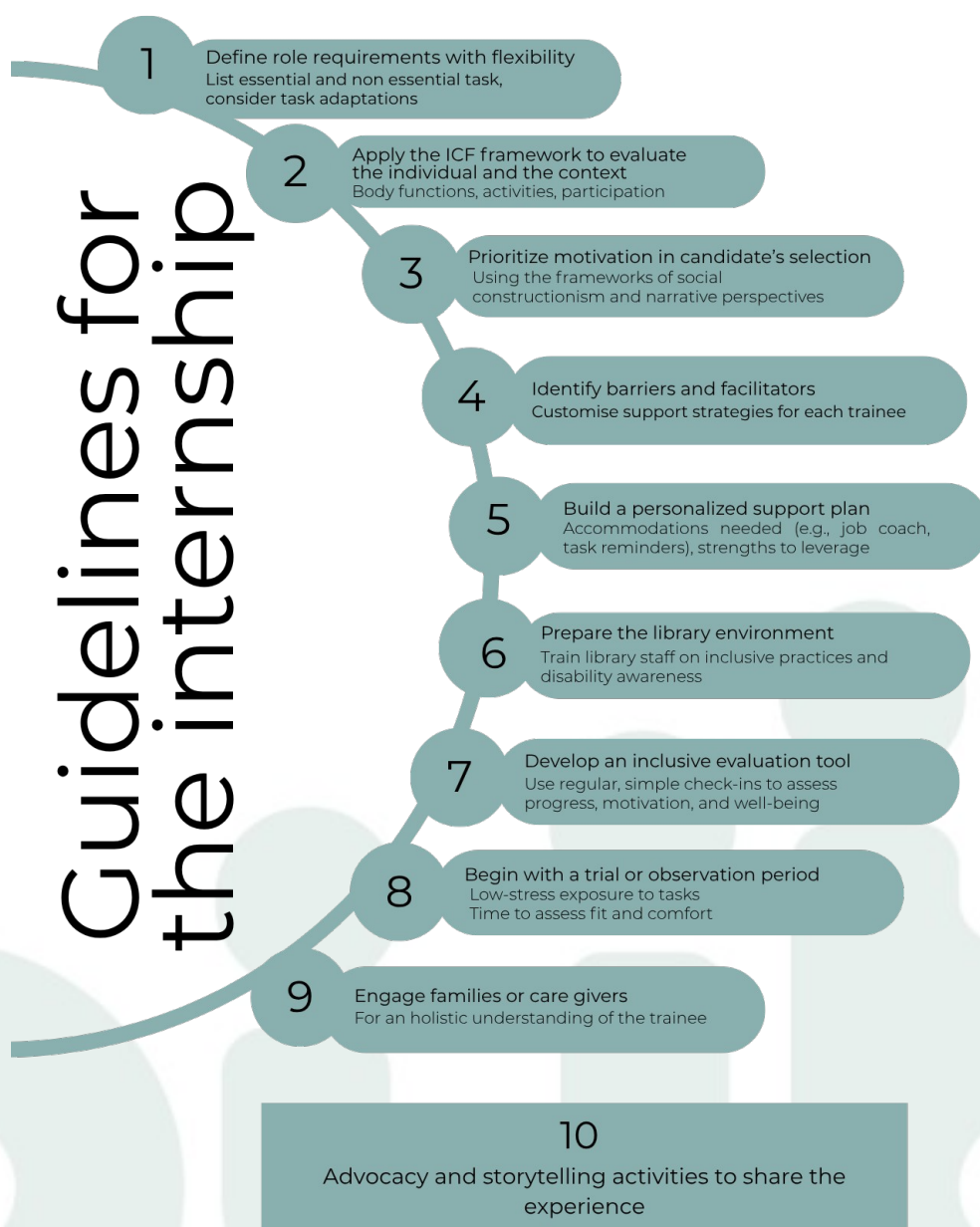


Communication materials—posters, videos, and social media toolkits—shared among partners to promote the value of inclusive internships to the wider community.



## 6.2 National Focus: Step-by-Step Guides

### 6.2.1. Italy: 10-Step Guide





When designing an internship for young adults with cognitive disabilities, the first decision to be made was choosing between a standard internship and an “inclusive” one. The former involves registering the intern with the Employment Centre and assessing them for the purposes of Law 68/99. The Centre then takes responsibility for matching the intern's skills with job offers. While this approach is useful and multidisciplinary, it is also complex and has a 'static' vision. It captures the intern's skills at the time of application, but does not explicitly empower them or involve their motivation. So, it does not take into account “potential development” or the possibility of intervention in the context. In a traditional internship, it is the intern who must adapt to the environment, rather than all that is around. Instead, *Byblios'* idea is to turn the library into a community hub where changes, adaptations and improvements involve each and everyone: professionals, operators with disabilities, spaces, structures, actions, times and access modes. The main advantage of inclusive internships is that they are specifically designed to meet the needs of people with disabilities. They are also much easier to implement from a bureaucratic point of view: being voluntary and not leading to any obligation of subsequent employment or remuneration, it often requires only a formal agreement between the proposing body (in our case, the ARDA association) and the implementing body (Istituto Comprensivo di Spoltore) and, of course, funds to pay the tutor, if this is not the school librarian. In Italy, the situation varies greatly depending on the region. Often, the intervention of a third party is necessary, namely Type B Cooperatives (social enterprises whose main objective is the employment of disadvantaged people). The main strengths of an inclusive internship compared to a standard one are ease of implementation, flexibility and a less stressful environment. It can be the best option for a first approach to job opportunities. On the other hand, a “standard” internship is aimed at job placement and it can be the gateway to permanent employment.

Once we have decided on inclusive training, we addressed the following issues:

**STEP 1)** Decide what work skills we wanted to develop so that they would be compatible (and adapted) to the profile of a ‘library assistant’. Our research team has therefore designed a reasoned and flexible adaptation of the skills catalogued in ESCO, together with the operational capabilities required to perform them, based on the ICF framework (see section *Trainee2\_Assessment Matrix*).

**STEP 2)** How to select the interns. We adopted the methodological framework of reasoned sampling, also referred to as purposive or “significant” sampling. This approach prioritizes the relevance of participants over random selection, allowing us to focus on individuals whose profiles are most informative for the goals of the internship (Patton, 2015). This choice was made because: a) cognitive disability is a very diverse landscape and even within the same condition (Down syndrome) we discovered enormous individual diversity. In this sense, it would not have made much sense to have a randomised sample, so we focused on relevance rather than random distribution. In addition, b) it helps design internships tailored to *real-life needs, challenges, and strengths* of participants. Rather than simply matching skills with job profiles, we chose to use ICF to outline abilities (influenced by the context in a positive (+), facilitator or negative manner (-), barrier). The exploration of the person's possibilities, especially in terms of evolution and development, was carried out according to the survey model developed by SIGAD (see the document: *Work Inclusion Protocol: A.*).

Another key factor was the number of people to be involved, which is closely linked to the availability of effective tutors. Given the action research nature of our project, two inclusive internships were set up in Italy in a school library at an “Istituto Comprensivo” (pupils aged from 3 to 14) for two young people with Down syndrome. The trainees were recruited with the support of the Abruzzo Regional Down Syndrome Association (ARDA), which helped in selecting its members based on the following criteria:

- age (between 18 and 35),
- no previous work experience,
- basic digital skills (knowing how to turn on a PC, use a mouse and selection functions, use Word, PDF, basic Excel functions as a user, knowing how to write an email, knowing how to search in the internet, knowing how to use the cut/paste functions);
- motivation to work, confidence in one's abilities, willingness to work in pairs/teams;
- ease in relating to children,
- approval of families/care givers.



**STEP 3)** The guidance approach used a constructivist methodological model drawn from the results of another European project, *WORK4PSY*, which, despite having a different target group (adults with mental health problems), shares with *Byblios* the need to adapt assessment tools and procedures aimed at empowering fragile people rather than measuring the “distance” between their current abilities and the tasks to be performed. It focuses on meaning making and co – constructing a vocational self through commitment and active involvement both from the trainee and the career counsellor’s part. Networking, collaborations and the active involvement of informal carers as well as their support, are significant elements of the proposed model. This approach has been implemented in the interview between tutor and trainee (following a list of activities as: *what do you want to do?* An exercise to become aware of activities one likes to undertake and whether they correspond with predispositions and whether they positively affect your sense of meaning; *the wheel of competences* that allows the individual to assess his/her competencies and abilities and provides an opportunity to present them graphically) and above all the *e-portfolio* (see the dedicated section) where trainees can, according to their expressive abilities, assess their skills, progress and enjoyment of the activities, also thanks to the use of emoticon (I liked it/I didn't like it). The e-portfolio is also particularly useful during the final assessment phase to evaluate progress/changes that have taken place.

**STEP 4)** A training internship such as the one offered by Byblios has the value of exploring and overcoming the possible difficulties and threats arising from the context. In the case of our two trainees, we observed how, in the case of A., the lack of analogue support made it difficult to scan the barcodes required for loan: once a lectern was used, the trainee was able to carry out her tasks more quickly and effectively. As for R., the barrier was time: fast-paced deadlines and insistent requests put R. under pressure. Moving her workstation to the back office, without the need to interact with users all the time, allowed R. to do her job accurately and effectively. Another common barrier is stigma. Many parents who volunteer at the library were initially afraid because they had never encountered people with disabilities before and were worried that they would not be able to cope with any difficulties that arose. However, spending time together has almost completely dispelled these fears. It is not possible to compile a preliminary list of all the potential barriers that could be encountered in the workplace.



However, a thorough analysis by the tutor, coupled with continuous observation of behaviour, will almost always make it possible to address any critical issues.

**STEP 5)** As we mentioned in point 4, two trainees with the same diagnosis (Down syndrome) have totally different needs, strengths and weaknesses. The ratio of 1 to 2/max to 3 between tutors and trainees allows the professional, in agreement with other observers, the trainees themselves and their families, to create a personalised, flexible and modifiable support plan. Through observation sheets and logbooks, the tutor can identify critical issues, propose corrective measures and evaluate their effectiveness. The role of the tutor will naturally become less prominent and less frequent over time, but will never be completely abolished. Once the skills have been consolidated, the tutor will evaluate their application by the trainee at set times without the constant guidance provided at the beginning.

**STEP 6)** As defined in the introductory note, the general framework of our model is provided by ICF and on the importance of context in modelling expectations and therefore roles and skills. A very important part of the project was dedicated to participatory action research (PAR) in which stakeholders and privileged witnesses provided their opinions by focus groups and interviews on the role and future of libraries and on the possibility to run internships with mentally impaired people. On this occasion, fears, biases, expectations and hopes also emerged. All of these mental and emotional constructs had to be taken into serious consideration before implementing the inclusive internship, as they could be one of the key factors in its success or failure. Responding to the main concerns and actively listening to those who will be sharing the work environment with the intern is extremely important. (see the Focus Groups and Interviews section)

**STEP 7)** The assessment tool developed by *Byblios* is multifactorial and consists of: an e-portfolio with self-assessment, observation sheets on job duties specified by ESCO , general behaviour and satisfaction degree and a final report. As with the diagnostic and planning phase, it must be multidisciplinary and multifocal: all actors have the opportunity to evaluate the experience. In addition, the use of storytelling also serves the function of advocacy and sustainability of the experience.

**STEP 8)** The entire internship period should be considered as a gradual approach to actual work experience. The choice of the school library as a low-stress environment with a high level of social interaction is a particularly favourable approach for people with cognitive difficulties. The introduction of new tasks was gradual and only implemented when the previous ones appeared to be sufficiently consolidated. Working memory, and not only that, is strongly linked to the emotions experienced at that moment: pleasant experiences of recognition and relationship allowed the acquisition of tasks previously considered too difficult.

**STEP 9)** Involving families and regular caregivers is useful not only during the initial phase of getting to know the trainee, but throughout the entire experience. Providing successful feedback throughout the experience is essential for sharing it and establishing it in the relevant context. We should let people speak for themselves when possible and include diverse perspectives.

**STEP 10)** As we mentioned in the introduction, behind the studies, data analysis and planning there are people. People whose voices are often too weak to be heard. Storytelling helps people understand, empathize, and act—making it essential in advocating for the job placement of people with disabilities. By choosing the right platform, focusing on authenticity, and targeting the right audience, storytelling becomes not just a method of communication, but a tool for transformation.

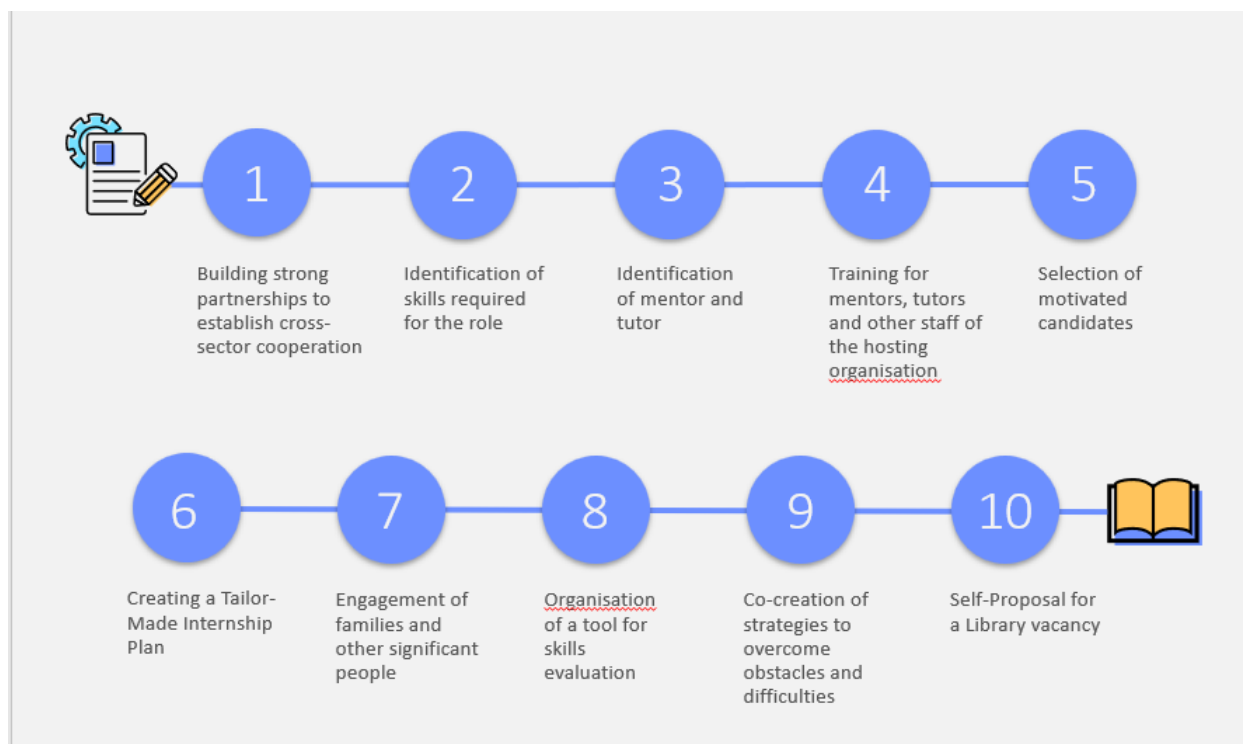
Sincere storytelling :

- humanizes the issue, changing public perception, putting a face to the issue, helping people relate emotionally;
- breaks down Stigma, challenging stereotypes and show capabilities, not just limitations;
- highlights successes, showing real-life examples of people thriving in jobs helps shift the narrative from "burden" to "valuable contributors";
- holds institutions accountable;

### **6.2.2 Portugal: 10-Step Guide**

#### **10 steps for building**

## A SUCCESSFUL INTERNSHIP



### 1 - Building strong partnerships to establish cross-sector cooperation

- ❖ Establish a foundation of trust between partners, which is a critical element for successful cross-sector coalitions;
- ❖ Ensure open communication channels to share information, align expectations, and address challenges effectively.

### 2 - Identification of skills required for the role

- ❖ A comprehensive set of competencies for being a library assistant;
- ❖ Identification of learning goals.

### 3 – Identification of mentor and tutor



- ❖ Among those who have already reached a good level of professionalism and experience;
- ❖ A person with a strong motivation to guide and advise and who has interpersonal skills and other personal qualities like empathy and an effective communication style.

#### **4 – Training for mentors, tutors and other staff of the hosting organisation**

- ❖ Training topics and content should align with the purpose of the mentoring program to be implemented (such as support on libraries activities and requirements for employment);
- ❖ General disability awareness, such as using the correct terminology when speaking with someone with a disability, and having a greater understanding of invisible and intellectual disabilities, specific strategies, and activities to utilize during the transition period.

#### **5 - Selection of motivated candidates**

- ❖ Interview based on their past experiences and expectations;
- ❖ Proposal of a visit or an experience time in the library.

#### **6 - Creating a Tailor-Made Internship Plan**

- ❖ The intern receives sufficient guidance appropriate to their own abilities and goals;
- ❖ The activities plan should be flexible and according to the intern's achievements.

#### **7 – Engagement of families and other significant people**

- ❖ By engaging families and communities, hosting organisations can learn more about the various challenges, barriers, needs and priorities of interns with intellectual disabilities and their families;



- ❖ Parents and families know their children and have greater insight into their learning experiences; sharing this knowledge with mentors and tutors improves the interns' experiences and promotes a more equitable system.

## **8 – Organisation of a tool for skills evaluation**

- ❖ Regular sessions of skills evaluation;
- ❖ Facilitate access to the labour market with personalised information.

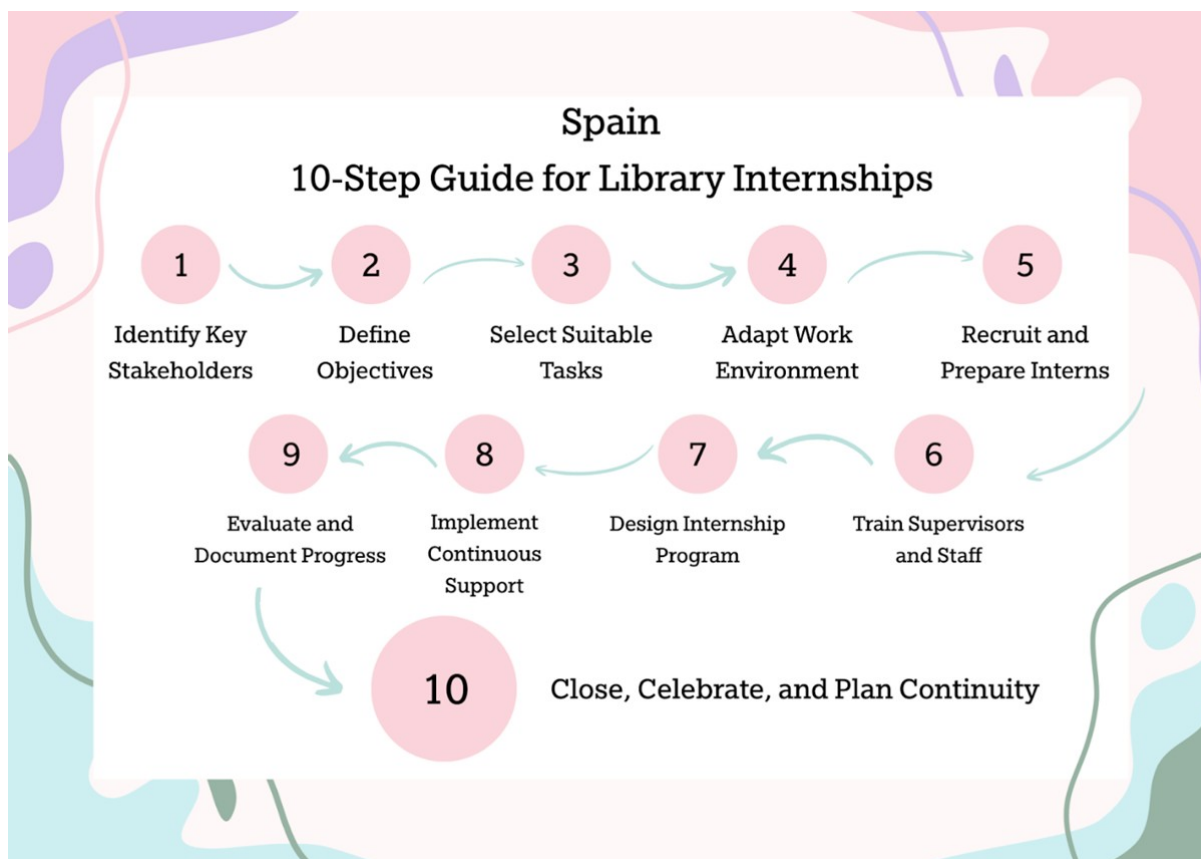
## **9 – Co-creation of strategies to overcome obstacles and difficulties**

- ❖ Co-creation is feasible with this target group, if co-creation methods are selected that fit the target group (e.g. making use of visuals, asking concrete (non-abstract) questions and providing clear but short instructions) but it might be helpful to make an assessment of the intern skills before conducting a co-creation process.
- ❖ Interns involved in co-creation bring their own perspectives, experiences, skills, and knowledge to their own learning process as other young people.

## **10 – Self-Proposal for a Library vacancy**

- ❖ The responsibility to be able to interns manage their own lives should be a goal of the library internship;
- ❖ Self-advocacy skills are fundamental to prepare interns for the definition of their career pathway and face the prejudices and stereotypes with a pro-active attitude.

### 6.2.3 Spain: 10-Step Guide



### 10-Step Guide to Recreate Inclusive Internships in Public Libraries (Spain)

#### 1. Identify Key Stakeholders

- ❖ Associations: organizations specialized in supporting people with cognitive disabilities.
- ❖ Host Institutions: public libraries within the municipal or regional library network.
- ❖ Supervisors: one library professional (mentor) and one support professional from the association.



- ❖ Municipal authorities: local government cultural departments to authorize and promote the initiative.

## **2. Define Objectives**

- ❖ Promote social inclusion through meaningful employment experiences.
- ❖ Develop personal autonomy and workplace skills for interns.
- ❖ Sensitize library staff and the community to the value of diversity in the workplace.

## **3. Select Suitable Tasks: focus on tasks aligned with the assistant librarian role but adapted to the interns' strengths.**

- ❖ Organizing books on shelves using color-coded labels.
- ❖ Assisting with lending/returning materials under supervision.
- ❖ Preparing spaces for reading activities or workshops.
- ❖ Helping with basic tidying tasks (magazines, newspapers, chairs).
- ❖ Assisting patrons with directions inside the library.

## **4. Adapt Work Environment**

- ❖ Use visual supports (icons, color codes, pictograms).
- ❖ Establish structured routines with clear beginning and end.
- ❖ Provide quiet working areas if overstimulation occurs.
- ❖ Ensure accessibility (easy signage, ergonomic furniture if needed).

## **5. Recruit and Prepare Interns**

- ❖ Selection through associations, prioritizing interest in reading, culture, or community service.



- ❖ Pre-internship workshops:
  - Social skills in a workplace.
  - Introduction to library services.
  - Role-playing common situations.

## 6. Train Supervisors and Staff

- ❖ Librarians receive training in inclusive practices, communication strategies, and reasonable adjustments.
- ❖ Association supervisors coordinate individual support plans (strengths, challenges, learning style).
- ❖ Staff sensitization workshops for fostering empathy and teamwork.

## 7. Design Internship Program

- ❖ Duration: typically 3-6 months with flexible weekly hours (e.g., 2-4 hours/day).
- ❖ Pair each intern with:
  - A professional librarian mentor (task guidance)
  - An association supports professional (personalized supervision, mediation).
- ❖ Establish a weekly review meeting between both supervisors.

## 8. Implement Continuous Support

- ❖ Daily check-ins at the start and end of shifts.
- ❖ Use of task cards or a visual daily agenda.
- ❖ Regular encouragement and positive reinforcement.



- ❖ Encourage peer support by other library staff and volunteers.

## **9. Evaluate and Document Progress**

- ❖ Joint evaluation (association + librarian) every 4-6 weeks.
- ❖ Tools: simple evaluation grids.
- ❖ Collect feedback from patrons and staff on community impact.
- ❖ Adjust tasks and supports needed.

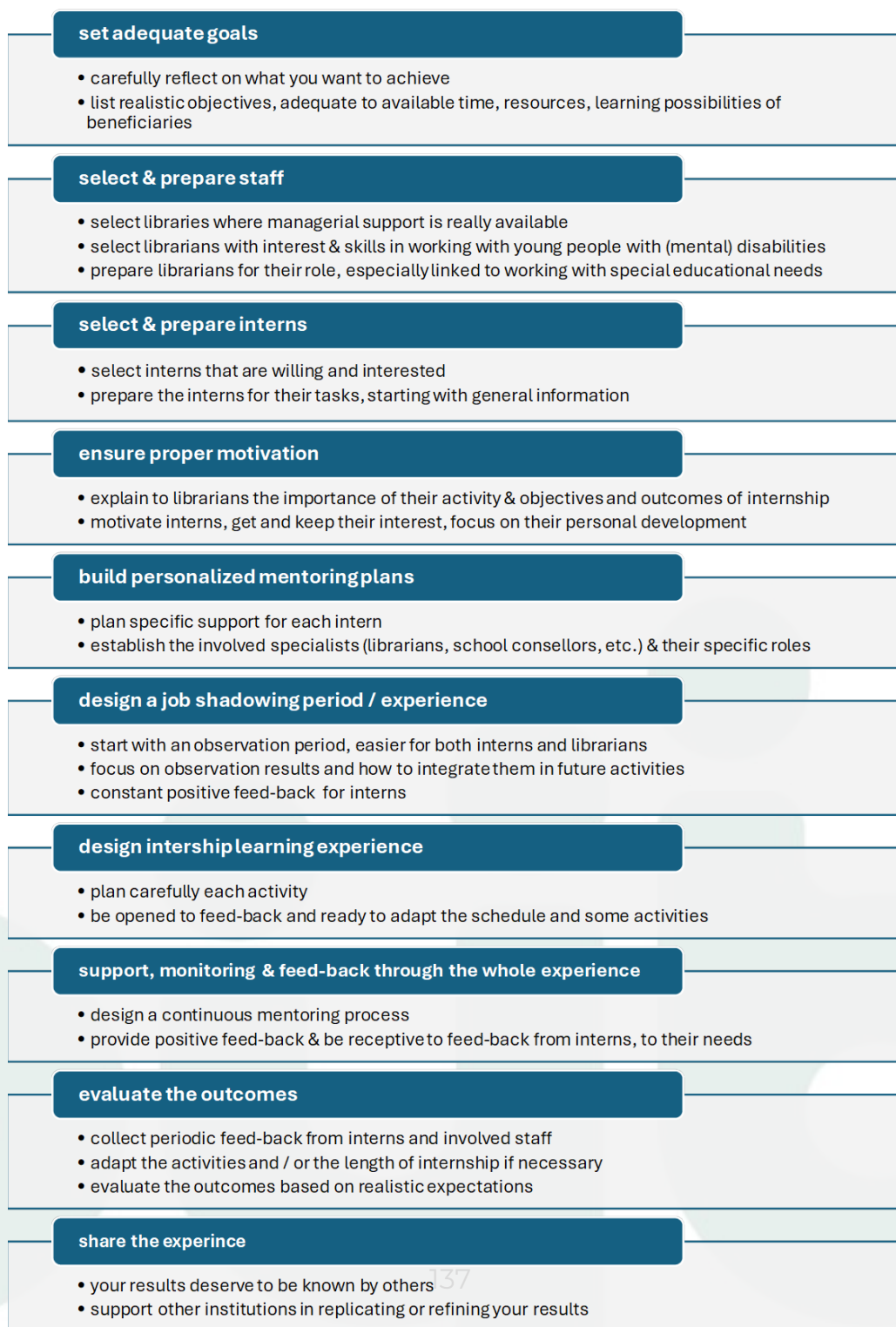
## **10. Close, Celebrate, and Plan Continuity**

- ❖ End with a closing ceremony (certificate of participation issued by the library and association).
- ❖ Invite family members, municipal representatives, and local press to give visibility.
- ❖ Document best practices to replicate in other libraries.
- ❖ Explore pathways: future volunteer opportunities, civic participation, or even supported employment in cultural institutions.



## 6.2.4 Romania: 10-Step Guide

### Milestones for the internship



1. First of all, when designing a future internship, start by doing an **in-depth adequate reflection on what you want to achieve** in order to establish adequate outputs for your interns, taking into consideration available resources (especially human resources), proposed length of internship experience, realistic evaluation of interns learning possibilities (based on the established target group). Take your time for this reflection, be patient and find as many sources of information as possible; use your professional network to get information from NGOs active in youth work, especially for youth with (mental) disabilities, consult with psychologists, school counsellors, librarians etc. Be as realistic as possible, as the success of your future learning experience is based on establishing specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound objectives (SMART).

2. Create a **list as long as possible with all libraries that could host the internship** experience and try to find reliable references about the activities carried out in each library; based on adequate knowledge about those activities, create a short list with the ones that could offer the best possible learning experience for the interns. Plan discussions with management and proposed librarians in each potential partner in order to fully assess the openness, interest and managerial support in order to select the library where interns will really be supported in learning. After selecting a library (or more), carefully prepare the librarians for their role, with a special focus on their skills to work and collaborate with youth with special educational needs; support from a psychologist or at least a school counsellor with background in special education could be needed.

3. Work with local NGOs on **identifying potential candidates** for the internship, based on the already established characteristics of the target group. Pay special attention to interns' motivation, interest in the job market and necessary (basic) skills. After selecting the interns, plan and implement some preparation activities, starting with presenting the general information about the internship, objectives, proposed learning outcomes etc.

4. carefully plan and implement a strategy to **fully motivate both the librarians and the interns**, as the success of the future activities is strictly conditioned by the gaining and maintaining the adequate level of motivation and interest for all involved persons. For the librarians, detailed explanations of the importance of their activity and



information about the specific impact they will have on the interns, as well as references on how to achieve those goals could prove to be useful. For interns, motivational strategy could include reference on their personal development, not necessarily linked to a specific profession, but skills and competencies that will be useful in any career path they will take. Again, involving a psychologist in preparing librarians and interns will be helpful, as personal development activities are in their expertise. This is an activity that will continue during the whole internship period, as there will be a need for maintaining the achieved level of motivation until reaching the goals at the end of the learning experience.

**5. Plan mentoring activities** for each intern, based on their interests, motivation, skills, attitudes etc. Designate a mentor, if possible other specialist than the librarian, that will be there to assist the interns during the learning, providing additional support if needed, listening to their feed-back and solving their potential complaints, while keeping them motivated for their tasks. Be ready to adapt these mentoring activities as often as necessary.

**6. Start with some easier activities**, both for librarians and for interns, **such as job shadowing** activities, a period when interns only observe the librarian doing their tasks, asking additional information etc. This facilitates success for interns and positive feed-back will encourage them to continue with the more difficult activities and keep them motivated. This period will also be used as social networking, with interns, librarians, mentors etc. becoming familiar to each other, gaining the “courage” to ask questions, to communicate etc. Also, this period is very useful for spatial orientation of the interns, getting familiar with the space, with location of various resources etc. Collect feed-back and get interns familiarized with the procedure of collecting and providing feed-back after each activity.

**7. Design and implement the actual internship activities**, when interns move from observers to actors, being directly involved in the activities in the library, taking, under supervision, the role of the librarian. Carefully plan each activity and task so you minimize the risks, especially the ones related to interns being directly in contact with beneficiaries, especially if they are small children in the school libraries. Be opened to feed-back, suggestions from interns and from librarians, and, if possible, from



beneficiaries, and, equally important, be ready to adapt the schedule and some activities as often it is necessary to fully facilitate learning.

8. **Design a mentoring process**, focusing especially on keeping the interns (and the librarians) motivated and focused. Pay special attention to positive feed-back for participants; if the activities are properly selected and objectives are realistic, then the interns should be successful in most of the activities, therefore reasons for positive feed-back should be easy to find; emphasise on the role of the librarian in the results of the interns to provide positive feed-back for staff and keep them motivated for future efforts. Be very receptive to the needs of interns and / or librarians, it is possible to identify needs that you didn't take into consideration when planning the learning experience.

9. During and after the internship, **conduct a realistic evaluation of the outcomes**. Collect periodic feed-back from interns and involved staff, in a formal and / or informal way, have someone always ready to really listen to all those involved in the internship. Take into consideration that the whole learning experience is new and very difficult for both librarians and interns, therefore even just listening to their difficulties could provide necessary motivation. When necessary, adapt the activities and / or the length of internship; on the one hand, this will prove to the librarians and interns that their feed-back was really listened to and their needs are taken into consideration; on the other hand, this constant adaptation will enhance learning and make the outcomes more reachable. Nevertheless, it is important to evaluate the outcomes based on realistic expectations, based on the observation of the whole learning experience, not only on some fixed indicators established when designing the internship; adapt the output indicators and evaluation strategy if necessary.

10. Last, but not least, share your experience and results with other stakeholders that could replicate or refine your results. Be positive and aware of the fact that your results deserve to be known by others and manifest your availability to support other institutions in replicating or refining your results. Provide as much information as possible, as many details as you consider relevant, share your personal thoughts and your personal experience as they might motivate others more than just sharing data and outcomes.

### 6.2.5 Germany: 10-step guide

## Ten steps to implement an internship



Suggestions for potential interns and library staff for implementing an internship

### 1. "I have an idea."

*Key questions and considerations, formulating goals*

**Participant:** Why do I want to do an internship in a library? What do I like about a library? What do I want to discover and learn? What can I do? What do I want? What do I want to change? What do I want to do after such an internship?

**Library:** How can our library become an open place of learning? Under what conditions can people with cognitive and physical disabilities work in a library/our library? How can an internship help us get closer to this goal? What challenges could this pose for our team? What ideas are there for applying them creatively – within the library, at the (local) political level?

## 2. Inform yourself

*Analysis and research, exchange with others*

**Participant:** What type of library suits me best? An academic library, a public library, a school library, a large library or a small one? How far away could it be at most? Under what conditions do I feel comfortable in a library? Which libraries do I prefer to avoid? What characterises working in a library? What suits me better: sorting or communicating? Or both? Where are the pitfalls? What could go wrong? Does the library of my choice offer internships? How long would I have to wait?

**Library:** What tasks could people with mild cognitive impairments perform in our library? What requirements should interns meet in terms of spatial conditions, team interaction and working with library visitors? What can an intern learn in our library? What opportunities are there to work in a library after an internship? What bridging function can so-called 'outsourced workplaces', as they exist in Germany, perform?

## 3. "There were two royal children"

*Intern finds library – library finds intern*

**Participant:** Contacting libraries, sending documents, contacting stakeholders and, for example, interest groups for people with disabilities, job interviews in libraries, supporting libraries in obtaining approval from the local public administration (human resources department) or other decision-makers for the purpose of drawing up contracts.

**Library:** Contacting vocational schools with special education classes as well as associations, initiatives and institutions for people with disabilities, including workshops for people with disabilities (DE): Offering internships

#### **4. Giving shape to agreements and trust**

##### *Agree and sign an internship contract*

Participants and the library agree on goals, activities, rights, obligations, duration of the internship, who the intern's contact person is, how the activities will be documented, and other details.

#### **5. Putting it into practise: learning experiences**

##### *Action and reflection during the internship*

Internships usually begin with a detailed introduction and a trial period of at least several days. Once the intern has familiarised themselves with the new environment as far as possible, they can gradually try out the activities of a library employee. The range of insights into everyday library life is also broadened when the intern has the opportunity to get to know other libraries in the network and their specific characteristics.

During an internship, learning takes place on many levels simultaneously. Cataloguing, systematising, dealing with people, working on the computer, developing frustration tolerance, etc. It is important that there is regular reflection on impressions and experiences, ideally every other day. At the latest halfway through the internship, it is also worth taking a look at the key questions and the agreed goals. Have the participants and the library come closer to achieving them?

Towards the end of the internship, a joint reflection session may be held between the intern and library staff to discuss lessons learned and share ideas on how to enhance inclusion and accessibility in future library practices.

#### **6. Processing – putting it into writing**

##### *Documenting activities and insights*

**Participant:** An internship diary helps you to become aware of what you have done and learned, which activities you particularly like, which you don't, and why that is.

Documenting your experiences usually leads to further ideas, for example, what else you would like to learn.

The diary can be kept using digital tools such as Padlet, as a 'classic' internship notebook or in any other way. There are no limits to your imagination.

**Library:** Documentation systems vary from institution to institution.

## 7. Flowers along the way

*Corrections of goals and leading questions?*

When you are on the road and plan to get from A to B, you can discover a lot 'in between'. Even completely unexpected things that are nevertheless insightful. Sometimes, goals can change during an internship. New ones are added, and the ones originally agreed upon remain important – or not.

## 8. Walking on the meta level

*Feedback and evaluation*

The 'flowers along the way' can also be appreciated in the context of interim feedback halfway through the internship and at the end (depending on its duration).

Key questions for the **participant's** assessment of the internship could be:

- What have I learned? In terms of

- \* professional skills: sorting, organising, cataloguing, understanding the organisation and structure of a library as a whole,

- \* communication skills: dealing with library visitors, in school libraries: with children,

- \* social skills: working independently and as part of a team, frustration tolerance, patience,

- \* psychosocial skills: strengthening self-perception and perception of others, self-confidence, the ability to express needs and set boundaries.



- Were the goals achieved? To what extent?
- What was missing? What was not so good and should be improved in the next internship?

Key questions for library **staff** could include:

- What did we learn from the internship about the possibilities of inclusion in libraries? Under what conditions is it likely to work?
- What ideas did the internship offer for designing a library as an open place of learning?
- Were there any preconceptions, reservations or lack of knowledge regarding people with disabilities, and were these overcome or at least put into perspective?
- What should be taken into account (better) in future internships?
- Were ideas developed for creating jobs for people with cognitive disabilities in the library sector? What is still needed to realise them?

## 9. New approaches?

*Conclusions from the evaluation and ideas for better inclusion*

Positive experiences, exchanges with others and a clear desire for greater inclusion can open our eyes to new ideas. What opportunities do library staff see for people with mild cognitive and/or physical disabilities to work in a library? What political and administrative changes would be effective in achieving this? How can this be taken into account in the financial resources allocated to libraries? What opportunities are already apparent – e.g. through new library buildings, restructuring or similar measures?

## 10. Communicating – sharing

*Publish experiences and insights*



**Participant:** You may share your experiences with friends, family, clubs, schools, workshops for people with disabilities and others in your immediate environment. Those who are media-savvy can share their pictures and short videos via their social media channels.

**Libraries:** Discussions with stakeholders (at local, state and federal or national level), contributions at conferences, in library magazines, via social media, etc. may encourage people to devise ways of achieving greater inclusion in their own environment.



## 6.3 Reflections and Future Directions

The Byblios project has opened a new perspective by recognising libraries as spaces not only for cultural and educational engagement, but also as venues for employability and professional development. Over the past two years of research, experimentation, and reflection, it has become clear that libraries can play a pivotal role in supporting the transition of young people with intellectual disabilities into the labour market. These institutions offer familiar, structured, and supportive environments that make learning and skill-building less intimidating, providing a bridge between education and meaningful work. At the local level, the involvement of municipal authorities and other regional organisations is crucial to ensure that the inclusion of young people in internships and the creation of employment opportunities in libraries is actively promoted. Awareness-raising, advocacy, and collaboration with decision-makers are necessary to overcome persistent barriers, which are often linked to stigma, lack of preparation, or insufficient recognition of the potential of these young people.

### *6.3.1 Why should we invest in inclusive internships?*

In this section, we will demonstrate how the implementation of inclusive internships has not only an ethical impact but also a social and economic one. Investment in inclusive internships is justified by the significant social, educational, and economic benefits they provide. These programmes have proven particularly relevant in contexts where unemployment rates among people with intellectual disabilities remain high and inclusive internships play a vital role in bridging the gap between education and employment.

#### **6.3.1.1. Personal level**

Inclusive internships offer participants much more than a temporary work experience — they provide a genuine **opportunity for personal growth, empowerment, and social recognition**. By engaging in a real working environment within their communities, interns gain practical experience that helps them understand workplace dynamics, routines, and responsibilities. This hands-on participation strengthens their

**self-confidence** and **gives meaning** to their daily activities, allowing them to see themselves not only as learners but as **active contributors to society**.

Through this process, interns also develop essential **social and communication skills**. They learn to collaborate with colleagues, interact with users and adapt to new situations — all of which reinforce their ability to **build relationships** and express their needs more effectively. At the same time, they gain **greater autonomy in daily routines**, improving their capacity to plan, make decisions, and take responsibility for their own actions. Facing and overcoming everyday challenges increases their **resilience and problem-solving abilities**, both at work and in personal life.

Another important outcome is the **acquisition of concrete professional skills** related to organisation, teamwork, and task management. These competencies, which align closely with European occupational standards such as those described in the ESCO framework, help interns prepare for future employment and strengthen their position in the labour market.

Beyond technical abilities, inclusive internships foster a deep **sense of empowerment and belonging**. By contributing to the life of their community, interns see their efforts recognised and their potential valued. This recognition not only enhances self-esteem but also nurtures a feeling of purpose and identity. The experience of earning even a modest income can further reinforce independence and confidence, as financial autonomy allows individuals to make personal choices and manage their own resources.

**Final outcome** → The final outcome is that these improvements in personal skills lead to lower social costs. As interns become more independent, resilient, and capable of managing daily tasks, they rely less on caregivers and external support. At the same time, increased participation and engagement in meaningful work help prevent issues such as depression or dependency on others. In this way, investing in personal growth not only benefits the individual but also reduces the demand for social services and long-term care, generating positive effects for the wider community.



### 6.3.1.2. For the Community and Society

The visibility of these internships generates a **powerful social impact**. By participating in everyday work activities, people with intellectual disabilities challenge stereotypes and demonstrate what true inclusion looks like in practice. Direct interaction between interns, staff, and the public fosters mutual understanding, reduces prejudice, and strengthens respect across the community. Over time, these individual transformations produce collective benefits: **communities become stronger, social isolation decreases, and the reliance on long-term care or support services is reduced**. In other words, investing in personal development through inclusive internships creates value not only for the individual but also for society as a whole.

Libraries, in particular, become more representative of the communities they serve, helping to break down assumptions about who can contribute and fostering empathy among staff and users alike. The presence of interns enriches both the organization and the wider social environment. With additional staff, libraries can expand their services, enhance relationships with users, and increase their overall capacity — generating tangible benefits for the community.

For librarians, hosting interns proves to be an eye-opening experience. It raises awareness of the capabilities of young people with intellectual disabilities and highlights how they can contribute meaningfully to library development and take on professional responsibilities. A library that actively includes people with disabilities on its team can also inspire confidence in other potential users with disabilities, reaching groups that are typically underrepresented among library patrons.

Across the EU contexts involved in the project, inclusive internships have extended beyond public libraries to support a variety of organisations, including school libraries, NGOs, and private companies. These institutions benefit not only from access to a more diverse and motivated workforce but also from fulfilling national legal obligations regarding employment of people with disabilities. In this way, inclusion becomes both a **social responsibility and a strategic advantage**, enhancing organisational culture, fostering innovation, and strengthening connections with the wider community.



### 6.3.1.3. Social and Cultural Benefits

When inclusion is treated as a standard practice rather than an exceptional measure, it becomes embedded in the very culture and operational framework of an organisation, shaping policies, daily routines, and long-term strategies. It influences hiring practices, guiding managers to consider diverse talents and abilities; it affects training programs, ensuring that all staff are equipped to work in an inclusive environment; and it informs service design, so that organisational outputs meet the needs of a wider range of users. By normalising inclusion, organisations send a strong message that people with disabilities have the same rights, responsibilities, and opportunities to participate fully in professional and community life as anyone else.

Moreover, the presence of people with disabilities in the workplace enriches the environment with perspectives, approaches, and ideas that might otherwise be overlooked. Their contributions often introduce creative problem-solving, alternative ways of thinking, and fresh insights that enhance both innovation and collaboration. In contexts such as libraries, this diversity fosters a more empathetic, responsive, and user-centred environment, helping staff and patrons alike to challenge preconceived notions and reduce biases. By witnessing daily contributions of individuals with disabilities, colleagues and community members alike develop a deeper appreciation for human potential and capability.

At a societal level, embedding inclusion in everyday practice strengthens social cohesion. It reinforces a collective sense of fairness, equity, and social justice, demonstrating that the contributions of all members of society are valued and respected. Over time, inclusive workplaces and institutions become models for broader social norms, encouraging communities to embrace diversity, support equal opportunities, and actively dismantle systemic barriers to participation. Inclusion, therefore, is not just a moral or legal obligation; it is a practical and transformative approach that benefits organisations, individuals, and society as a whole.

#### 6.3.1.4. Economic and Fiscal Benefits

Investing in the training and employability of people with disabilities generates significant value that extends far beyond the individual, producing positive effects for the wider community and the economy. Inclusion is not a form of charity; it is a strategic investment that strengthens the resilience, productivity, and richness of both organisations and society as a whole. By creating opportunities for people with disabilities to gain real work experience, societies benefit from a more diverse, capable, and motivated workforce, while individuals gain the skills and confidence needed to contribute meaningfully.

**Increased Gross Domestic Product (GDP):** workplace inclusion transforms individuals from welfare recipients into active contributors to the economy. When people with disabilities participate in the labour market, they not only earn their own income but also generate added value through taxes, social contributions, and consumption. Their engagement broadens the diversity of the active workforce, encourages innovative thinking, and fosters more balanced and sustainable economic growth. By integrating new talent, organisations stimulate creativity, improve problem-solving, and strengthen the adaptability of teams. In this way, inclusion becomes a driver of economic development rather than a cost.

**Reduced public and social expenditure:** greater independence and sustained employment reduce reliance on social subsidies, healthcare services, and long-term care facilities. As individuals acquire the skills and confidence to work, they require fewer state-funded interventions, freeing public funds for prevention, education, and innovation initiatives. Over time, this shift from dependency to active participation generates a positive fiscal balance, lowering the long-term maintenance burden on the welfare system while strengthening social cohesion and collective wellbeing.

**Addressing labour shortages and tapping untapped talent:** inclusive internships provide an effective mechanism for filling workforce gaps, particularly in sectors facing shortages. Countries such as Portugal have demonstrated that these programmes enable organisations to access a motivated and underutilised pool of skilled individuals. By creating pathways for people with disabilities to enter employment, internships

help meet organisational needs, expand operational capacity, and enhance overall productivity.

Overall, investing in inclusive internships is a **win-win strategy**: it empowers individuals, strengthens organisations, and creates measurable benefits for society at large. By combining skill development, workforce diversification, and targeted financial support, these programmes demonstrate that inclusion is not only ethically necessary but also economically and socially advantageous.

#### **6.3.1.5. Benefits for companies and institutions:**

Inclusive internships offer substantial advantages not only to the interns themselves but also to the organisations that host them. By welcoming people with disabilities into the workplace, companies and institutions can access untapped talent, strengthen team dynamics, and foster a culture of innovation, collaboration, and social responsibility. Beyond ethical and legal considerations, these programmes contribute to organisational growth, improved performance, and long-term sustainability. The following sections detail the key benefits for organisations, from workforce development and enhanced productivity to improved reputation and access to financial support.

##### **Developing a skilled and diverse workforce:**

Inclusive internships open access to a wider and often overlooked pool of talent, allowing organisations to discover skills, perspectives, and working styles that might otherwise remain invisible. People with disabilities frequently bring creativity, perseverance, and strong problem-solving abilities developed through their everyday experiences of navigating complex environments. By welcoming this diversity, companies and public institutions can strengthen their teams, stimulate collective learning, and cultivate an organisational culture that values different kinds of intelligence. Over time, such diversity becomes an asset for innovation, adaptability, and long-term competitiveness.

##### **Improved organisational climate:**

Organisations that invest in inclusion tend to experience a clear improvement in their internal atmosphere. The presence of inclusive practices fosters empathy, cooperation,

and a stronger sense of shared purpose among employees. Teams become more cohesive and more aware of each other's strengths and needs, which can reduce internal conflict and improve overall satisfaction at work. When people see their workplace as fair and respectful, their motivation and engagement naturally grow, leading to better performance and lower absenteeism.

**Increased retention and productivity:**

Numerous studies and field experiences show that employees with disabilities often display a high level of loyalty and commitment to their work environment. Once adequately supported and placed in roles suited to their abilities, they contribute consistently and with dedication. This stability is valuable for employers: lower turnover rates mean reduced recruitment and training costs, and the continuity of staff fosters institutional memory and quality of service. Inclusive workplaces thus gain both in efficiency and in human depth.

**Innovation and accessibility:**

Focusing on accessibility does not only benefit those with disabilities — it leads to broader improvements in how organisations function. Adjusting tools, technologies, and workflows to make them more inclusive often results in ergonomic designs, clearer communication systems, and digital solutions that enhance productivity for everyone. Inclusion becomes a catalyst for innovation, pushing institutions to rethink habits, simplify processes, and embrace user-centred design approaches that make their services more effective and modern.

**Enhanced reputation and community trust:**

A visible and genuine commitment to inclusion strengthens the credibility and social image of any organisation. Institutions that open their doors to diverse talent send a powerful message of fairness and civic responsibility, enhancing their reputation among partners, stakeholders, and the broader community. This trust translates into tangible benefits — stronger partnerships, higher customer or user satisfaction, and greater public recognition. Over time, inclusion becomes part of the organisation's identity, reinforcing its legitimacy as a space where everyone has the opportunity to contribute and grow.



**Financial support for companies:** in addition to the social and economic benefits, many governments offer funding and incentives to organisations that host inclusive internships. Companies can receive support to finance training, create sustainable jobs, and offset some of the costs associated with mentoring and adapting workplaces. Such programmes make it easier for public institutions, private companies, and non-profit organisations to participate in inclusive employment initiatives, turning inclusion into both a socially responsible and economically viable strategy.

#### **6.3.1.6. Metaphor: the aqueduct and the hydroelectric power station**

To illustrate the broader economic and social impact of workplace inclusion for people with disabilities, it can be helpful to think in terms of a metaphor.

We can easily imagine the unemployment of people with disabilities as a story: **the aqueduct and the hydroelectric power station**. Imagine that the social welfare system and public funds are like a giant aqueduct designed to bring water to cities. If people with disabilities are not employed and remain inactive, water flows in only one direction: from the state (spending) to the citizen (subsidy). The aqueduct performs, but it only creates a constant maintenance cost (social spending, subsidies, ongoing assistance). In the long-term it ensures survival, but consumes resources that are extracted from active society and never re-enter the economic cycle. It is a passive expense. On the other hand, imagine the state welfare as an hydroelectric power station: there is an initial investment that requires a bigger effort and cost (time and resources for inclusion) but in a long term period it generates value before reaching its destination: the energy produced generates works, and so taxes and contributions, in addition the energy feeds the entire network, improving morale, innovation and the reputation of the company and the community.

#### **6.3.2. Why should we invest in libraries as spaces to improve employability of people with disabilities?**

Libraries possess unique characteristics that make them ideal, safe, and supportive environments for inclusive internships and for enhancing the employability of people with disabilities. Their combination of accessibility, educational resources, and

community presence allows them to serve as effective training hubs, bridging skill gaps while promoting social inclusion. Let's take a look at their characteristics:

### ● ***Specific Strengths of Libraries***

**Universal Accessibility:** Public libraries are open to all citizens without economic barriers, positioning them as natural spaces for inclusive participation.

**Educational Resources:** They provide access to resources for lifelong learning, digital literacy programmes, and cultural activities that can be adapted for diverse needs.

**Community Anchors:** libraries are trusted public spaces where people from different backgrounds interact, which facilitates social integration.

**Low-Pressure Environment:** compared to high-paced commercial settings, libraries offer a calmer work pace, which is ideal for skill-building for people with intellectual or cognitive disabilities.

**Flexible tasks:** Tasks like cataloguing, shelving, and user assistance are structured but flexible, making them easily adaptable and designable in collaboration with disability support organizations and employment agencies.

**Low investment costs:** creating internships for people with cognitive disabilities in libraries involves *very limited costs*, mostly quantifiable in terms of the tutor, who must also have disability management skills (i.e., be able to identify possible barriers and facilitating factors in the context). The tutor will be more present in the early stages, then limit his/her presence to ongoing monitoring activities.

Therefore, libraries have the characteristics to perform the role of training venues (including informal education) and can become hubs for inclusion ecosystems and collaboration with other public and private institutions:

- ◆ Formal partnerships: libraries can sign long-term agreements with disability support organizations, employment agencies, and vocational training centres.
- ◆ Visibility in inclusion networks: participate actively in municipal disability councils and employment roundtables.



- ◆ Libraries can strengthen their role by collaborating with other organizations that support people with disabilities, creating a stronger network of resources and expertise. By partnering with disability organizations, libraries can better connect individuals with employment opportunities and develop specific programs to address their needs.
- ◆ Libraries as training hubs: develop and promote specific “Library Skills Training Modules” that can be recognized within regional vocational qualification frameworks.

In countries with extensive library networks, such as Portugal, these institutions are strategically positioned to reach even remote communities. By combining accessible spaces, educational resources, supportive staff, and collaborative networks, libraries foster skill development, social cohesion, and long-term resilience. Inclusive internships in libraries thus create a powerful intersection of personal growth, organisational development, and societal benefit.

### **6.3.3 What is the biggest challenge we face?**

Despite the significant progress achieved, several barriers continue to affect the full inclusion of young people with disabilities in library internships.

A first area of concern relates to **technological and resource limitations**. Many libraries still lack or do not properly maintain essential assistive technologies such as screen readers, Braille materials, or hearing aids. Similarly, accessible resources remain insufficient, with collections that are not always available in alternative formats such as large print, e-books, or audiobooks, and online catalogues that may not meet accessibility standards. These shortcomings are often linked to funding constraints, which limit the capacity of libraries to invest in adequate resources, technology, and staff training.

Beyond material limitations, **attitudinal and cultural barriers** also play a crucial role. Persistent stigma and bias toward people with disabilities can foster unwelcoming environments, both among library staff and users, while a lack of familiarity with inclusive practices may lead to uncomfortable interactions or even unintentional exclusion. Convincing some **institutions** to host interns with cognitive disabilities — a

moment often described as **initial buy-in** — proved demanding, especially when the staff had little prior experience with inclusion. And equally demanding is motivating some **staff members** to take on the role of tutor, which requires time, preparation, and sensitivity. For example, in Italy, in addition to a key contact within the library (the school library responsible), the internship also involved an internal university tutor linked to the project, providing additional guidance and support. Yet, as shown across all internship experiences, support from management and tutors is fundamental to ensuring a successful placement.

In fact, the biggest challenge is the **combination of legislative, physical and systemic barriers** that prevent people with disabilities from fully using libraries and developing job skills. Legislatives because almost all of the legal framework for employability support may be effective in some cases of disability or incapacity, but it is inadequate in terms of the expected duration, causing frustration for both young people and their families, as well as for host organizations. The time required for learning varies greatly from young person to young person, and their ability to sustain a work schedule also differs. Measures need to be adjusted so that they function as a continuous system that may or may not result in employment or lifelong social occupation. In both cases, a grant or remuneration is desirable to promote young people's autonomy, and it is also important that its existence does not result in a loss of income for the household.

The second challenge is the **lack of adequate staff training and attitudinal barriers** stemming from stigma and a lack of awareness among both staff and employers. Employability or the transition to employability should also be a continuation of the inclusive education model, seeking to ensure that all young people covered by this model benefit from personalized support tailored to their needs. Although most measures provide for the presence of tutors in the host organization, the centers currently promoting placements for these candidates are overwhelmed with cases, and their geographical dispersion makes it humanly impossible to provide ongoing, specialized support. This is especially true given the factors that often interfere with the stability of these young people, and for which both employers and tutors in these organizations lack the time, training, and often the skills to help them overcome them.

On the side of **interns**, another challenge was related to the **low expectations** often placed on young people with intellectual disabilities. Many young people with



intellectual disabilities have internalised what psychologists call “**learned helplessness**”<sup>22</sup> having long been exposed to environments where others doubted their potential. Encouraging them to believe in their abilities, to acquire skills relevant to the labour market, and to imagine themselves as active contributors requires sustained encouragement and guidance. The goal of inclusive projects like **Byblios** is to break this mold, offering experiences of success, confidence, and autonomy, where young people with disabilities can see their efforts produce real results.

On the side of **families**, today they tend to be smaller and often live apart from their places of origin, which makes their presence and daily support less consistent. As parents age, ensuring that young people with disabilities can live and work independently becomes even more important. To avoid premature or unnecessary institutionalisation, employment monitoring should therefore be part of a broader, lifelong support framework — one that removes barriers to learning and participation and promotes the professional success of all young people.

A further challenge was ensuring the **continuity of internships** beyond the project's lifespan, as the **sustainability** of such initiatives depends on broader structural and systemic conditions. Moving from an assistance-based mindset to a capacity-based approach requires continuous communication, collaboration, and cultural change. Maintaining internships once project-based funding (such as Erasmus+) has ended remains particularly difficult, especially for smaller municipalities with limited resources.

Finally, several **structural aspects** could also affect the success of internships (*missing or incomplete resources, partnerships, or mindsets*). The absence of dedicated inclusion coordinators, vocational training centres, disability advocacy organisations, or cross-sectoral partnerships can further weaken the impact. Incomplete documentation — such as missing standardised internship agreements or learning contracts — and limited regional networking also reduce continuity and scalability.

Despite these challenges, the overall experience confirmed that with careful planning, strong collaboration, and genuine belief in the capabilities of young people, libraries can become inclusive and transformative spaces for both learning and social

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<sup>22</sup> <https://it.padlet.com>



participation.

### **6.3.4 What's the next step for improving internship practices?**

The next steps for improving internship practices for people with cognitive disabilities include increasing participation in existing programs, providing more targeted training and support, and enhancing employer engagement through awareness campaigns. Specific actions include scaling up pilot projects, providing personalized support like job coaches and accessible tools, and developing partnerships to create inclusive job opportunities and lasting support structures.

The next steps include:

- *Visibility in inclusion networks:* libraries should participate actively in municipal disability councils and employment roundtables at regional and national levels.
- *Role as training hubs:* libraries need to apply and empower specific "library skills training modules", they have to be recognized within regional vocational qualification frameworks.
- *Pathway creation:* internships should be used as stepping stones to other roles in municipal services, cultural centres, or administrative support positions.
- *ICF-based assessment tools:* use standardized forms to assess abilities, participation barriers, and environmental adaptations, ensuring more tailored task assignments.
- *organizational support:* libraries should access specific support from public or private institutions or NGOs supporting young people with (mental) disabilities, learning from them how to provide more effective services for the interns or even applying for funding for these initiatives. Specialized training modules: ongoing professional development on inclusive communication, adaptive task design, and behavioural support: on-site inclusion mentors: availability of a support person during the initial weeks to help resolve challenges quickly; resource kits: ready-to-use accessibility tools - visual aids, easy-to-read guides, and adapted workflow templates; peer networking: opportunities for libraries to



exchange experiences and mentor each other in inclusion practices; longer preparatory phase: allow more time for pre-internship training (both for interns and host library staff) to set clear expectations; expanded task variety: offer more diverse roles within libraries (event organization, digital support, user assistance) to match individual abilities and interests;

- *Policy or funding to scale or replicate:* dedicated regional grants; integration into employment plans; EU funding continuity: use Erasmus+ and European Social Fund (ESF+) programmes to secure multi-year support rather than one-off cycles.
- *New tools, formats, or partnerships:* using digital learning platform (EPALE); partnership with cultural networks: collaborate with museums, archives, and community centres to expand inclusive placements in the cultural sector.

A key priority is to expand and enhance existing internship programs to reach a broader population of young people with intellectual and other disabilities. This includes moving pilot initiatives, such as the "Iniciar Internships" measure, to permanent, fully funded policies, ensuring greater scale and stability. Eligibility criteria should also be reviewed and potentially widened—for example, through programs like "Internship + Talent"—to include a broader range of qualifications, age groups, and individual profiles, so that no motivated young person is excluded.

Equally important is the provision of enhanced, individualized support throughout the internship process. This can involve targeted training programs, such as, for instance, in Portugal the digital literacy courses offered at institutions like the Politécnico de Santarém, which strengthen employability and digital competence. Personalized accommodations, including access to assistive technologies, ergonomic equipment, and personal assistants, should be available from the outset. Mentorship also plays a critical role: job coaches or facilitators can provide one-on-one guidance, helping interns navigate both academic and professional environments, develop social connections, and gain confidence.

Finally, engagement with employers and external partners is essential to ensure sustainable impact. Awareness campaigns and training programs for public and



private sector staff—at both operational and management levels—can help reduce barriers and dispel misconceptions about disability. The benefits of inclusive recruitment, including innovation, team diversity, and broader societal impact, should be actively promoted. Long-term partnerships between educational institutions, businesses, and disability advocacy organizations can create inclusive employment opportunities while providing ongoing support networks for young people. By combining program expansion, personalized support, and active employer engagement, internship initiatives can move from isolated projects to sustainable pathways for social and professional inclusion.

After two years of experience, it is evident that the journey has only just begun. Reflection on the lessons learned and strategic planning for the future are essential to scale up inclusive practices, strengthen institutional support, and ensure that libraries, along with other public and community spaces, continue to serve as catalysts for social inclusion, skill development, and meaningful participation.

## 7. Conclusions

### 7.1. Comparative Reflections

The comparison of national experiences shows that each country has brought a specific perspective on inclusion through libraries to the European dialogue, but also that the learning has been truly mutual.

The policies and strategies identified are not simple models to be replicated, but rather different ways of interpreting the connection between culture, education, and active citizenship.

Germany has offered the lesson of systemic integration between internships and vocational training, with a strong focus on formal recognition of skills and employability. Portugal, on the other hand, has demonstrated the strength of the local dimension, integrating libraries into municipal inclusion and social work plans: a proximity approach capable of generating territorial cohesion.

Italy has contributed with a model based on cooperative alliances between libraries, schools, and social enterprises, which expands the impact of inclusion through cross-sector collaboration. Romania, with a more flexible framework, has highlighted the value of creativity and adaptability, demonstrating that even in less structured systems, innovation is possible through local autonomy and the motivation of stakeholders.

Spain's contribution stood out for its ability to institutionalize change: Spanish libraries developed shared mentoring and evaluation procedures, creating a stable operational framework that translates inclusion principles into manageable and replicable



practices. Furthermore, Spain placed emphasis on training trainers, introducing specific modules for library staff focusing on interpersonal skills, inclusive communication, and diversity management. This approach strengthened the link between European planning and regional policies, strengthening advocacy capacity and long-term sustainability.

The transversal lessons that emerged from the comparison confirm that inclusion can thrive in very different contexts, and that attitudes and creativity matter as much as infrastructure. Seemingly minor practices—such as accessible signage, "buddy" systems, or flexible working hours—have proven to be highly impactful and easily transferable. A common understanding emerged across all countries: **stigma and the underestimation of capabilities remain widespread obstacles**, but they can be overcome thanks to positive examples, visibility of success stories, and public recognition of the value of each participant.

## 7.2. Final Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall, European collaboration has functioned as a cultural catalyst. It has enabled not only the sharing of tools and methodologies, but also a transformation of the perspective on inclusion: no longer an exceptional intervention or "pilot project," but rather a structural dimension of cultural and social policies. In this sense, Spain represents an example of how transnational learning can translate into systemic change rooted in institutions and supported by the professional community.

The BYBLIOS project (2023–2025) successfully designed, tested, and documented a cohesive European Protocol for Social Inclusion that promotes the professional integration of people with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities within public and school libraries across five European countries. This protocol represents the scientific and operational synthesis of participatory experiments, grounded in the principles of the WHO's ICF (International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health) model—focusing on functional abilities and contextual factors—and the ESCO (European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations) framework for standardizing competencies.

The core finding is that libraries are uniquely positioned as effective, low-pressure environments to serve as "laboratories of inclusion" and training venues. The protocol's success hinged on several key strategies:

1. Individualized and Adapted Design: Internships were structured using a person-centered approach ("Individualized Internship Design"), requiring personalized planning, flexible timeframes, and the gradual introduction of tasks. Tasks, responsibilities, and learning outcomes, adapted from ESCO descriptors, were simplified, often through the use of visual aids, color codes, and accessible routines, to align with the trainees' abilities.
2. Robust Support Systems: Success was critically dependent on strong local partnerships involving specialized NGOs, local authorities, and the trainees' families. The provision of consistent, trained supervision by dedicated tutors and mentors (often supported by on-site job coaches, as seen in Spain) was fundamental to provide continuous guidance and support self-reliance.
3. Multidimensional Assessment: Evaluation moved beyond mere skill measurement by integrating a quantitative assessment (simplified ESCO/ICF grids) with a qualitative analysis performed through an accessible digital career e-Portfolio (Padlet). This dual approach enabled the capture of technical skills alongside crucial personal and relational growth, such as self-confidence, emotional engagement, and a sense of belonging.

The experience fostered significant positive impacts for the trainees (increased autonomy, improved social skills, and reduced stereotypes) and for the institutions (enhanced awareness of their social role and capacity to welcome diverse user needs).

Looking forward, the main challenge is ensuring sustainability by transitioning from successful pilot experiences to institutionalized, recurring practices. To scale and replicate this model across Europe, key recommendations include establishing long-term policy and funding solutions (moving beyond ad hoc grants), integrating "Library Skills Training Modules" into vocational qualification frameworks, and actively developing clearer post-internship pathways, such as supported employment or the German model of the outsourced workplace, to facilitate entry into the open labor

market. The project ultimately demonstrates that investing in inclusive internships is not merely a social expenditure, but an investment in the richness and resilience of the community and the workforce

These experiences demonstrate that inclusion can generate real transformation when treated not as an exception, but as an integral part of the functioning of cultural institutions. The results demonstrate a simultaneous change on three levels: personal growth of participants, organizational evolution of libraries, and cultural openness of the community.

To consolidate these advances, it is necessary to ensure continuity, coordination, and structural support, so that inclusive internships become a standard practice, capable of combining training, citizenship, and cultural participation.

**In the end, the message is simple:** *Start small, but start!*. Even a short, well-supported internship in one library can have a big impact on both the interns and the institution. Build strong partnerships (with schools, NGOs, municipalities), provide clear training for tutors, and use flexible, person-centred approaches. Remember that the goal is not perfection, but creating real opportunities for participation and growth. Success stories will multiply once inclusion becomes visible.



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