

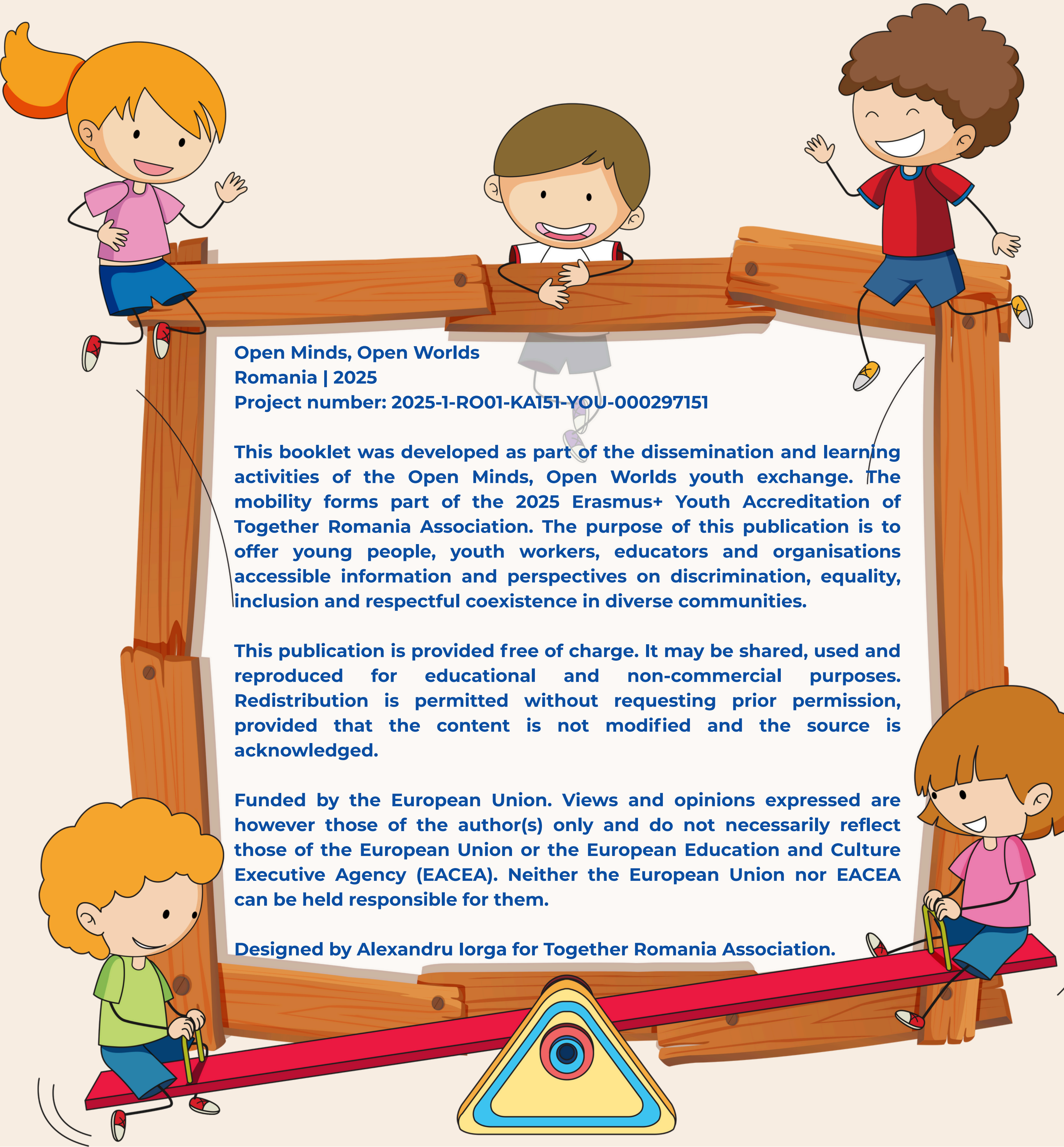
Open Minds, Open Worlds



a manual against discrimination



Funded by
the European Union



**Open Minds, Open Worlds
Romania | 2025**

Project number: 2025-1-RO01-KA151-YOU-000297151

This booklet was developed as part of the dissemination and learning activities of the Open Minds, Open Worlds youth exchange. The mobility forms part of the 2025 Erasmus+ Youth Accreditation of Together Romania Association. The purpose of this publication is to offer young people, youth workers, educators and organisations accessible information and perspectives on discrimination, equality, inclusion and respectful coexistence in diverse communities.

This publication is provided free of charge. It may be shared, used and reproduced for educational and non-commercial purposes. Redistribution is permitted without requesting prior permission, provided that the content is not modified and the source is acknowledged.

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

Designed by Alexandru Iorga for Together Romania Association.

Table of contents

1. About the Project

2. Erasmus+ Youth

3. Discrimination

4. Stereotypes

5. Equality & Inclusion

7. Hate Speech

8. Practical Tools

9. Who Made It Happen



1. About the project

Open Minds, Open Worlds was an international youth exchange bringing together young people from different cultural, social and national backgrounds to explore how discrimination, stereotypes, equality and inclusion shape our communities. Through non-formal learning methods, creative workshops, discussions, and collaborative projects, participants engaged in a shared learning journey aimed at fostering empathy, critical thinking and active citizenship.

The project was implemented in Traisteni, Romania, in 2025, and involved groups of young people and youth leaders from Poland, Slovakia, Spain, Türkiye and Romania. Over the course of the mobility, participants worked with various tools and activities inspired by human rights education, intercultural dialogue and experiential learning. By interacting with peers, sharing personal perspectives, and discovering real experiences from different contexts, they developed a better understanding of how attitudes and behaviours influence inclusion in daily life.

A key dimension of the project was the creation of a safe and supportive environment where diversity could be explored respectfully.

The exchange encouraged participants to recognise what they have in common, value differences and challenge forms of exclusion or marginalisation. In doing so, the project contributed to strengthening democratic values, mutual respect and social cohesion among young people across Europe.



2. Erasmus+ Youth

Erasmus+ Youth is the European Union's flagship programme supporting young people to develop competences, gain international experience and participate actively in democratic life. Through non-formal learning, intercultural exchanges, training courses, volunteering and cooperation projects, the programme creates opportunities for young people to learn, explore and shape their societies.

Youth exchanges, such as Open Minds, Open Worlds, allow groups of young people from different countries to meet and work together on themes relevant to their realities. These mobilities promote dialogue, creativity and solidarity, while strengthening intercultural awareness and mutual understanding. Participants learn by doing, through workshops, group tasks, simulations, reflection and peer learning rather than through formal classroom methods.

Erasmus+ Youth also supports youth workers, organisations and networks that play a role in youth education and participation. By providing structured opportunities, the programme helps young people develop key competences such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, intercultural sensitivity and critical thinking. Many participants also gain confidence, new friendships and broader perspectives on Europe and the world.

More information can be found at:
<https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/>



3. Discrimination

What is discrimination?

Discrimination happens when someone is treated unfairly or differently because they belong to a certain group or are perceived to have a particular characteristic. This can include things like ethnicity, nationality, religion, gender, disability, sexual orientation, social background, or other aspects of identity. Discrimination limits someone's opportunities, rights or ability to participate fully in society.



How discrimination appears

Discrimination can show up in different ways and in different spaces. Some examples include:

- being refused a job or service
- being treated worse at school, at work or in public institutions
- being bullied, excluded or harassed
- being judged or controlled based on identity rather than actions

Where discrimination comes from

Discrimination rarely appears out of nowhere. It is often linked to:

- stereotypes (fixed ideas about groups)
- prejudice (negative attitudes toward groups)
- ignorance or lack of contact between groups
- fear of difference
- historical inequalities and power relations

Forms of discrimination

Different forms help us understand how discrimination operates in real life:

- **Direct discrimination**

When someone is openly treated worse because of who they are.

Example: “We don’t rent apartments to foreigners.”

- **Indirect discrimination**

When a rule or practice looks neutral but ends up disadvantaging a certain group.

Example: A school bans head coverings, which affects only certain religious students.

- **Structural discrimination**

Long-term patterns in institutions and society that disadvantage certain groups, even without explicit rules.

Example: Lower access to quality education or healthcare in communities with minority populations.

- **Hidden and normalised discrimination**

Sometimes discrimination is subtle, expressed through jokes, social expectations, stereotypes or “traditions” that go unquestioned.

Why discrimination matters

Discrimination has consequences for individuals and society. For individuals, it can lead to:

- lower self-confidence
- stress and mental health difficulties
- fewer educational or job opportunities
- feeling unsafe or excluded
- reduced sense of belonging



For society, discrimination can:

- damage social cohesion
- create divisions and conflict
- waste talent and potential
- weaken democratic values and human rights

Rights and protection

At European and international levels, non-discrimination is considered a fundamental human right. Laws and policies exist to protect people, promote equal treatment and challenge unfair practices. However, legal protections alone do not eliminate discrimination. Awareness, dialogue and active participation are needed to build inclusive communities.



What young people can do

Even small actions matter. Young people can:

- question stereotypes and biased comments
- support classmates or peers who are targeted
- learn about other cultures and identities
- speak up when something is unfair
- participate in projects, campaigns or youth initiatives promoting equality

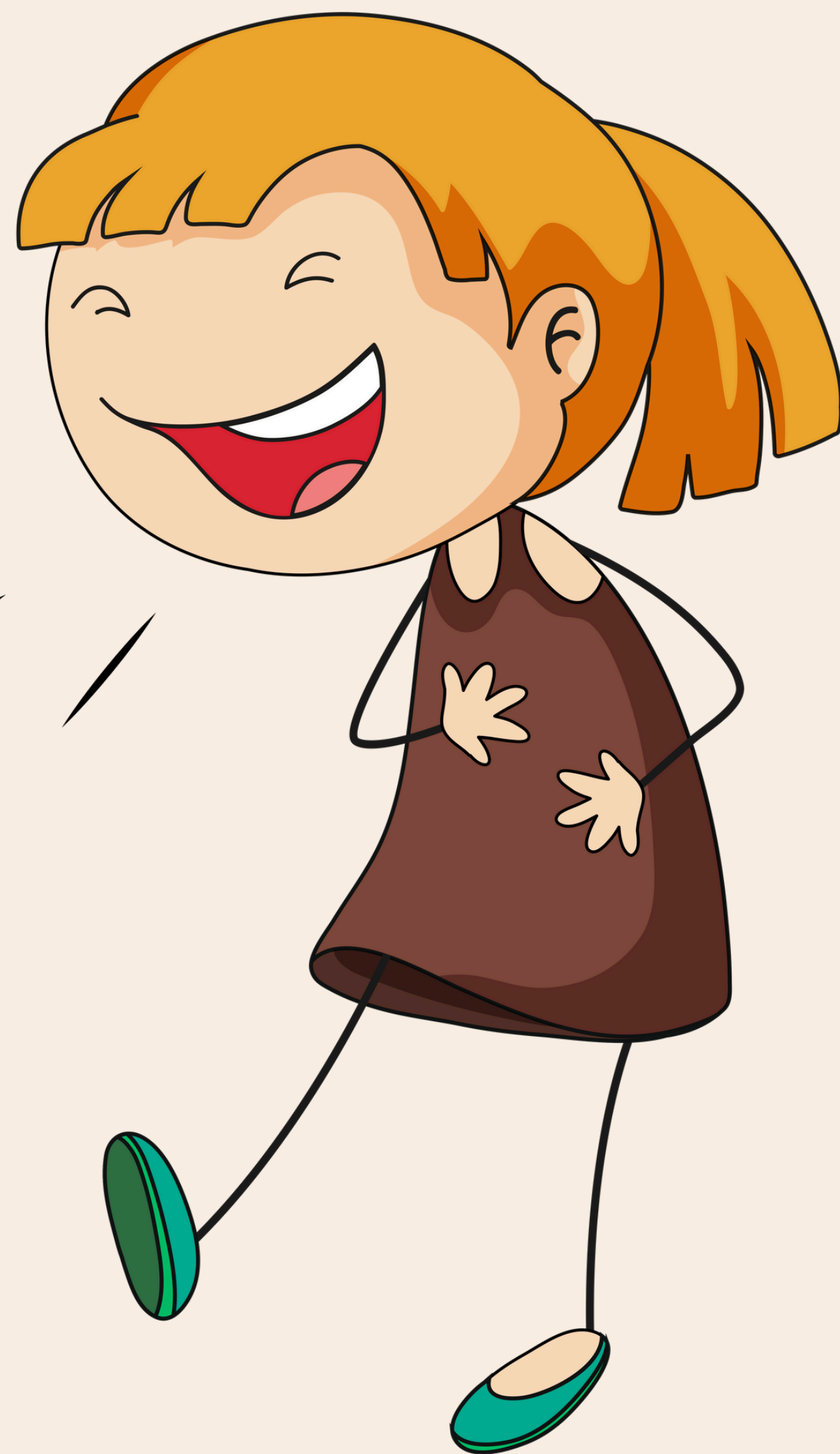
The first step in addressing discrimination is recognising that it exists and understanding how it affects people's lives. Knowledge, empathy and critical thinking make it easier to challenge unfair behaviours and contribute to more inclusive spaces for everyone.

4. Stereotypes

What are stereotypes?

Stereotypes are simplified and generalised ideas about a group of people. Instead of seeing individuals with unique personalities, talents and stories, stereotypes assign the same characteristics to everyone in the group. Stereotypes can be positive, negative or seemingly harmless, but they always reduce people to labels.

HA HA



Examples of common stereotypes

- “Young people are irresponsible.”
- “Girls are bad at science.”
- “Foreigners don’t respect local culture.”
- “Boys don’t show emotions.”
- “People from city X are lazy.”

These ideas may sound familiar because they circulate in families, schools, media or social networks. With time, they can begin to feel “normal,” even when they are not true.

Where do stereotypes come from?

Stereotypes often develop from:

- lack of contact with certain groups
- stories, jokes or media representations
- cultural traditions and expectations
- fear or discomfort with difference
- historical inequalities and power dynamics

Once a stereotype appears, it can spread quickly and become part of everyday thinking without being questioned.

Why stereotypes are a problem

Stereotypes seem simple, but they affect how people think, behave and make decisions. They can lead to:

- prejudice (pre-judging people before knowing them)
- social exclusion and bullying
- discrimination in workplaces or institutions
- lower expectations or self-esteem among those targeted

Positive stereotypes also have negative effects. For example, saying that “Asians are good at maths” assumes that everyone must perform in a certain way, leaving no space for individuality.

How stereotypes influence behaviour

When stereotypes become strong, they shape:

- how we see others
- how we talk about others
- how we treat others
- how we see ourselves

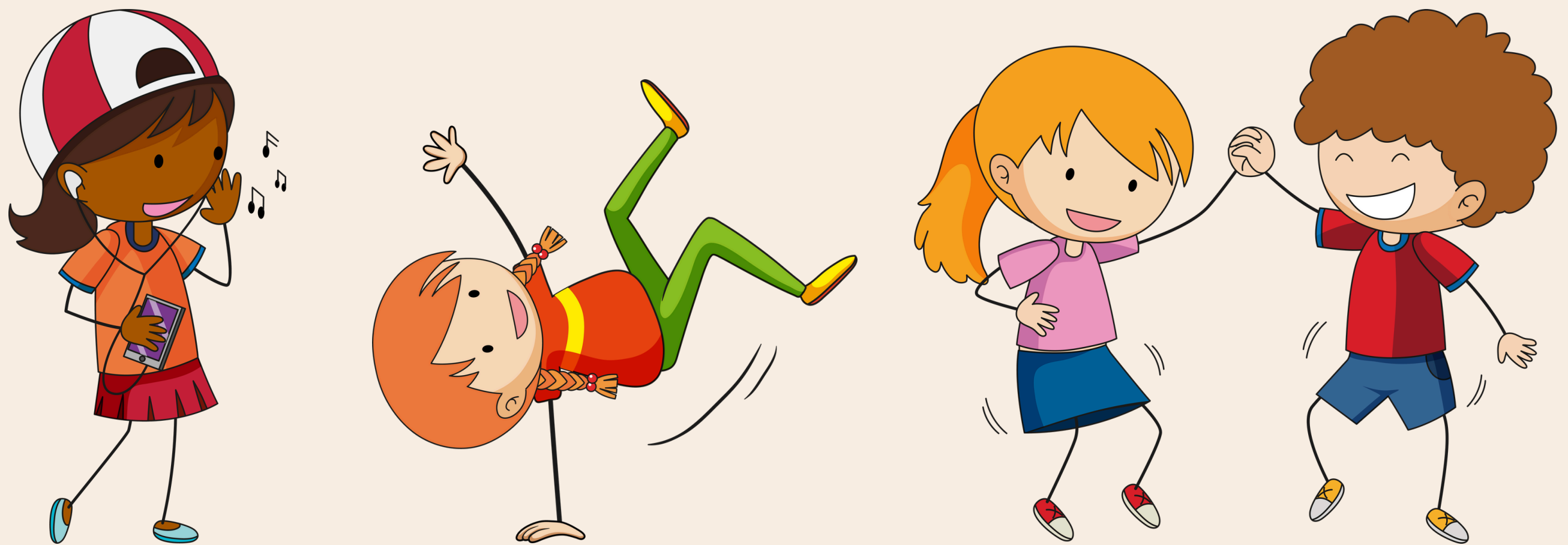


Sometimes people who are stereotyped begin to internalise these messages and believe them. This phenomenon is known as stereotype threat and can affect performance, confidence and identity.

Breaking stereotypes

Fortunately, stereotypes can be challenged and changed. Useful strategies include:

- getting to know people from different backgrounds
- asking questions instead of assuming
- avoiding generalisations in speech and thought
- reflecting on where certain ideas come from
- consuming diverse media and perspectives



What young people can do

Young people play a powerful role in reshaping narratives and norms. They can:

- refuse to use stereotypes in jokes or conversations
- notice stereotypes in media and advertisements
- speak up when others are reduced to labels
- encourage others to see individuals rather than categories

Understanding stereotypes is an important step toward preventing prejudice and discrimination. By recognising how stereotypes work, young people can contribute to societies that value diversity and individuality rather than limiting people through assumptions.

5. Equality & Inclusion

What is equality?

Equality refers to the fair treatment of individuals and groups, ensuring that everyone has access to rights, opportunities and resources. Equality does not always mean treating everyone the same, because people may have different needs, backgrounds or starting points. True equality focuses on removing barriers so that everyone can participate fully in society.

What is inclusion?

Inclusion goes a step further. Inclusion means creating environments where all people feel respected, valued and able to contribute. An inclusive space does not simply allow participation; it actively encourages and supports it. Inclusion promotes a sense of belonging and ensures that diversity is seen as an asset rather than a challenge.

Equality and inclusion in everyday life

These concepts apply to many areas of life, including:

- education
- employment
- public services
- community spaces
- sports and youth activities
- online environments



Equality and inclusion in everyday life

These concepts apply to many areas of life, including:

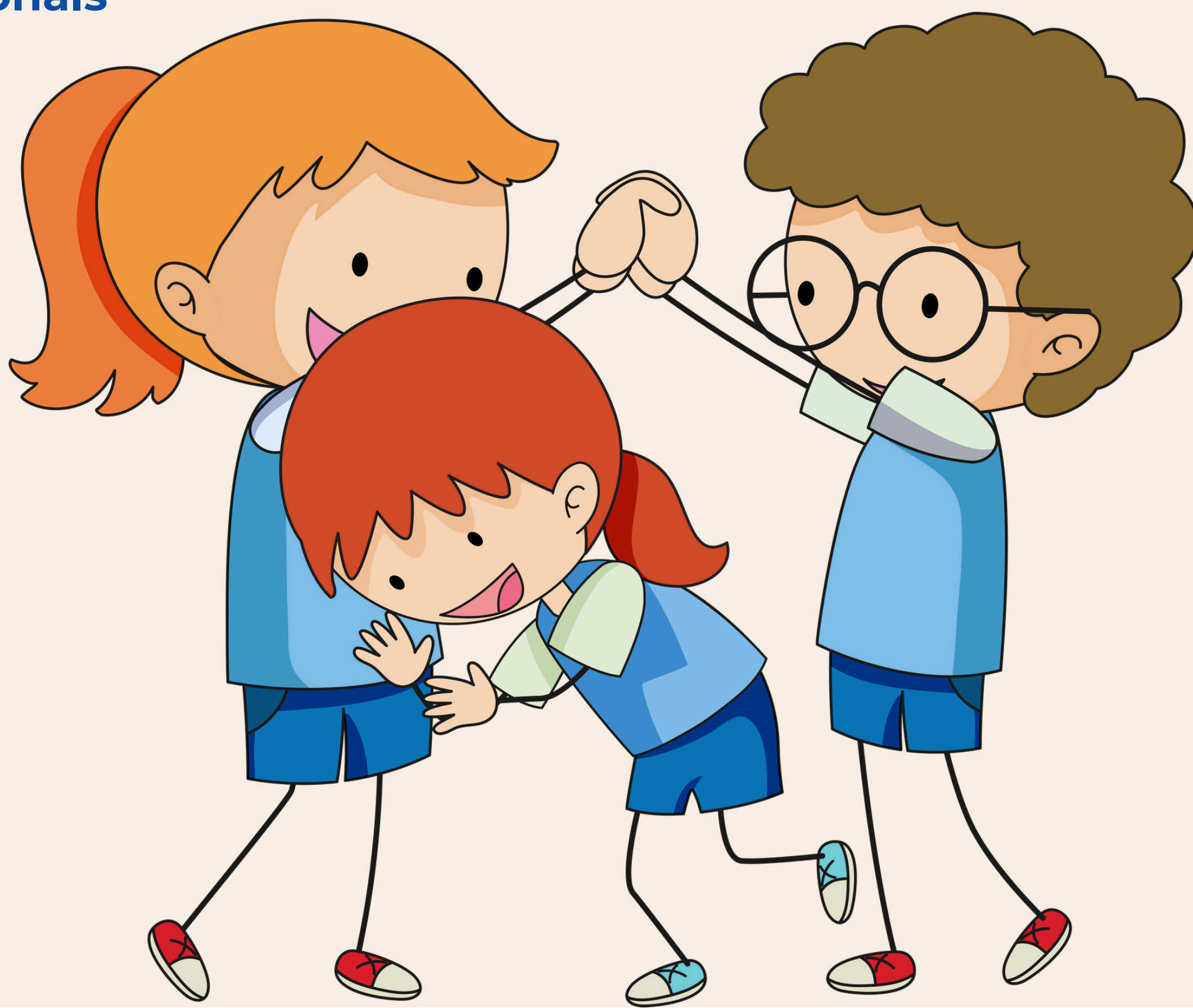
- **education**
- **employment**
- **public services**
- **community spaces**
- **sports and youth activities**
- **online environments**

Inclusion means that people who might otherwise be ignored or excluded are actively considered in decisions, planning, design and communication.

Different needs, different support

Some groups may require specific support to enjoy equal participation. This is known as reasonable accommodation or targeted support. Examples include:

- **providing wheelchair access to buildings**
- **allowing flexible schedules for caregiving duties**
- **adapting learning materials for different abilities**
- **offering language support for newcomers or foreign nationals**



Why inclusion matters

Inclusive societies benefit everyone, not just minority groups. They tend to be:

- **more innovative and creative**
- **more socially cohesive**
- **less prone to conflict and discrimination**
- **better at using the talents and perspectives of their members**

Inclusion strengthens democratic values by ensuring that people have a voice and can contribute to decisions that affect their lives.

Barriers to equality and inclusion

Despite progress, many barriers still exist. These include:

- **prejudice and stereotypes**
- **discriminatory policies or practices**
- **lack of accessibility or resources**
- **social expectations and cultural norms**
- **limited representation in institutions or media**

Understanding these barriers makes it easier to address them.

What young people can do

Young people play an important role in promoting inclusion.

They can:

- **encourage participation from classmates or peers who might feel excluded**
- **support accessibility and fairness in youth spaces and organisations**
- **challenge exclusionary behaviour or language**
- **learn about others' experiences and identities**
- **advocate for change in schools, communities or online spaces**

Towards inclusive communities

Building inclusive communities requires cooperation between individuals, organisations and public institutions. Schools, youth organisations and local authorities can contribute through policies, programmes and practices that promote equal access and participation. Each small action strengthens the culture of respect, diversity and belonging that inclusive societies rely on.



6. Hate Speech

What is hate speech?

Hate speech refers to expressions that insult, dehumanise, threaten or promote discrimination against a person or group based on characteristics such as ethnicity, nationality, religion, gender, disability, sexual orientation or other aspects of identity. Hate speech can appear in spoken language, written text, images, memes, symbols, videos or online comments.

Where hate speech appears

Hate speech can occur in many spaces, including:

- schools and local communities
- sports environments
- public debate and political discourse
- media and entertainment
- online platforms and social networks



The digital environment has made hate speech more visible and easier to spread, often without immediate consequences for the speaker.

Why hate speech is harmful

Hate speech does not just “offend feelings.” It contributes to a climate where discrimination, exclusion and even violence can become normalised. It can:

- undermine dignity and sense of safety
- encourage social division and hostility
- isolate targeted groups
- reinforce negative stereotypes and prejudice
- escalate into harassment or physical aggression

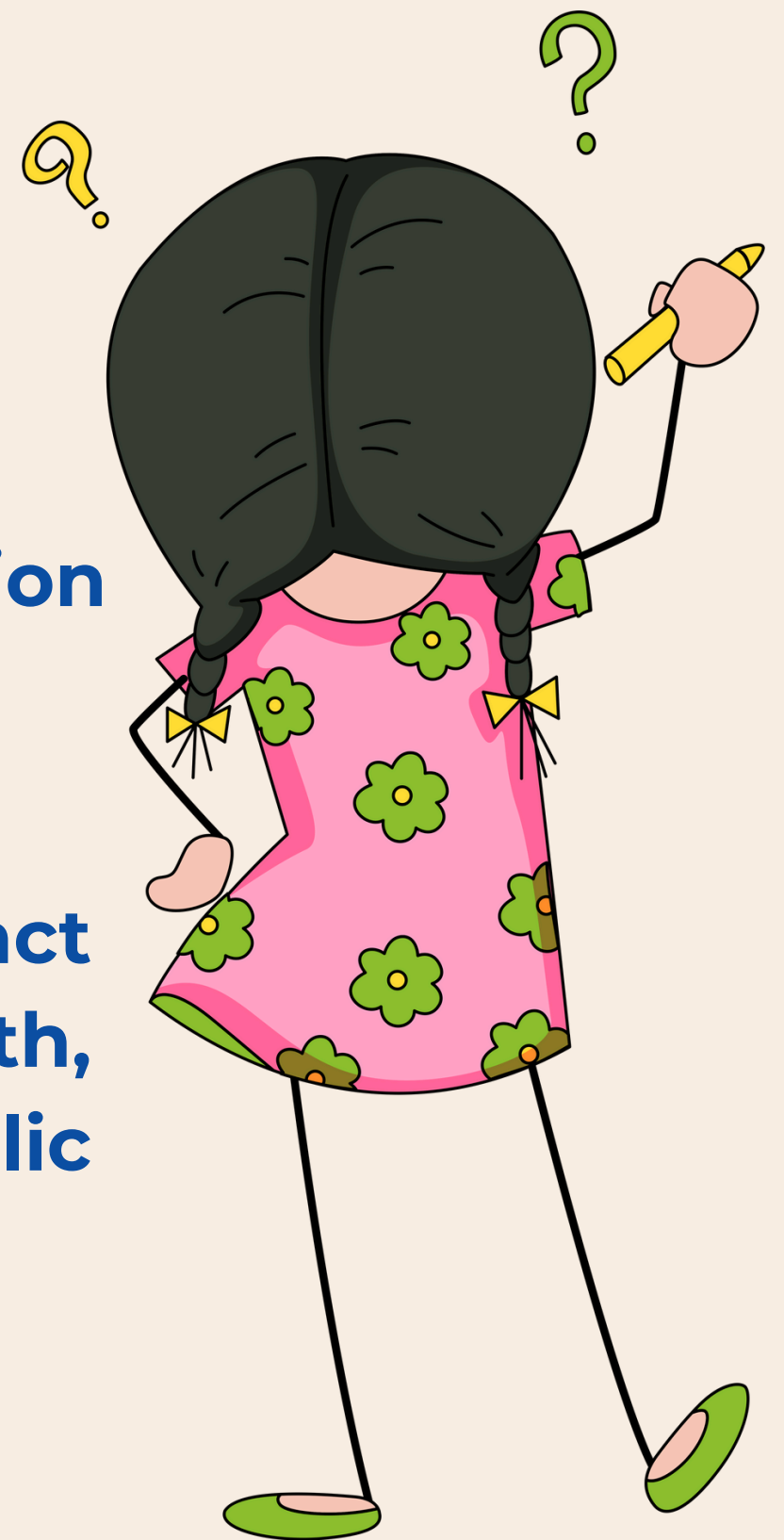
For people targeted by hate speech, the impact can be severe, affecting mental health, participation in society and access to public spaces.

Forms of hate speech

Hate speech can take different forms, ranging from subtle to explicit. Examples include:

- derogatory jokes or slurs
- slogans that attack specific groups
- dehumanising language comparing people to animals or objects
- calls for exclusion or segregation
- messages that promote violence against a group

Some forms are coded or disguised, using symbols, numbers or insider language understood only by certain communities.



Legal and rights-based perspectives

Many countries, as well as the European Union and the Council of Europe, recognise the dangers of hate speech and have legal measures to prevent it. These frameworks aim to protect people's dignity and safety while balancing freedom of expression. Freedom of speech does not include the freedom to harm others or incite discrimination or violence.

Online hate speech

The internet has become a key space where hate speech spreads rapidly. Algorithms, anonymity and echo chambers can amplify harmful messages. Young people encounter hate speech on platforms such as:

- social media feeds
- comment sections
- gaming communities
- messaging apps



Technology companies increasingly have policies for reporting harmful content, though enforcement remains uneven.

What young people can do

Young people can contribute to reducing hate speech by:

- refusing to share or engage with hateful content
- reporting harmful material on platforms
- supporting peers who are targeted
- using counterspeech (positive messages that challenge harmful narratives)
- promoting respectful discussion online and offline

7. Practical Tools

Why practical tools matter

Knowing about discrimination, stereotypes, equality and hate speech is important, but young people also need concrete strategies for how to act in real situations. Practical tools help individuals respond safely, support others and contribute to more inclusive environments in schools, communities and online spaces.

Recognising unfair situations

The first step is noticing when something is not right. Young people can pay attention to:

- who is being included or excluded
- who is being listened to and who is ignored
- how people are being described or labelled
- whether jokes target specific groups
- whether someone looks uncomfortable, silent or isolated

These observations help identify situations where discrimination or exclusion may be happening.

Showing allyship

Allyship means supporting people who are discriminated against or excluded. Allies do not speak for others but help create spaces where they can speak for themselves. Allies can:

- listen and believe people's experiences
- amplify voices that are not heard
- share resources and information
- intervene when safe
- encourage inclusive practices in groups



What to do when you witness discrimination

Being a bystander means being present when something unfair happens. There are several strategies young people can use, depending on the situation and safety:

1. Direct Action

Speaking up and expressing disagreement with harmful behaviour.

Example: “That joke targets people and it’s not okay.”

2. Distraction

Interrupting the situation without confrontation.

Example: changing the topic, redirecting attention or inviting the targeted person away.

3. Delegation

Reporting or involving someone with authority.

Example: a teacher, youth worker, coach, moderator or platform admin.

4. Delay

Checking in afterwards with the person affected and showing support.

Example: “Are you okay? I saw what happened and I’m sorry.”

5. Documentation

Recording or noting what happened, especially online, and saving evidence for reporting if necessary.

These approaches are commonly known as the “5 D’s” of bystander intervention.

Online tools

In digital spaces, young people can:

- report hateful content
- block or mute harmful accounts
- use counterspeech to challenge negativity
- share positive content promoting diversity
- build inclusive communities in group chats, servers or forums

Reflection and learning

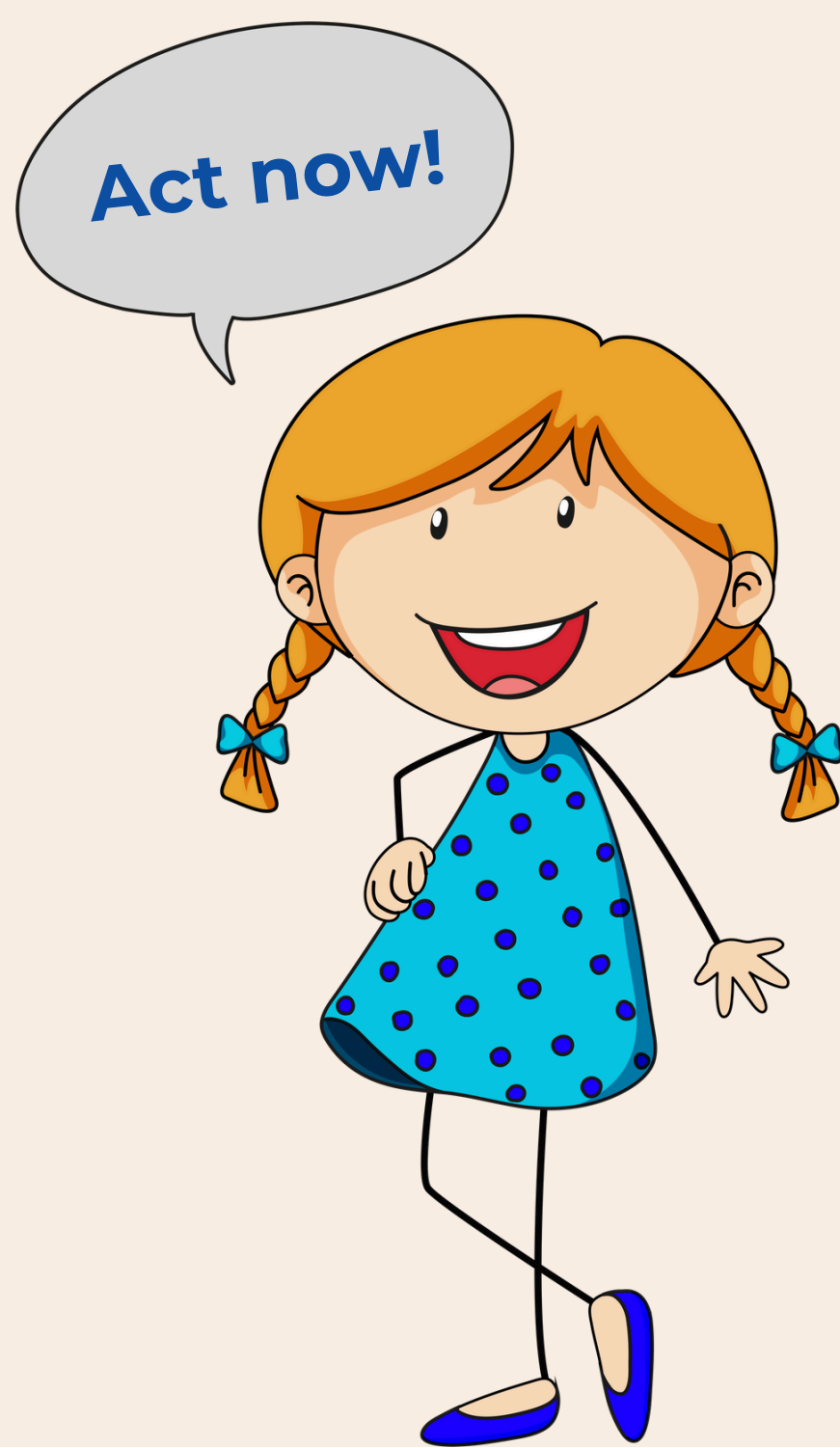
Practical action also involves reflection. Questions that help reflection include:

- what assumptions did I have before?
- how did this situation affect others?
- what could be done differently next time?
- what support or tools are still missing?

Youth organisations and support

Youth organisations, schools and associations can help by:

- providing workshops and training
- creating safe spaces for discussion
- establishing clear rules against discrimination and hate speech
- supporting participation of young people with fewer opportunities



Small steps matter

Change does not always happen through big actions. Small everyday choices such as inclusive language, inviting someone to join a group, questioning stereotypes or challenging harmful jokes already contribute to building environments where everyone feels respected.

8. Who Made It Happen

Our gratitude goes to the partner organisations for their cooperation, trust and dedication during preparation, implementation and follow-up phases. Their work made this international experience possible.

Together Romania



Kolektyw Młodych Wizjonerów,
Poland



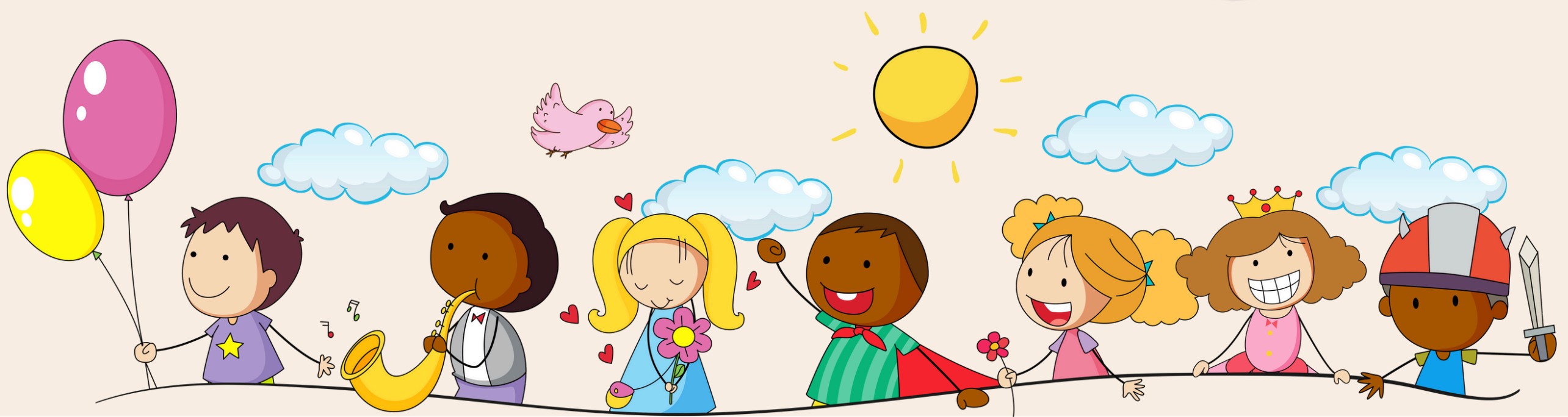
STEP, Slovakia



El Cencerro Joven, Spain



Aktif Gençlik ve Spor Kulübü
Derneği, Türkiye



We extend our sincere appreciation to the participants, whose curiosity, openness and commitment shaped the learning experience. Their active involvement, creativity and perspectives made the mobility meaningful and impactful.

We further thank the support staff and local collaborators who contributed to the educational quality and smooth functioning of the activities. The hospitality of the hosting community played an important role in creating a welcoming environment for all participants.

We would also like to acknowledge the group leaders and facilitators for their guidance, support and responsibility throughout each stage of the project. Through their coordination, educational facilitation and continuous presence, they ensured communication, engagement and well-being within the group.

Finally, we recognise the collective effort of everyone involved in making this mobility a reality. Through shared commitment, dialogue and collaboration, the project was able to promote learning, inclusion and intercultural understanding across borders.

