

MODULE 5

Outdoor Spaces and Buildings



Community &
Healthcare

Transportation

Housing

Social Participation

Outdoor Spaces &
Buildings

Respect and Social
Inclusion

European Seniors Friendly Communities Guideline

MODULE: OUTDOOR SPACES AND BUILDINGS

THEORETICAL INTRODUCTION

The design and maintenance of outdoor spaces and buildings are foundational to creating inclusive, safe, and socially vibrant communities for older adults. Drawing from established frameworks and interdisciplinary principles, the following concepts underpin this module:

Age-Friendly Urban Design, as defined by the World Health Organisation's Global Age-Friendly Cities initiative, emphasises equitable access to public infrastructure. This approach prioritises features like barrier-free pathways, rest areas with seating, and adequate lighting to ensure older people can navigate streets, parks, and buildings independently. For example, tactile paving and ramps not only aid those with mobility challenges but also create environments that benefit parents with pushchairs or individuals with temporary injuries, embodying the principle of universal design.

Universal Design extends beyond accessibility compliance by advocating for spaces that are inherently usable by people of all ages and abilities. Key elements include intuitive signage, non-slip surfaces, and ergonomic seating, which reduce physical strain and prevent accidents. This philosophy aligns with the social model of disability, recognising that environments—not individual limitations—create exclusion.

Social Inclusion Through Public Spaces highlights the role of parks, plazas, and community hubs in fostering intergenerational connections. Well-designed spaces encourage activities like walking clubs, outdoor markets, or cultural events, which combat loneliness and promote mental well-being. For instance, intergenerational seating arrangements in parks can facilitate spontaneous interactions between older adults and younger residents, strengthening community bonds.

Safety and Mobility addresses the physical and psychological barriers that deter older people from engaging with outdoor environments. Poorly maintained pavements, uneven surfaces, and inadequate lighting contribute to fear of falls, a leading cause of hospitalisation among older adults. Proactive measures like regular hazard audits, clear wayfinding systems, and accessible public transport are critical to building confidence and encouraging active lifestyles.

STATUS QUO

Despite growing awareness of age-friendly principles, significant gaps persist in Europe's outdoor spaces and buildings, as revealed by focus groups across Ireland, Italy, and Spain:

- **Physical Accessibility:** *Cracked pavements, steep kerbs, and uneven surfaces remain widespread, particularly in rural and historic urban areas. In Ireland, participants highlighted poorly maintained footpaths, where older people avoid walking due to tripping hazards.*
- **Amenity Shortfalls:** *Public benches, shaded areas, and public toilets are scarce. In Dublin, older adults noted that parks lack sufficient seating, forcing visitors to cut walks short.*
- **Building Inaccessibility:** *Many public buildings—including healthcare facilities—lack ramps, lifts, or automatic doors. In Spain, older adults in Valencia reported difficulty accessing upper-floor clinics in older buildings.*
- **Digital Exclusion:** *Transport systems increasingly rely on app-based ticketing, disadvantaging older people unfamiliar with smartphones. Irish focus groups criticised Dublin Bus's shift to digital-only tickets, leaving older passengers dependent on others for travel.*
- **Safety Concerns:** *Poor street lighting and isolated pathways deter evening outings. Italian participants described avoiding night time walks due to fear of theft or falls.*

COUNTRY-SPECIFIC FINDINGS

- **Ireland:** *Rural transport gaps and inaccessible GP surgeries dominate concerns. Older adults in Cork emphasised long waits for home adaptation grants, delaying critical modifications like stairlifts.*
- **Italy:** *Historic cities like Florence struggle with uneven cobblestone streets and a lack of lifts in heritage buildings, isolating older residents in upper-floor flats.*
- **Spain:** *Urban older adults in Madrid and Barcelona face mandatory digital ticketing for buses and trains, while those in coastal towns like Málaga highlighted beachfronts without shaded rest areas.*



LEARNING OUTCOMES

Description of the main learning objectives and results to be achieved in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes by:

Seniors:

- *Gain the ability to express specific requirements for public spaces (e.g., bench design, hazard reporting) through participatory activities*
- *Develop skills to identify safety hazards (e.g., uneven pavements, poor lighting) and collaborate on actionable solutions using tools.*

Stakeholders & Local Actors:

- *Learn to conduct accessibility audits and co-design improvement plans with seniors, ensuring inclusive urban planning*
- *Inclusive Mindset: Recognise and challenge age-related stereotypes through role-play scenarios, fostering policies that prioritise equity.*

Educators:

- *Master the principles of Universal Design (UD) and WHO guidelines to teach others how to create accessible outdoor spaces.*
- *Design and promote inclusive community projects, such as gardens, that bridge generational gaps and address social isolation.*



EDUCATIONAL TOOLS

Activity 1: Collaborative Access Audit & Improvement Planning

Target: *for stakeholders and local actors*

Duration	2 hours
Materials*	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Self-Assessment Access Checklists (from Appendix 1 of Great Outdoors: A guide for accessibility). https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/2019-10/great-outdoors-a-guide-for-accessibility.pdf 2. Printed maps/photos of a local outdoor site (e.g., park, community centre). 3. Sticky notes, markers, and large paper. 4. Case studies from Irish Wheelchair Association (Access Advisory Team) or CARA.
Description (2000 characters):	<p>Objective: Equip staff to identify accessibility barriers and co-design solutions with seniors.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Case study discussion (30 mins): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Begin with a mini Disability Equality Training session using case studies (e.g., "How uneven paths exclude seniors"). Discuss the social model of disability (barriers are societal, not individual). ◦ Share examples of successful access upgrades (e.g., IWA's park redesigns). 2. Collaborative Audit (1 hour): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Divide participants into small groups. Give each a checklist and site map. ◦ Role-play as "accessibility detectives": Identify barriers (e.g., steep kerbs, lack of seating) and mark them on the map. ◦ Include Seniors: Invite 2–3 seniors to join each group and share lived experiences (e.g., "I avoid this path because it's too slippery").

	<p>3. Solution Co-Design (1 hour):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Groups draft an Access Improvement Plan using sticky notes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Short-term fixes: Paint kerbs yellow for visibility. ◦ Long-term upgrades: Install ramps or benches. • Present plans to the group. Use a "Dragon's Den" format where seniors/stakeholders ask questions. <p>4. Action Commitments (30 mins):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Each participant writes one actionable step (e.g., "Report hazards via "FixMyStreet" or "Apply for IWA grants").
<p>Tips for trainers</p>	<p>Pair staff with seniors during audits and assign clear ownership for each improvement step (e.g., "Maria emails council about broken pavements").</p>
<p><i>*if needed add here tables, pictures or other materials to be used for the activity</i></p> <p>Supporting Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Checklists: Use the Appendix 1 templates from the https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/2019-10/great-outdoors-a-guide-for-accessibility.pdf. • Case Studies: Download IWA's guides on accessible parks or CARA's inclusive adventure training modules. • Grant Resources: Share links to local council funding schemes. 	





Activity 2: 'Breaking Stereotypes' Role-Play Workshop

Target: *for stakeholders and local actors*

Duration

60 mins

Materials*

Scenario cards (e.g., "A senior wants to join a hiking group but fears being excluded"). See the supporting material below

Description
(2000 characters):

Objective: Challenge preconceptions about ageing/disability and embed inclusive practices.

Steps:

1. Role-Play Scenarios (1 hour):

- Groups act out scenarios (see the scenarios below).

2. Policy Redesign (1 hour):

- Review your organisation's current policies.
 - Rewrite one policy (e.g., event planning) to include senior input.

3. Commitment Wall:

- Participants post pledges on a wall (e.g., "I will always consult seniors when planning activities").

Tips for trainers

Rotate roles (senior, dismissive/inclusive staff) and pause scenarios to challenge stereotypes (e.g., "Why assume frailty?").

**if needed add here tables, pictures or other materials to be used for the activity*

Supporting Material:

Scenario 1: The Digital Ticketing Dilemma

Context:

A senior wants to attend a community event but must book tickets online. They approach a staff member for help, explaining they don't own a smartphone.

Stereotypical Response:

Staff member sighs and says, "Everyone uses apps now. Maybe ask a family member to do it for you?"

Inclusive Response:

Staff member offers to book tickets on their behalf and suggests introducing paper tickets for future events. "Let's set up a phone-booking option too – I'll raise this with the team."

Discussion Questions:

- How does digital exclusion limit participation?
- What alternatives can ensure equal access?

Scenario 2: The Unreachable Park Bench**Context:**

A senior with mobility issues points out that the nearest park bench is 200 metres away, making it impossible to rest during walks.

Stereotypical Response:

Staff member says, "We can't add more benches – it's a historic park. Maybe you should walk shorter distances?"

Inclusive Response:

Staff member notes the concern and suggests temporary seating (e.g., portable stools) while lobbying for permanent benches. "Let's map your walking route to identify priority spots."

Discussion Questions:

- How do assumptions about "heritage preservation" exclude seniors?
- What low-cost fixes can bridge gaps while waiting for long-term solutions?

Scenario 3: The 'Too Risky' Nature Walk**Context:**

A senior expresses interest in a local hiking group but is told, "The trail is too rough for someone your age."

Stereotypical Response:

Organiser says, "We don't want anyone slowing the group down. Why not try our gentle yoga class instead?"

Inclusive Response:

Organiser adapts the route (e.g., shorter loop, smoother path) and pairs the senior with a buddy. "Let's trial the adjusted route together next week!"

Discussion Questions:

- How do stereotypes about ageing limit opportunities?
- How can activities be adapted without patronising participants?



Scenario 4: The Invisible GP Surgery

Context:

A senior struggles to access a first-floor GP surgery with no lift. They ask the receptionist for help.

Stereotypical Response:

Receptionist says, "We've been here for decades – you'll have to manage the stairs or find another clinic."

Inclusive Response:

Receptionist arranges a ground-floor consultation room and commits to advocating for a lift. "I'll also share home-visit options with you today."

Discussion Questions:

- How does inaction normalise exclusion?
- What interim solutions can organisations offer while waiting for structural changes?





Activity 1: Design Your Dream Bench

Target: *for seniors*

Duration

1 hour

Materials*

Large paper sheets, coloured pens and stickers

Description
(2000
characters):

Objective: Empower seniors to articulate their needs for public seating.

Steps:

1. **Discussion:** Ask seniors to share frustrations about current benches (e.g., "Too low to stand up from").
2. **Design Session:** In small groups, sketch a "dream bench" incorporating features like back support, armrests, or integrated planters.
3. **Presentation:** Groups pitch their designs, explaining how each feature improves accessibility.

**Tips for
trainers**

Trainer Tip: Use sticky notes to vote on the most popular design features.

**if needed add here tables, pictures or other materials to be used for the activity*

Activity 2: Hazard Hunt & Fix

Target: *for seniors*

Duration

1 hour

Materials*

- Localised Maps: Printed/digital maps of a park in each partner country (e.g., Dublin's Phoenix Park, Valencia's Turia Gardens, Florence's Cascine Park).
- Hazard Tokens: Coloured stickers/icons (e.g., red triangles for cracked pavements, blue dots for poor lighting).
- Solution Board: A shared board for brainstorming fixes (stickers, pens, sticky notes).
- Reporting Tool Cards: Localised versions (e.g., FixMyStreet Ireland).

Description
(2000 characters):

Objective: Identify and prioritise outdoor hazards through collaborative mapping, culminating in actionable solutions.

Steps:

1. Hazard Hunt (20 mins):

- Seniors explore the map, placing tokens where they've encountered hazards (e.g., "This bridge in Valencia has no handrails!").

2. Mapping & Patterns (15 mins):

- Cluster similar tokens (e.g., all lighting issues). Discuss trends: "Why are hazards concentrated near the Dublin park entrance?"

3. Solution Sprint (25 mins):

- Small groups propose fixes for top 3 hazards. Use Solution Board to categorise:
 - Quick Fix (e.g., report potholes via council app).
 - Long-Term (e.g., petition for more benches).
- Vote on best solutions to implement first.

Tips for trainers

- *Localise: Partner with councils to provide country-specific maps/reporting tools.*
- *Involve Storytelling: Ask seniors to share a personal story tied to a hazard (e.g., "I fell here last winter") to humanise data.*

**if needed add here tables, pictures or other materials to be used for the activity*

Activity 1: Universal Design & Age-Friendly Cities Training Workshop

Target: *for educators*

Duration

1 hour

Materials*

PPT Slides with supporting material information

Description
(2000 characters):

Objective: Equip educators and community health workers to teach and apply UD principles and WHO guidelines to improve outdoor spaces for seniors.

Workshop Steps

1. Lecture & Discussion

Materials:

- Slides summarising UD principles and WHO goals.
- Case studies e.g., Dublin's Age-Friendly Benches, https://www.dublincity.ie/sites/default/files/media/file-uploads/2018-07/AF_PublicRealm_online-1.pdf

Steps:

- Teach UD Basics: Use slides to explain the 7 principles (See supporting reference sheet).
- Link to WHO Goals: Show how UD aligns with Age-Friendly Cities e.g., "Tolerance for Error" = fewer falls. (See WHO Goals in supporting reference sheet).
- Case Study Discussion: Ask, "How can pedestrian zones in Meath improve senior mobility?"

Tips for trainers

- *Prep: Bookmark all the links and PPT slides in advance.*

**if needed add here tables, pictures or other materials to be used for the activity*

Supporting Reference Sheet

Universal Design (UD) Basics

(Adapted from the 7 principles of UD): <https://universaldesign.ie/about-universal-design/the-7-principles>

1. **Equitable Use:** Design is useful to people with diverse abilities (e.g., ramps alongside stairs).
2. **Flexibility in Use:** Accommodate preferences (e.g., seating with/without armrests).
3. **Simple & Intuitive:** Easy to understand (e.g., clear signage with icons).
4. **Perceptible Information:** Communicate effectively (e.g., tactile paving for visually impaired).
5. **Tolerance for Error:** Minimise hazards (e.g., non-slip surfaces).
6. **Low Physical Effort:** Reduce strain (e.g., ergonomic benches).
7. **Size & Space for Approach/Use:** Ensure accessibility for all body types/mobility aids.

WHO's Age-Friendly Cities Key Goals for Outdoor Spaces:

- **Safety:** Well-lit paths, even surfaces.
- **Comfort:** Adequate seating, shaded areas.
- **Social Inclusion:** Spaces for intergenerational interaction.
- **Accessibility:** Barrier-free access to parks, transport, and buildings.

(Source: **WHO Age-Friendly Cities Guide**)



Activity 2: Designing Intergenerational Community Gardens

Target: *for educators*

Duration

2 hours

Materials*

1. AARP Resources:
- Creating Community Gardens for all ages:
<https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/tool-kits-resources/info-2023/creating-community-gardens.html>
 - Worksheets: <https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/livable-communities/tool-kits-resources/2023/Creating%20Community%20Gardens-worksheet-0-Collection-012423.pdf>
 - Videos:
 - Planting a Garden in Oklahoma: <https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/community-challenge/info-2019/2019-community-challenge-video-anadarko-ok.html>
 - Growing Food in Providence, Rhode Island: <https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/community-challenge/info-2021/2021-community-challenge-video-providence-rhode-island.html>

Description
(2000 characters):

Objective: Train educators to design inclusive, age-friendly community gardens using AARP's toolkit and video resources.

Activity Steps:

1. Introduction & Video Screening (20 mins)

- **Watch:** Show one of the AARP videos
- **Discuss:**
 - What made these gardens successful?
 - How did they address intergenerational needs?
 - What challenges did they face, and how were they resolved?

2. Garden Design Challenge (60 mins)

- Scenario: "Design a community garden for a neighborhood with limited green space, high senior isolation, and food insecurity."



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group Task: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Plan Using Worksheets: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use the Garden Layout Worksheet to sketch accessible features (e.g., wide paths, seating areas). ▪ Apply the Funding Worksheet to brainstorm grant opportunities (e.g., AARP Community Challenge). 2. Incorporate Universal Design (UD): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure pathways are wheelchair-friendly (UD Principle 1: Equitable Use). ▪ Include signage with icons and large text (UD Principle 4: Perceptible Information). 3. Present: Groups pitch their garden plan, explaining how it meets WHO's age-friendly goals (safety, accessibility, social inclusion) • Reflect: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ How can gardens combat social isolation among seniors? ◦ What partnerships (local councils, schools) are critical for sustainability?
<p>Tips for trainers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Prep:</i> Bookmark video links and print worksheets in advance. • <i>Guest Speaker:</i> Invite a local garden coordinator to share real-world insights.
<p><i>*if needed add here tables, pictures or other materials to be used for the activity</i></p> <p>Supporting Materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>AARP Case Studies:</i> Share excerpts from local examples like tidy towns for inspiration. • <i>UD Checklist:</i> Align garden features with the 7 Principles of Universal Design: https://universaldesign.ie/about-universal-design/the-7-principles 	

TRAINING RESOURCES

<p>Città per l'invecchiamento attivo</p>	<p>Presents WHO guidelines and Italian reflections on making cities age-friendly through accessible environments, mobility, inclusion, and intergenerational participation.</p>	<p>http://www.abitareanziani.it/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/AeA_Magazine_02.pdf</p>
<p>SPAZI PER L'ATTIVITÀ FISICA PER TUTTE LE GENERAZIONI</p>	<p>Swiss guide to planning outdoor intergenerational activity spaces, focusing on participatory design, accessibility, shared use, and health promotion for all age groups</p>	<p>https://www.hopp-la.ch/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Guida-spazi-per-lattivita-fisica-per-tutte-le-generazioni.pdf</p>
<p>GUÍA DE ACCESIBILIDAD EN LOS ESPACIOS PÚBLICOS URBANIZADOS</p>	<p>It serves to clarify the criteria that governed the Order's review process in general, as well as other issues considered useful for understanding its content. Among other things, it explains its nature as a basic standard, the criteria adopted in relation to the standards cited in the text, and the reference to other regulatory standards.</p>	<p>https://cdn.mitma.gob.es/portal-web-drupal/estudios_y_publicaciones/guia_accesibilidad.pdf</p>
<p>Guía de buenas prácticas de accesibilidad universal en las Entidades Locales</p>	<p>Accessibility is a constantly evolving concept, which has gone from being considered a simple means to improve the living conditions of people with disabilities (making their daily lives easier, even if only partially or without autonomy) to becoming a fundamental element in ensuring the full participation of all citizens in today's society.</p>	<p>https://fundacionacs.com/descarga/guia-de-buenas-practicas-de-accesibilidad-en-municipios.pdf</p>



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Assessments Section



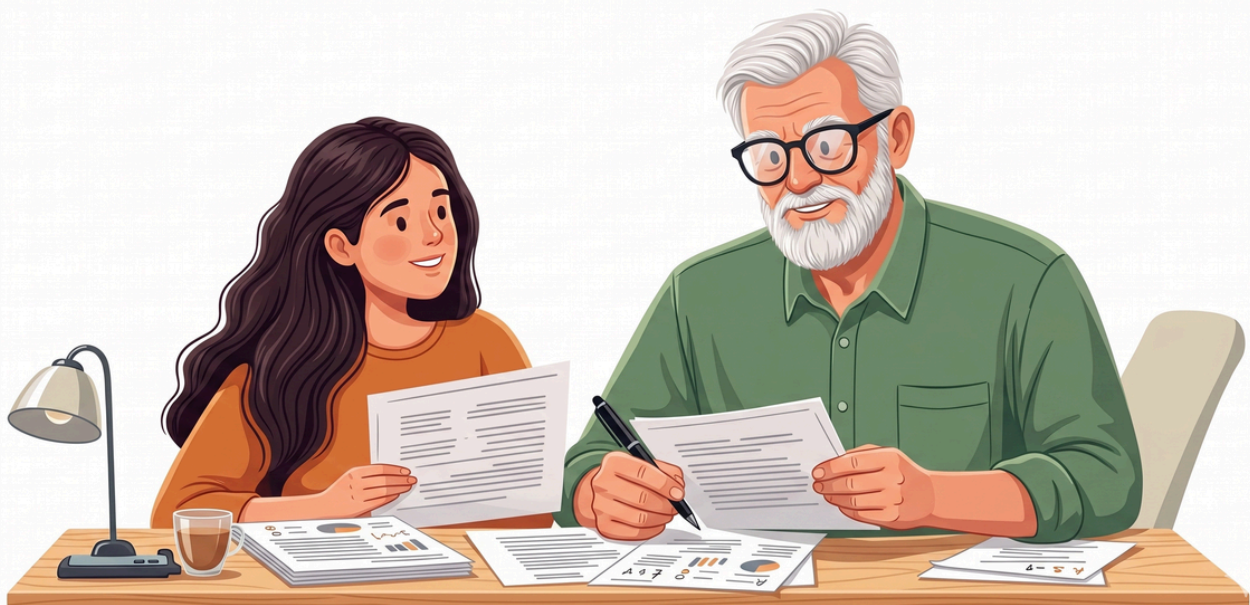


MODULE: OUTDOOR SPACES AND BUILDINGS

EDUCATORS

Theme: Universal Design and Urban Inclusion

1. What is the main goal of Universal Design?
 - A. Meeting legal standards for ramps
 - B. Designing for young families only
 - C. Creating environments usable by all people regardless of ability.
 - D. Minimizing construction costs
2. Which of these is a principle of Universal Design?
 - A. Single-use access points
 - B. Complex navigation paths
 - C. Perceptible information and intuitive signage
 - D. High-maintenance surfaces
3. True or False: Universal Design only benefits older adults.
– Yes / No
4. Do you feel confident applying the WHO's age-friendly outdoor space guidelines to your teaching or community work?
– Yes / No





MODULE: OUTDOOR SPACES AND BUILDINGS

STAKEHOLDERS AND LOCAL ACTORS

Theme: Accessibility Audits and Inclusive Policy

5. Which of the following is an age-friendly feature in public spaces?
 - A. Cracked pavements
 - B. Unshaded benches
 - C. Step-free access with handrails
 - D. Steep staircases

6. True or False: Only long-term structural changes can improve accessibility.
– Yes / No

7. Which approach reflects the social model of disability?
 - A. Blaming seniors for reduced mobility
 - B. Avoiding park renovations due to cost
 - C. Identifying environmental barriers and fixing them
 - D. Prioritizing aesthetics over function

8. Would you commit to consulting seniors when redesigning public spaces in your local area?
– Yes / No





MODULE: OUTDOOR SPACES AND BUILDINGS

SENIORS

Theme: Empowerment and Safety in Outdoor Areas

9. Which of these is a common barrier to using outdoor spaces?
- A. Clearly marked pathways
 - B. Ample shaded seating
 - C. Uneven sidewalks and poor lighting
 - D. Accessible restrooms
10. True or False: Your feedback about benches and paths is valuable for public space design.
– Yes / No
11. Do you know how to report a hazard (like a broken path) to your local council or community office?
– Yes / No
12. Which of these features would you include in your "dream bench"?
- A. Low seating without armrests
 - B. Slippery wooden surface
 - C. Back support and armrests
 - D. Narrow space between benches
13. Would you like to participate in a local walk audit or park review with your community?
– Yes / No

