«Accessible Hiking Trails»
MOVEMENT SPONTANEOUS
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18.02.2025., Peipsimaa

Interreg

Estonia – Latvia

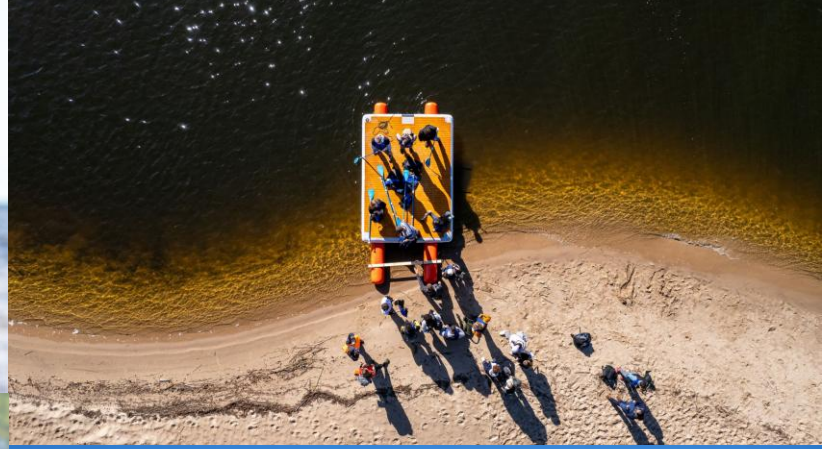
Co-funded by
the European Union

WP3 Pilot actions - Piloting the accessibility solution No.6 (adaptation for foreign language and cross-cultural social groups) (MS, LC)

Pilot testing with foreigners, 28.09.2024:

- 15 km pilot hike on Lilaste beach
- MS collects feedback during and after the hike for the guidelines
- Improvement of the methodology
- Dissemination of the results

PILOT HIKE WITH FOREIGNERS, LILASTE - CARNIKAVA 28.09.2024.



WP1 Joint development of accessibility solutions
Actvity 1.4. Training materials and training

Self-guided hikes for school youth – Training video

https://youtu.be/iNXKzy35dwE

Guidelines for Foreigners and Cross-Cultural Social Groups – Training video

GUIDELINES FOR SELF-GUIDED HIKES FOR SCHOOL-AGED YOUTH

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https://docs.google.com/document/d/1TxcdVfu9q68s6a0l5FoOpwmUOvGUmyOz7k45Wy1YzLQ/edit?usp=sharing

Safety Requirements Based on Weather Conditions and Trail Difficulty

Safety during a hike depends on both the right equipment and the complexity of the trail and weather conditions. In rainy or wet conditions, using **trekking poles** can help maintain stability and balance on slippery surfaces. Poles are also beneficial for long-distance hikes.

Forecasting weather and regularly checking conditions is essential to avoid unexpected situations. Utilizing reliable weather forecasting apps, such as **Windy, AccuWeather, or YR.no**, can provide detailed weather updates. Another valuable resource is online webcams, which offer real-time insights into conditions along the route.

When planning hikes along coastlines or rivers, it's important to monitor water level changes. For this purpose, the **Tides app** provides accurate information about tides and currents. **The Sun and Moon app** is also helpful for weather forecasting and route planning, as it provides information about sunrise and sunset times. This app is especially useful when planning hikes in areas where knowing the onset of twilight or complete darkness is critical, such as in mountainous or forested trails. It aids in better pacing the hike and selecting suitable spots for breaks or overnight stays to avoid unpleasant situations when darkness suddenly falls.

If an adult, like a teacher, parent, or guardian, is leading the hike, they should download and use these apps, since some may not be available for kids under 13. It's crucial for this adult to show the young hikers how to use the apps and explain their features, so they can learn to check the weather forecasts on their own and adapt to changing conditions in the future.

2.4 Meal and Activity Planning

During a hike, it's essential to ensure there's enough food and water, as well as to include educational activities and plan breaks that help boost team spirit and keep participants energized.

Meal and Water Consumption Planning During the Hike

Nutrition and hydration are key factors for maintaining participants' energy and well-being while hiking. Meals should be planned to be portable, nutritious, and suitable for outdoor consumption. Here are some commonly useful food items for hikes:

- **High-energy snacks**: Nuts, dried fruits, energy bars, and cookies are great options.
- **Easily transportable foods**: Whole grain wraps with cheese, meats, hard-boiled eggs, tofu, or other protein sources, as well as sturdy fruits and vegetables that won't get squished in a bag.
- **Dehydrated meals**: These are particularly useful for multi-day hikes. They're available at specialized outdoor shops, are lightweight, and can be quickly prepared by adding hot water.

Staying hydrated is very important, especially in hot weather or during intense physical activity. It's recommended to plan for at least **1.5 to 2 liters of water** per participant per day. If there are water refill stations or natural water sources along the route, you can plan to replenish supplies along the way. However, it's crucial to verify the water's cleanliness beforehand or bring along **water filters or purification tablets**, which can be found at outdoor stores.

Integrating Activities and Learning During the Hike

Going on a hike can be a valuable part of the learning process, enhancing young people's practical knowledge and teamwork skills. Activities can be designed to connect with subjects like science, geography, biology, or orienteering skills. Here are some ideas:

- **Orienteering challenges**: Assign each participant a task to locate specific points along the trail using a map and compass. This encourages navigation skills and teamwork.
- **Nature exploration**: Engage participants in identifying and learning about local plants or animals encountered along the way. For example, they can explore forest habitats and practice recognizing different tree and plant species.
- **Ecology lessons**: Incorporate topics on sustainability and waste reduction, teaching participants the principle of "leave no trace." This fosters an understanding of conservation and environmental protection while they enjoy the outdoors.

Rest Breaks During the Hike

Rest breaks during a hike are not only important for physical recovery but also for fostering teamwork and building stronger relationships among participants. It's recommended to plan **regular breaks every 1 to 1.5 hours**, especially on longer routes, so participants can rest, enjoy snacks, and hydrate. For example, during a 12 km hike, there could be two longer breaks and several shorter, 5-10 minute pauses. To make these breaks more meaningful, consider incorporating activities that promote cooperation and communication, such as:

- **Team-building games**: For example, the "knot game," where participants form a circle, hold hands, and try to untangle themselves without breaking the chain, encourages problem-solving and teamwork.
- **Campfire conversations**: These moments can strengthen bonds between participants and offer a time for reflection on the day's experiences and lessons learned.
- **Shared meal preparation**: Whether it's making sandwiches, grilling vegetables, or roasting sausages over a campfire, preparing food together creates a positive and friendly atmosphere that strengthens relationships.
- **Feedback circle**: Each participant can share their thoughts on what they enjoyed, what challenges they faced, and what they learned. This activity encourages reflection and provides valuable insights for improving future hikes.

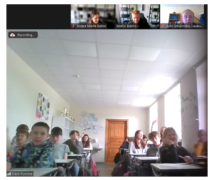
It's also necessary to give participants free time to simply enjoy nature without any planned activities. They can take in the scenery, listen to nature's sounds, or engage in personal conversations. This balance between structured activities and relaxation ensures that the hike becomes a well-rounded experience, offering both education and leisure.

3. Piloting

A pilot test is a small-scale trial conducted to evaluate ideas or methods before broader implementation. It helps identify potential improvements or risks and assess how successfully the project might operate in the future. As part of this project, a pilot test was carried out with the active involvement of the administration of Laurencu Primary School, who showed interest in engaging students in organizing hikes.

3.1 Hike with Laurencu School Students

In collaboration with the Laurencu Primary School science teacher, an online meeting in the form of a webinar was organized on April 17, 2024, with 6th-grade students. During this session, they learned the skills needed to organize self-guided hikes. The presentation was prepared by the head of organization "Movement Spontaneous" Matijs Babris.



Photos from online meeting and presentation for students

The presentation covered hiking planning methods, focusing on key topics:

- Route analysis and map reading
- Event management plan and navigation
- Weather conditions and equipment selection
- Meal and activity planning

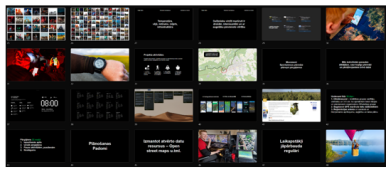


Photo capture of the presentation slides

After the webinar, the class was given the following tasks:

1. Select a group leader, a deputy, and three additional individuals to be trained in using radios and added to the organizers' WhatsApp group
2. Prepare a route plan and a GPX file for the participants
3. Create a registration form, along with a list of equipment, clothing, and a time schedule

Recommended activities for the hike:

- An introductory and briefing circle
- Breaks and a lunch stop
- A feedback circle at the end of the hike

The student group chose one of the Baltic Forest Trail sections – No. 5 Sigulda-Ligatne [see Appendix 1], slightly shortening the final part of the route. Since the students are very active and athletic, they opted for a relatively long section. It's important to assess one's physical fitness during a hike, but also not to underestimate one's abilities.

The pilot hike took place on May 22, 2024, with 26 participants: 19 students, the science teacher, two parents, three representatives from "Movement Spontaneous" organization, and one representative from "Lauku Celotāji" organization. At the start of the hike, a briefing was conducted [see Appendix 2], and the most active participants were given radios to relay information about rest breaks, the remaining distance, or to communicate in case of an emergency. Some students had printed maps from Baltictrails.eu, while representatives from "Movement Spontaneous" used the GPX files available on the website via smart devices to ensure the correct route in case of uncertainties.

The trail was well-marked with the Forest Trail signage (white-orange-white) and informational stands. [see Appendix 2] Along the way, several stops were made to share interesting facts about Forest Trail and the surrounding nature, as well as to rest and hydrate, because the day was particularly hot. After approximately 10 kilometers, a longer lunch break was organized, during which the students enjoyed healthy snacks and learned more about preparing food for hikes. [see Appendix 2]

After the break, there were about 10 kilometers left to hike through Gauja Valley. Some students took the opportunity to capture beautiful photos with Andra, a photographer from "Movement Spontaneous". The hike concluded at a parking lot with a rest area, where a feedback circle was held. Each participant had the chance to share what they enjoyed most and what they found most challenging.

3.2 Piloting Feedback and Improvements

After the pilot hike, feedback was collected, providing valuable insights for planning and organizing future hikes. Based on the experiences of all participants, several improvements were identified that would help make the organization and management of future hikes more efficient.

Student Feedback

Participants enjoyed:

- Having a group leader from among the students
- Being outdoors and staying active
- Conversations with the "Movement Spontaneous" organizers, exchanging experiences and stories
- Learning how to use the radios
- Taking photos with a camera
- Route planning
- Animals and nature

Challenges faced by participants:

- The heat and sun
- The long distance, with a route over 20 km
- Finding a place for the large group to sit
- Walking the last few kilometers
- Mosquitoes

Teacher's Feedback

- The children chose the Forest Trail route themselves.
- The students' parents suggested shortening the route to end at the parking lot, optimizing both the distance and time spent on the hike.
- It was easy to follow the route using navigation tools.
- The students were independent and motivated, with no need for extra encouragement to keep moving forward.
- The students were excited about the hike, and the teacher felt proud of their responsibility and engagement.
- It was a valuable experience in the planning process – important aspects such as safety and preparation were thoroughly discussed.

The teacher is actively planning more hikes and is eager to continue organizing such activities with the students.

Recommendations from organization"Movement Spontaneous"

1. **More thorough route selection**: The 20 km route proved too long for some participants. For future hikes, it is recommended to more carefully assess participants' physical abilities and the difficulty of the route, planning shorter or medium-length sections, especially for younger or less experienced groups.
2. **Time management**: Some activities during the hike took longer than initially planned, leading to fatigue towards the end of the hike. It is advisable to plan rest breaks and activities more precisely, ensuring they are spaced evenly and frequent enough.
3. **Better route accessibility for the entire group**: Not all participants had access to a physical or digital map of the route, causing confusion in areas where trail markings were damaged.
4. **More detailed first aid training**: Although there were adults present who were trained in first aid, it is recommended to provide basic first aid training to students before the hike. This would increase safety and preparedness in case of emergencies.

5. **Integrating hikes into the learning process**: Hikes not only promote physical activity and teamwork among students but also offer educational opportunities across various subjects. For example, science lessons can be integrated into hikes by teaching about the environment and navigation in a practical way. History lessons could also become more engaging by organizing hikes to culturally or historically significant sites, where students can learn about events in history. Additionally, incorporating such activities during project weeks ensures they do not interfere with regular lesson plans or students' holidays, while offering a meaningful and educational alternative to traditional teaching methods. This fosters closer collaboration between teachers and students, developing teamwork and organizational skills.

4. Recommendations and Resources

This section compiles recommendations and resources that will help anyone plan and organize successful hikes, based on the information gathered in the guidelines. Online tools and platforms are provided to facilitate route selection, navigation, and safety measures.

4.1. Recommendations

- Plan the hike carefully, considering the difficulty level of the route, trail conditions, and weather forecasts.
- Check the weather regularly.
- Inform a family member about your planned route and expected return time.
- Familiarize yourself with trail markings and signs to stay on track.
- Dress in layers, choose durable hiking shoes, and protect yourself from the sun with SPF cream, a hat, and sunglasses.
- Ensure you have enough water and food.
- Take regular breaks and listen to your body's signals.
- Be alert and watch your surroundings, especially for unstable terrain, wildlife, and changing weather conditions.
- Stay on the chosen trail and avoid unknown or restricted areas.
- If you encounter wildlife, maintain a safe distance and do not create stress for them.
- If hiking in a group, maintain visibility with each other and communicate regularly.
- Follow the principle of "Leave no trace," respecting nature and minimizing your impact on the environment.

4.2. Useful Resources

- **Webinar** on conducting self-guided hikes (in Latvian): https://youtu.be/VeEbe2cgNH4
- **Educational film** made within this project summarizing these guidelines: https://youtu.be/26e4xo8f9lw
- **Coastal Trail** and **Forest Trail** hiking routes and information: https://baltictrails.eu/lv/
- **Google MyMaps** allows you to customize maps by marking routes, travel points, and adding annotations: https://mymaps.google.com
- **Strava** is a popular app that allows you to track your hiking routes and share achievements

- **Outdoor Active** is a navigation app offering hiking and tourism maps, as well as route planning options: https://www.outdooractive.com/
- **The Komoot** app helps plan adventure hikes, offering routes and navigation: https://www.komoot.com/
- **Locus Map** is a navigation app with extensive functionality, suitable for hiking, cycling, and other outdoor activities: https://www.locusmap.app/
- **Mapbox** is a cartographic tool with customizable maps and navigation options: https://www.mapbox.com/
- **Windy.com** provides detailed weather forecasts, including wind speed and direction, especially useful for coastal hikes: https://www.windy.com/
- **AccuWeather** is a weather forecasting app with detailed information about conditions in specific locations: https://www.accuweather.com/
- **Yr.no** is a weather forecasting app from the Norwegian Meteorological Institute that offers accurate weather information: https://www.yr.no/
- **Tides** is an app providing information about tides, essential for hikes near water: https://tides.mobilegeographics.com/
- **Sun and Moon** is an app that shows sunrise and sunset times, helping to plan hikes according to the time of day: https://www.sunmoon.io/
- **Webcams** - local webcams provide real-time information about trail conditions and weather: http://eradio.lv/kameras/
- **Trello** is a project and task management tool that helps effectively organize the steps of hike planning: https://trello.com/

Appendixes

Appendix 1.

Chosen trail from baltictrails.eu : baltictrails.eu/sigulda_ligatne

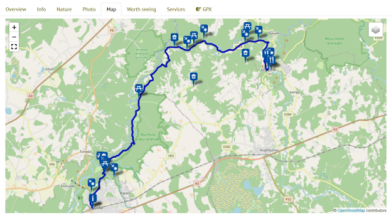


Photo of chosen trail Map

Appendix 2.

Activities from Pilot Hike

Photo form the meeting point *Photo from introduction, brief circle*

Photos of printed maps being used

Photo of students having a lunch break

Photo of the terrain and nature *Photo of the group leader Elīza*

Photo of the rest stop *Photo of nature education stop*

Photo of students hiking *Photo of students in the feedback circle*

Guidelines developed in 2024 by NGO "Movement Spontaneous" in collaboration with LLTA "Lauku Celotāji" and Laurencu Primary School as part of the European Union's INTERREG Estonia-Latvia program project "Forest and Coastal Hiking Trails' accessibility improvement for different social groups" No. (EE-LV00013). The pilot test for the self-guided hike was conducted on May 22, 2024.

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Topics include

1.Introduction
2. Basic Elements of Self-Guided Hike Planning
2.1 Route Analysis and Map Reading
2.2 Event Management Plan
2.3 Weather Forecasting and Equipment Selection
2.4 Meal and Activity Planning
3. Piloting
3.1 Hike with Laurenču School Students
3.2 Pilot Feedback and Improvements
4. Recommendations and Resources
4.1 Recommendations
4.2 Useful Resources

Accessible Hiking Guidelines for Foreigners and Cross-Cultural Social Groups

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https://docs.google.com/document/d/1djZnZCI47q6HqLtIG0KWjnC4FTupocYSdp0du4OFST8/edit?usp=sharing

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Estonia – Latvia

Accessible Hiking Guidelines for Foreigners and Cross-Cultural Social Groups

Tested with ~40 international participants on a pilot hike Lilaste-Carnikava, Latvia, 28.09.2024.

Within project "Accessible Hiking Trails"

By NGO "Movement Spontaneous"

Introduction

The **Accessible Hiking Trails** initiative aims to open up the natural landscapes of Latvia and Estonia to social groups of foreigners living temporarily in these countries. These groups include international students, international employees, refugees, and tourists. Through simple, accessible hikes this project promotes an inclusive environment where people from different cultural backgrounds can enjoy nature, connect with locals, and build new relationships.

These guidelines have been created to help **hiking organizers, service providers, NGOs, and local authorities** successfully plan and carry out hikes that are accessible to foreign participants. They provide practical, step-by-step instructions on how to:

- Engage and motivate international participants,
- Plan and lead inclusive and safe hikes,
- Overcome language barriers and cultural differences,
- Ensure all participants, regardless of their experience or knowledge of the local terrain, feel comfortable and welcome.

These guidelines will help you organize inclusive hikes that connect locals and foreigners, enriching the social and cultural environment of Latvia and Estonia. Whether you're experienced or new to leading hikes, you'll find tips for planning, preparation, participant engagement, and safety to create accessible, memorable experiences.

You can watch an educational film in addition to these guidelines - https://youtu.be/2rUJZgiUdcU .

1. Overview and Objective

- **Project Goal**: Make hiking accessible for foreigners living temporarily in Latvia or Estonia (students, workers, refugees, tourists) through simple, organized hikes.
- **Purpose**: Provide tourism organizers, NGOs, and hiking leaders with practical guidelines on how to engage international groups and ensure a fun and inclusive experience for all participants.

2. Identifying and Engaging Your Target Audience

- **Who to Engage**: Foreign students (e.g., Erasmus exchange students), international employees, refugees, tourists.
- **How to Engage**: Use social media platforms like Facebook Groups, Instagram, and WhatsApp (e.g., Erasmus Network) to promote your hike. Also ask local universities and NGO's to share information within their international audience. Influencers and content creators within the target group can be great promoters.
- **Key Motivators**:
  - Free participation and free food are key to attracting participants.
  - Good weather and a simple packing list will help avoid dropouts.
  - Keep hikes short and beginner-friendly (10-15 km is ideal).
  - Using international languages like English for advertising and communication will be more welcoming than relying on local languages.

3. Organizing the Hike

- **Planning**:
  - **Route**: Use tested and safe routes to avoid issues. Choose easy and short to medium length routes, 10-15 km is perfect for new hikers. Use websites such as Baltictrails.eu to find and download GPX files for the chosen route.(A GPX file is a standard file format used to store GPS data, such as routes, waypoints, and tracks. It's commonly used for outdoor activities like hiking or cycling, allowing users to share and follow pre-planned routes on GPS devices or apps.
  - **Group size**: Group size will depend on the popularity of the event and engagement of foreign communities. Make sure you create a registration form and also mention if there are any limits to the group size. Expect 50-80% of registered participants to show up. If the weather forecast is not favorable, expect a larger dropout rate. If numbers of the group exceed 50 people, make sure to contact the local municipality for approval and additional guidance.
  - **Pre-event communication**: Create a public event.

    1) Facebook is currently a great platform to create a public event, reaching a wide audience and attracting diverse participants. Ensure the event page is engaging and informative, with details about the hike's purpose, meeting point, schedule, and level of difficulty. Use accessible language, primarily in English, and add vibrant images of past hikes or the landscapes participants will experience to spark interest and excitement.

Figure 1, Example of a vibrant promotional photo

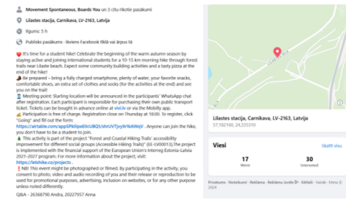


Figure 2, Example of the public Facebook event

2) Create a registration form, with questions / fields such as:

- Name and surname
- Phone nr. with country code (If you plan to create a WhatsApp group chat)
- E-mail (If you plan to send information via email)
- Your Nationality
- Instagram or other social media (if a participant wants to be tagged in the photos and videos)
- I accept that event will be photographed and filmed (Tick-Box)
- I acknowledge and accept that my data will be processed in accordance with applicable data protection regulations (Tick-Box)
- Please provide any relevant information, such as dietary preferences or accessibility requirements
- Space for comments or questions

3) Include a link to the hike's WhatsApp group to stay in touch with participants. Message practical info about the hike including transport departures, length of the hike, trail route, weather forecast packing list etc. If planning is done by a team of people consider creating a separate communication channel for organizers only.

4) Ensure you promote your event across various platforms, such as LinkedIn, interest groups, local community centers (via physical posters), and others, as some people may not use Meta products like Facebook, Instagram, or WhatsApp.

- **Roles and Responsibilities**:
  - **Team Leader:** Coordinates the hike, leads the group from the front, and manages communication, must be able to make quick and educated decisions to ensure the safety and enjoyment of all.
  - **Support Lead:** Helps guide the group during the hike and ensures that all necessary equipment (e.g. including at least three radios) is available for effective communication, assist with navigation, monitor the group's pace.
  - **Activity & Food Lead**: Manages food distribution (snacks or a light meal during the hike), coordinates with service providers or sponsors to deliver the food on site if necessary, and plans any extra activities (games, cultural exchanges).
  - **Trail End Coordinator:** Ensures that all participants are accounted for at the end of the hike and communicates with the Team Leader about the group's progress.
  - **Communication specialist**: Creates publicity for the event, answers frequently asked questions.

4. Communication and Inclusivity

- **Overcoming Language Barriers**: All information should be in English (or another widely spoken language), but some participants may still face language barriers. To ensure inclusivity, use visual aids like signs, symbols, and maps with clearly marked routes and important stops to help everyone follow along easily. Apps with GPS trail maps and added landmarks are an excellent solution for providing detailed, accessible information. If further assistance is needed, tools like Google Translate, Siri, or Microsoft Translator can offer real-time voice-to-text translations, ensuring effective communication throughout the hike.
- **Inclusivity**: Avoid separating foreigners from locals; mixed groups foster new connections and experiences.
- **Group Dynamics**:
  - **Introduction Circle**: At the start, have everyone say their name, where they're from, and what they expect from the hike. It breaks the ice and fosters cross-cultural exchanges.
  - **Tracking Participants**: Have a sign-in sheet at the start of the hike to ensure everyone is accounted for. Signing the sheet can also serve as confirmation that participants are responsible for their own safety and as consent for organizers to take photographs of them.
  - **Buddy System:** Pair participants up to foster interaction and ensure no one gets left behind during the hike, enhancing both social dynamics and safety.

- **Group Roles:** Assign specific roles like "Helper with Food," "Team Exercise Leader," or "Support Lead" to keep the group organized and to encourage teamwork.
- **Conversation Prompts:** Throughout the hike, suggest simple conversation topics to encourage discussions, such as asking about favorite hiking experiences or cultural differences.

5. Equipment and Packing List

- **Simple Gear**: Send a packing list ahead of time to participants. Essentials should include:
  - Comfortable walking shoes or hiking boots (suitable for coastal, forest, or uneven terrain)
  - Weather-appropriate clothing:
    - Waterproof jacket or poncho
    - Layers for warmth (sweater or a thermal shirt for colder days)
    - Light, breathable clothing for warmer weather
  - Sun protection:
    - Sunscreen
    - Hat or cap
    - Sunglasses
  - Hydration and snacks:
    - Water bottle (at least 1–2 liters, especially for longer hikes)
    - Energy-rich snacks (e.g., nuts, dried fruit, granola bars)
  - Comfortable backpack to carry essentials comfortably
  - Personal items:
    - Any necessary medications (especially for allergies or health conditions)
    - Basic first aid items (band-aids, blister pads)
- **Optional**:
  - Lightweight blanket or mat for resting
  - Trekking poles (for added stability on rough terrain)
  - Bug spray or repellent (particularly in forested areas)
  - Power bank for charging phone etc. (especially for longer hikes)
  - Camera or smartphone for photos
- **Additional Tip:** For those participants who don't own hiking gear, consider offering advice on affordable rental options or local stores where they can purchase essentials at reasonable prices.

  See an Example of a packing list in Appendix Nr. 10.

6. Food and Activities

- **Motivational Factor**: Food is a big motivator for foreigners and students with tight budgets. Offer free, simple food like sandwiches, fruit, snacks or meals that can be prepared by adding hot water (couscous, buckwheat flakes, corn flakes, pea flakes, potato porridge with milk powder and much more)

[see Appendix 10]. Try to include dietary options to cater to various preferences (vegetarian, lactose free, halal, etc.).

- **Where to Eat**: Plan to stop for lunch midway through the hike. It gives participants a chance to rest and socialize. Benches or dry wood logs will be suitable for sitting, but if there are none on the way, you can ask participants to bring sitting pads.
- **Introduction circle:** Takes place at the beginning of the hike and serves as an icebreaker for participants to meet each other. The Team Leader initiates the conversation by gathering everyone into a physical circle and posing introductory questions. They also outline the day's agenda, including when breaks will occur. A useful tip is for the Team Leader to use a megaphone to ensure everyone can hear each other clearly.
- **Team-building exercises:** Promote collaboration and enhance connections among participants. Activities can include fun challenges along the way that require teamwork, encouraging communication and interaction. Additionally, shared meal preparation, such as cooking together over a fire, or a sauna break, fosters a friendly atmosphere and strengthens relationships among group members.
- **Feedback circle:** Occurs at the end of the hike, providing participants with an opportunity to reflect on their experience. The Team Leader leads this session by gathering everyone into a circle again and encouraging each person to share what they enjoyed the most. They also outline any next steps or plans for future hikes. Again, having a megaphone is beneficial.

7. Transport and Service Availability

- **Logistics:** Provide clear transportation details well in advance, including public transport routes, schedules, and the exact address of the main transport hub (e.g., train station or bus station). Be sure to clearly specify where participants should meet at the start of the hike and the time to gather. Finding the right place can be very frustrating for those who are not familiar with the local transportation system and language.
- **Transport and Schedule:** Share links to local transportation schedules for Latvia and Estonia. Baltictrails.eu provides a comprehensive summary of available routes and schedules for hikers, covering all types of transportation, including air, car, bus, and train, specifically tailored for the Baltic region: Baltic Coastal Hiking: Getting there & around and Baltic Forest Hiking: Getting there & around.
- **Accommodation:** If the hike is longer or involves multiple days, it's important to inform participants about nearby accommodation options. Hiker-friendly accommodations are often available along the Baltic Trails route. This label is awarded to service providers in the Baltic States that cater specifically to hikers by offering relevant services and amenities. This label is not tied to any specific pathway or route. Find more details about hiker-friendly accommodations here: Hiker - friendly Sign: Meaning and Hiker - friendly Accommodation: Providers list .
- **Cancellations:** In the event of a cancellation (e.g., due to severe weather), inform participants as early as possible. However, we advise against canceling for mild bad weather; instead, provide free raincoats or encourage participants to bring appropriate clothing. Ask all participants to notify you if they can't attend. Knowing the exact number of attendees helps organizers better plan activities and meals.

8. Safety and Risks

- **Local Hazards**: Provide brief information on local flora/fauna if participants are unfamiliar with them (e.g., ticks, mosquitos, stinging plants).

9. Post-Hike Feedback and Follow-Up

- **Gathering Feedback**: Use a simple questionnaire or poll to gather feedback on the hike's organization, inclusivity, and participant satisfaction.
- **Data gathering:** With previous consent from the questionnaire, record data from the participants (the number that registered vs the number that actually showed up, their nationalities, etc.) to evaluate the success of each event and identify areas for improvement in future hikes.
- **Communication:** Use the participants' chat in e-mail list to inform them about upcoming events, share photos, and provide feedback. Be sure to keep the chat focused and avoid sending spam messages.

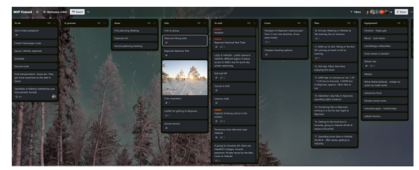
10. Additional Tips

- **Adapt to Group Size**: For larger groups (over 50), check with the municipality for permits and have atleast 3 persons guiding the goup, one in the front, one in the middle and one in the back. For smaller groups 1-2 guides are sufficient.
- **Cultural Exchange**: Plan additional activities (e.g., cultural storytelling, games) that encourage participants to share their backgrounds. You can do interviews to better know the participants, you can ask questions such as
- **Be Flexible**: Hiking may take longer than expected, especially if the group is large and diverse in skill level. Plan for extra time. Better promise that the event will be longer, rather than squeezing everything in only a few hours.

Appendices

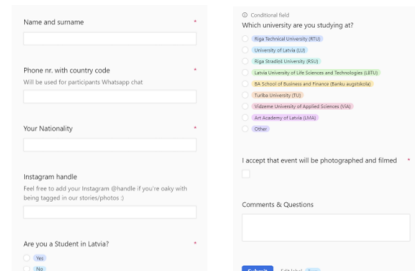
1. **Trello Board for planning a hike and event management**

Screenshot of an example Trello board for planning a hike in Finland.



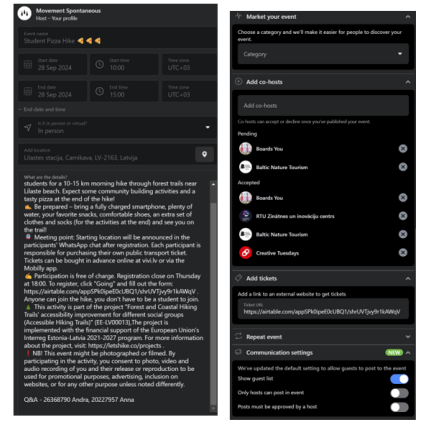
2. **Sample Registration Form**

Screenshot of the Student Pizza Hike event registration form made in airtable.com



3. **Creation of a Facebook event or other public event platform**

Screenshot of making a Facebook event. Some tips for creating events are adding co-hosts, setting clear location and time, adding registration link, and organizing content into themed paragraphs with visual aids like emojis. Also, consider other platforms beyond Facebook for event promotion.



4. **Promotional Channels and Posts**

Example of a promotional post shared by RTU International Student Department on Instagram.

Topics include

Introduction
1. Overview and Objective
2. Identifying and Engaging Your Target Audience
3. Organizing the Hike
4. Communication and Inclusivity
5. Equipment and Packing List
7. Transport and Service Availability
8. Safety and Risks
9. Post-Hike Feedback and Follow-Up
10. Additional Tips
Appedix

ONLINE TOOL GUIDELINES

Practical hints for hikers on how to use the online solutions (weather stations, web cameras, and platforms etc.) for planning a safe hike. (Draft - https://docs.google.com/document/d/1djZnZCI47q6HqLtIG0KWjnC4FTupocYSdp0du4OFST8/edit?tab=t.0#heading=h.69j8v362ynpw)

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Accessible Hiking Guidelines for using Online Tools, 2025

Within project "Accessible Hiking Trails"

By NGO "Movement Spontaneous"

Introduction

The Accessible Hiking Trails initiative aims to enhance hiking safety and accessibility by using online tools and digital solutions. Digital platforms provide real-time information, improve route planning, and ensure safe navigation in diverse terrains and weather conditions.

These guidelines **help hikers, tourism organizers, and outdoor groups** integrate digital resources into their hiking experience, covering:

- Weather forecasts and emergency alerts.
- GPS tracking and navigation apps.
- Digital trail databases and community platforms.
- Real-time information from webcams and local reports.
- Online tools for group coordination and communication.

By using these solutions, hikers can **avoid risks, improve preparation, and enjoy safer, more inclusive hikes.**

1. Packing and Equipment with Digital Support

Carrying the right gear is crucial for comfort and safety. Online resources help organize packing lists, find gear recommendations, and avoid overpacking or missing essentials.

Best Online Packing List Tools

- Interactive Checklists:
  - ✅ **Trello Boards** – A project management tool that helps organize hiking plans, gear lists, and trip details with customizable boards. **How to use:** Create a board, add checklists, and track progress. https://trello.com/
  - ✅ **PackPoint** – A packing list app that suggests what to bring based on your destination, weather, and activities. **How to use:** Enter your trip details, and it generates a customized list. https://www.packpnt.com/
  - ✅ **Trail Wallet** – A budgeting app for tracking hiking and travel expenses. **How to use:** Add expenses manually and categorize them for budgeting. http://trailwallet.io/

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  - ✅ **LighterPack** – A minimalist packing list tool that helps hikers track the weight of their gear. **How to use:** Add items to your list, and it calculates the approximate total pack weight. https://lighterpack.com/
- Hiking Gear Reviews: YouTube channels, outdoor blogs, Reddit forums.
- Rental and Second-Hand Gear Platforms:
  - ✅ **Facebook Marketplace & Local Outdoor Rental Services** – Platforms for buying, selling, or renting hiking gear. **How to use:** Search for hiking equipment in your area, filter results, and contact sellers or renters. https://www.facebook.com/marketplace/
  - ✅ **Local Outdoor Rental Services** – Platforms that allow hikers to rent outdoor gear instead of purchasing it, making hiking more accessible and cost-effective. How to use: Visit the website, browse available gear, check rental terms, and book equipment for your hike. Gandes in Latvia, Hiking in Estonia

Practical Tips

- Use a digital checklist to avoid forgetting essentials.
- Check weather-based packing recommendations in apps to adjust gear.
- Find gear rental options online if you lack equipment.

Basic Digital Packing List

- Navigation: Smartphone or smart watch with GPS apps, power bank, printed backup map.
- Weather Protection: Waterproof jacket, layered clothing, UV protection.
- Safety Gear: First aid kit, whistle, flashlight, emergency blanket.
- Food & Water: Lightweight, energy-rich snacks, at least 2L of water, portable water filter.
- Emergency Items: Multi-tool, duct tape, fire starter, backup batteries.

2. Weather Conditions

Weather conditions significantly affect hiking safety. Sudden storms, temperature drops, or fog can make trails dangerous or impassable. Online weather tools help hikers plan accordingly and avoid hazardous situations.

Best Online Tools for Weather Monitoring

- ✅ **National Weather Websites** – Official sources for country-specific weather forecasts and alerts. **How to use:** Search for your country's weather service and check conditions before your hike. https://videscentrs.lvgmc.lv/ for Latvia, https://www.ilmateenistus.ee/ for Estonia.
- ✅ **Global Forecast Apps:**
  - **Windy** – A detailed weather map with wind, precipitation, and temperature data. **How to use:** Search your location, view real-time maps. https://www.windy.com/
  - **MeteoBlue** – Forecasting app with weather models for hiking. **How to use:** Enter a location and check short/long-term forecasts. https://www.meteoblue.com/
  - **Yr.no** – Norwegian weather service with global forecasts. **How to use:** Search your location for weather updates. https://www.yr.no/en
  - **AccuWeather** – A weather app providing localized forecasts and severe weather alerts. How to use: Check your location's current and future weather. https://www.accuweather.com/

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  - ✅ **Tides** – An app providing tide forecasts and water level data, essential for coastal hiking and planning around tidal changes. How to use: Select a location to view tide charts, high and low tide times, and real-time water conditions. Tides
  - ✅ **Sun and Moon** – A tool for tracking sunrise, sunset, moon phases, and daylight duration, useful for planning hikes with optimal lighting. How to use: Enter your location to see solar and lunar data, including golden hour and moonrise times. Sun and Moon
- ✅ **Real-Time Alerts** – Local emergency services and government alert systems providing weather warnings. **How to use:** Enable notifications from national authorities for real-time updates.

What to Check Before the Hike

- Temperature, wind speed, precipitation, storm warnings.
- Long-term vs. short-term forecasts and their reliability.
- Interpreting weather data: How to read radar maps, precipitation charts, and wind forecasts.

Practical Tips

- Check multiple sources for accuracy before the hike.
- Use alerts and notifications for sudden weather changes.
- Plan alternative routes in case of adverse conditions.

3. Web Cameras for Real-Time Trail Conditions

Web cameras provide real-time visual updates on trail conditions, visibility, and congestion. This information is especially useful for determining whether a trail is safe and accessible before setting out

Where to Find Them

- ✅ **National Parks, Ski Resorts, and Nature Reserves** – Many official park websites offer live webcams covering popular hiking areas, helping hikers check real-time trail conditions. **How to use:** Visit the official website, select a webcam location, and view live images to assess weather, visibility, and trail congestion. Latvia: eRadio Webcams , Estonia
- ✅ **Local Road Cameras** – Online road cameras help check real-time road conditions before departure, ensuring safe access to trailheads, especially in snowy or rainy seasons. **How to use:** Visit the official road authority website, select a camera location near your route, and review live footage for weather and traffic conditions. Latvian State Roads Cameras , Estonian Road Cameras
- ✅ **Community-Shared Camera Feeds** – Platforms like Windy and hiking forums provide access to live webcam feeds for lesser-known trails, helping hikers assess conditions before setting out. **How to use:** Visit the website, search for your desired location, and view available live camera feeds. www.windy.com/-Webcam

Consider limitations such as delays in updates - some webcam images may not refresh frequently, so always double-check timestamps. It is also recommended to cross-reference webcam visuals with weather forecasts to get a more accurate and complete picture of current conditions.

4. Navigational Tools with GPS

Getting lost or misjudging the terrain is a common risk. GPS tools ensure safe navigation, prevent detours, and help track progress.

Best Online Navigation Tools

- Hiking Route (GPX file) Databases:

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  - ✅ **Baltictrails.eu** – A website providing official Baltic hiking trail maps and information. **How to use:** Browse trail routes, download maps. https://balticrtrails.eu/
  - ✅ **Komoot** – A hiking and biking route planner with offline maps. **How to use:** Plan a route, download maps for offline use, and track your progress. https://www.komoot.com/
  - ✅ **AllTrails** – A database of hiking routes with user reviews and GPS tracking. **How to use:** Search for specific trails, download GPX file, and track your hike. https://www.alltrails.com/
- GPS Navigation Apps:
  - ✅ **Strava** – A fitness tracking app that allows hikers, runners, and cyclists to record their routes, monitor performance, and share achievements with others. **How to use:** Download the app, start recording your hike, and track your distance, elevation, and time. You can also analyze stats and share your routes with the Strava community. https://www.strava.com/
  - ✅ **Google MyMaps** – A tool for creating custom hiking maps. **How to use:** Mark waypoints, add notes, and share your route. https://www.google.com/mymaps
  - ✅ **Outdoor Active** – A navigation app with hiking, biking, and outdoor sports maps. **How to use:** Plan and follow GPS routes. https://www.outdooractive.com/
  - ✅ **Locus Map** – A GPS mapping app for offline navigation and live tracking. **How to use:** Download maps, track routes, and record hikes. https://www.locusmap.app/
  - ✅ **Mapbox** – A customizable mapping platform for navigation apps. **How to use:** Developers can integrate maps into their hiking applications. https://www.mapbox.com/
  - ✅ **Maps.me** – An offline map app for detailed hiking trails and city navigation. **How to use:** Download maps for offline use and navigate without internet. https://maps.me/

Practical Tips

- Download GPX file maps beforehand to use them offline in case of weak signal areas.
- Use live tracking to share location with a trusted contact.
- Mark waypoints such as water sources or shelters for safety.

5. Platforms for Trail Updates

Trail conditions change due to weather, maintenance, or natural hazards. Checking online updates reduces risks and helps in planning.

Best Online Resources for Trail Updates

- Webcams: Live views from national parks or hiking areas.
- Hiker Communities: Facebook Groups, Reddit, local forums.
- National Park and Tourism Websites: Official updates on closures, permits, and advisories.
- Apps with hiker-reported issues: Komoot.

Practical Tips

- Check webcams before leaving to assess trail visibility.

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- Join local hiker groups for real-time reports.
- Report hazardous conditions to help other hikers.

6. Communication and Safety

Staying connected is essential, especially in remote areas. Online communication tools help groups stay organized, share updates, and respond to emergencies.

Best Online Communication Tools

- Group Chats: ✅ **WhatsApp, Telegram, Signal** – Messaging apps for group coordination before and during hikes. How to use: Create a group chat, share updates, and enable location sharing. Whatsapp , Telegram , Signal .
- Event Coordination:
  - ✅ **Facebook Events** – A tool for organizing hiking events and inviting participants. **How to use:** Create an event, set details, and invite hikers. https://www.facebook.com/events/
  - ✅ **Google Forms, Airtable** – Tools for collecting hiker preferences and organizing group details. **How to use:** Create a form to gather participant info or use Airtable to track plans. Google Forms: https://forms.google.com/ , Airtable: https://www.airtable.com/
- Emergency Location Tools:
  - ✅ **What3Words** – A location tool that assigns three-word addresses to every spot on Earth. **How to use:** Enter a three-word code to find or share an exact location. https://what3words.com/
  - ✅ **Google SOS Alerts** – Emergency notifications for disasters, road closures, and extreme weather. **How to use:** Enable notifications to receive alerts. https://www.google.org/crisisresponse/
  - Offline GPS trackers

Practical Tips

- Create an online group chat for hike details, updates, and emergency contacts.
- Use online registration form for participant registration and preferences.
- Share real-time location using GPS apps.
- Save emergency numbers in your phone before the hike.
- Carry a power bank to keep devices charged.

7. Post-Hike Feedback and Data Tracking

Recording hike details helps improve future experiences and builds a hiking community.

Best Digital Feedback Tools

- Surveys: Google Forms, Airtable, Typeform.
- Route & Performance Tracking: Strava, Komoot, Google Sheets.
- Community Sharing: Facebook groups, hiking blogs, Instagram.

Practical Tips

- Create a post-hike survey to improve future events.

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- Share trail insights on hiking forums.
- Analyze participation trends using Google Sheets or Strava analytics.

8. Final Safety Checklist

✅ **Preparation:** Trello Boards, Google documents

✅ **Weather Apps:** Windy, Yr.no, AccuWeather, Tides, Sun and Moon.

✅ **Webcams:** National park webcams, road cameras.

✅ **Navigation Apps:** Strava, Google MyMaps, Outdoor Active, Komoot, Locus Map, Map box, Maps.me.

✅ **Emergency Services:** What3Words, Google SOS Alerts.

✅ **Communication:** WhatsApp, Signal, Telegram.

✅ **Trail Updates:** National park websites, Komoot, hiker forums.

Summary

Online tools have significantly enhanced hiking safety by providing essential information on weather, trail conditions, and navigation. By integrating these resources into their preparation, hikers can mitigate risks and maximize their outdoor adventures.

However, no digital tool can replace good judgment and preparedness. **Always carry essential gear, inform someone of your plans, and be ready to adapt if conditions change.** With the right combination of technology and common sense, hikers can safely explore the great outdoors with confidence.

Guidelines developed in 2025 by NGO "Movement Spontaneous" as part of the European Union's INTERREG Estonia-Latvia program project "Forest and Coastal Hiking Trails' accessibility improvement for different social groups" No. (EE-LV00013).

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Topics include

Introduction
1. Packing and Equipment with Digital Support
2. Weather Conditions
3. Web Cameras for Real-Time Trail Conditions
4. Navigational Tools with GPS
5. Platforms for Trail Updates
6. Communication and Safety
7. Post-Hike Feedback and Data Tracking
8. Final Safety Checklist

Next steps - Partners invited to organize hikes and test according to our methods

- RTU International Students departament - Cross Cultural groups [April/May 2025]
- Riga Student Council – School-aged youth [TBC]

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This activity is supported as part of project "Forest and Coastal Hiking Trails' accessibility improvement for different social groups" (EE-LV00013), an Interreg Estonia-Latvia programme 2021-2027, co-funded by the European Union.
This presentation reflects the views of the author. The managing authority of the programme is not liable for how this information may be used.