

# Inclusive Mobility Alliance

## *Recommendations on making the Erasmus programme 2021-2027 more inclusive*

<b>Introduction and context</b>	1
<b>General recommendations targeted to all relevant stakeholders (EC, EACEA, NAs, Governments, HEIs, NGOs, Youth Workers, beneficiaries, ...)</b>	5
RECOMMENDATION 1: Training and capacity building on inclusion for Staff members (EC, EACEA, NAs, HEIs and Youth Workers) is crucial	5
RECOMMENDATION 2: Improving outreach and diverse communication through co-design and co-delivery	6
RECOMMENDATION 3: Providing an accessible centralised online platform on Inclusive Mobility	7
<b>Recommendations for the European Institutions / European level</b>	7
RECOMMENDATION 4: Updating the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education	8
RECOMMENDATION 5: Creating a taskforce on Social Inclusion in Erasmus+	8
RECOMMENDATION 6: Recognising champions of inclusion in Erasmus+	8
RECOMMENDATION 7: Ensuring clarity, transparency and flexibility for special needs costs	8
<b>Recommendations for the National level / National Agencies for Erasmus+ / Governments</b>	10
RECOMMENDATION 8: Creating an “Inclusive Office”, a support unit for access needs in Erasmus+	10
RECOMMENDATION 9: Improving clarity on finances and special needs costs	11
RECOMMENDATION 10: Allowing portability of grants and support services	12
<b>Recommendations for host and sending organisations (HEIs, Civil Society Organisations, etc.) and beneficiaries (staff, students, learners, young people, etc.)</b>	13
RECOMMENDATION 11: Improving partnerships and bilateral agreements	13
RECOMMENDATION 12: Providing inclusive communication	13
RECOMMENDATION 13: Involving Disability Officers in Erasmus+	13
RECOMMENDATION 14: Creating of a Peer-Support network	14
RECOMMENDATION 15: Fostering the use of Assistive Technologies and Universal Design	14
RECOMMENDATION 16: Enhancing IRO-DO collaboration within HEIs	14
RECOMMENDATION 17: Ensuring basic support systems are offered	14

## Introduction and context

While the overall number of young people and students experiencing Erasmus+ exchanges are increasing rapidly, the number of students and young people with disabilities taking part in Erasmus+ has been almost stagnating over the past few years. According to the official LLP Erasmus and Erasmus+ results:

- the number of Youth mobilities who registered as Special Needs beneficiaries between 2014 and 2016 is oscillating between 2729 and 4164 for a percentage of the total Youth mobilities on the same period oscillating between 1.80% and 2.77%.
- the number of Higher Education students (both studies and traineeships) who requested the special needs support in 2009-2010 are 257 for a percentage of 0.12%. They are between 2014 and 2016 oscillating between 323 and 412 for a percentage oscillating between 0.13% to 0.17%.

These recommendations were produced between September 2018 and January 2019 by the Inclusive Mobility Alliance (IMA) member organisations, during two training events using Non-Formal Education methodologies, and finalised through online consultations and online participation. Although these recommendations were produced mainly with the Higher Education and Youth fields of Erasmus+ in mind, they are highly transferable to the School sector, adult and VET sector, as well as other programmes and mobility schemes (e.g. European Solidarity Corps, traineeships etc.).

The Inclusive Mobility Alliance (IMA) is [an alliance of 21 organisations and European networks](#), representing three different fields: Higher Education mobility, Youth mobility and Disability. As stated in the Inclusive Mobility Alliance Declaration, the IMA partners stand for full inclusion in mobility and an inclusive Erasmus+ programme.

### What Inclusion and Inclusive Mobility mean to IMA:

**Inclusion** means awareness and acceptance of differences, acceptance of everybody, full participation in all activities, representation in decision-making, accessibility in infrastructure, access to up to date information, relevant information.

**“Inclusive Mobility”** means creating and ensuring adequate conditions to learn, work or volunteer abroad for people with fewer opportunities, by addressing their diverse support needs. It is a needs-based approach to what the individual beneficiary needs to ensure a safe and exciting mobility period abroad. It is important to not generalise needs, needs are specific and the individualised aspect in it is highly important. What the person/beneficiary says they need is what they should receive.

Examples of needs before a mobility: accessible information, communication between actors, respectful procedures, support in the application process, encouraging mobility (positive activities/incentives).

Examples of needs during a mobility: support services for diverse needs, tools to become independent, access to accommodation, health care, leisure etc., accessible learning conditions and portals.

Examples of needs after a mobility: feedback forms, accessible/clear assessment tools, evaluation of inclusivity, reintegration support.

Some of the key words we identified that we think summarizes the core elements of an “Inclusive Mobility” are:

- Fair and equal access to the Erasmus+ programme
- Accessibility and accessible information
- Clarity
- Individualised support
- Independence for the person who goes abroad
- A better approach to assessment and understanding of needs
- Evaluation and monitoring
- Informing / training / awareness raising
- A universal design for learning that includes everyone
- Effective means of communication and structures to solve problems related to access and inclusion

It is not only about academic mobility but also about the social aspects that plays an important role in the experience abroad and the potential link to connect with the local community. We believe it is important to create awareness, to **educate and train those who work with mobility to know how to work in an inclusive way.**

### Definition of disability

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) recognises that ‘disability is an evolving concept. Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. It results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others”.

### For further reading

- [UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities \(UNCRPD\)](#)
- [European Youth Forum paper on Social Inclusion and Young people](#)
- [European Pillar of Social Rights](#)
- [European Platform on Learning Mobility \(EPLM\) Quality Mobility handbook](#)

### List of abbreviations

DO: Disability Office(r)

EACEA: Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency

EC: European Commission

ECHE: Erasmus Charter for Higher Education

EP: European Parliament

ESF: European Social Fund

HEI: Higher Education Institution

IMA: Inclusive Mobility Alliance

IRO: International Relations Office(r)

LLP: Lifelong Learning Programme

NA: National Agency for Erasmus+

NGO: Non-Governmental Organisations

SALTO-Youth: Support, Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities for Youth

SMP: Supportive Mobility Plan

VET: Vocational Education and Training

## General recommendations targeted to all relevant stakeholders (EC, EACEA, NAs, Governments, HEIs, NGOs, Youth Workers, beneficiaries, ...)

### RECOMMENDATION 1: Training and capacity building on inclusion for Staff members (EC, EACEA, NAs, HEIs and Youth Workers) is crucial

The Inclusive Mobility Alliance (IMA) believes it is essential to identify further the needs **of all** staff within institutions / organisations working with mobilities and mobility projects, with the aim of building the capacity and competences necessary to enhance inclusion. With the support of Erasmus+ self-evaluation tool a mapping out of the needs of key stakeholders (European Commission, National Agencies, institutions and organisations, former and current participants), should be carried out to identify the strengths and weaknesses of practices in Erasmus+ with particular emphasis on inclusivity. Training co-created and co-designed with organisations and experts in the disability field should be provided based on identified needs and in different areas. For example:

- **Programme managers and administrative officers** working on the direct implementation of the Erasmus+ programme would benefit highly from training on the inclusion aspects in Erasmus+, as would **Communication staff** at all levels. (see recommendation 2).
- How to write and include an inclusion component in Erasmus+ projects should not only be a part of the basic information sessions on Erasmus+, but specific training should be provided by the National Agency (through an “Inclusive Office”, see recommendation 8) to **potential project leaders and organisations**.
- **Project evaluators** should be trained on the aspects of inclusion in order to better assess and recognise good practices and potential risks related to inclusion or lack of inclusive methodologies.

In order to achieve full inclusion in Erasmus+, all stakeholders involved need to be trained, including but not limited to: EC staff and subcontractors, NAs staff and subcontractors, HEIs staff, NGOs staff, Trainers and Youth Workers, etc.

## **RECOMMENDATION 2: Improving outreach and diverse communication through co-design and co-delivery**

Outreach is very important for Erasmus+ in order to make sure all the opportunities are known and that they reach a wide target group. As already stressed in the [MappED! recommendations](#) (2017) and in the [mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme](#) (2017), we urge the European Commission and National Agencies to invest in the training of **staff members in charge of communication and outreach**, to learn more about inclusive online and offline communication, through co-delivery with experts in the field.

IMA believes that there needs to be more diversity in the provision of accessible information on Erasmus+ and a more diverse range of testimonials when advertising for opportunities for Erasmus+ in order to better target different groups (e.g. youth and students with disabilities). It is important to ensure that the promotional material is inclusive by co-designing it and co-producing it with the support of the programme beneficiaries, organisations and experts in the field.

All information should be inclusive/accessible and should be widely distributed and made available in all centres supporting persons with different needs. For example, making braille or large print available for blind or partially sighted people or creating sign language translation videos for completely deaf or partially deaf people. Thus, by doing so, NA's will be encouraged to market Erasmus+ opportunities outside of the 'usual' institutions, such as schools and youth centres in order to reach those who aren't able to attend mainstream services, possibly because of their specific support need. These could be in youth hospitals, community health centres, libraries and more.

When recruiting and subcontracting (as it is often done communication on European programmes), inclusion factors/indicators should be a criteria in the evaluation of applications/bids (European Commission, NAs, etc.).

### **RECOMMENDATION 3: Providing an accessible centralised online platform on Inclusive Mobility**

There is a need for a centralised accessible platform where everything is to be found about Inclusive Mobility, targeting the needs of youth and students with disabilities, youth workers, HEIs, National Agencies and National authorities.

This platform would be targeted at beneficiaries of the programme, individuals as well as organisations and educational institutions. This platform could also include a forum where one can chat with peers, find videos and other accessible content that is easy to read and easy to use. This platform could also provide an extensive list of all ‘disabilities’ organisations across Europe, locally, nationally and internationally, stating how they can help and what their support could be.

We urge the European Commission to foster and incentivise the creation of such a platform (through a tender or a specific priority in the next centralised calls for proposals). The platform should be co-created and co-designed by NGOs, users and experts in the fields. Such a platform needs to be fully accessible and translated in all official EU languages.

IMA acknowledges that the [MappED! platform](#) is a good starting point with its map of accessibility of European Universities and Infocenter, where beneficiaries can find already a lot of information. But it needs to be further developed, updated and elaborated to reach its full potential and target the needs of all stakeholders.

Funding for updating and upgrading and hosting/maintenance of the platform should be included in the Erasmus funding framework.

# Recommendations for the European Institutions / European level

## **RECOMMENDATION 4: Updating the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education**

There should be a section in the Erasmus Student Charter and the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE) addressing the aim of an accessible and inclusive approach and the responsibilities that institutions have to assume when it comes to being accessible. It should become mandatory that ECHE holders transparently communicate about the accessibility and inclusiveness of their HEI and campuses (e.g. by keeping their profile updated on the MappED! platform).

Also, a certain number of student representatives from diverse backgrounds should be mandatorily added to the different working groups, and especially the ECHE working group.

## **RECOMMENDATION 5: Creating a taskforce on Social Inclusion in Erasmus+**

The European Commission should create a task force on Social Inclusion in Erasmus+ involving civil society organisations (including organisations of people with disabilities), to make sure that different inputs are taken into account in relation to making the programme more inclusive.

## **RECOMMENDATION 6: Recognising champions of inclusion in Erasmus+**

IMA recommends recognising champions in the field of inclusion and inclusive mobility, and host a yearly award where best practices are shared and awarded for their inclusive measures in the different Key Actions of Erasmus+.

## **RECOMMENDATION 7: Ensuring clarity, transparency and flexibility for special needs costs**

Although there is funding available through the Erasmus+ for access needs, the IMA partners have seen in many cases that it is not sufficient or not always distributed in the most inclusive way. There is also confusion about the source of funding (is it Erasmus+ or ESF) and at times extra local sources of funding exist however these are not specifically for Erasmus+ beneficiaries. In addition, there is a lack of clarity in how the funding can be used and who carries the responsibility to support with funding. IMA therefore recommends that:

- There is a specific paragraph in the Programme Guide dedicated to the special needs costs. The current structure is unclear and especially in cases where unforeseen expenses such as equipment and services have to be financed. IMA identified the programme guide as the most essential document because it is used by the National Agencies and Erasmus offices, public and can be accessed by everyone. The paragraph in the Programme Guide should explain:
  - What the budget line can be used for.
  - Who is eligible to apply.
  - What possibilities there are in amending the budget line.
- The European Commission and NAs create a more inclusive financial support calculation framework that allows for flexibility in supporting beneficiaries with one or several needs and disabilities.
- Design a budget template that automatically includes an “inclusion budget line”. Such a budget line would be by default connected to the goal/benchmark of how many beneficiaries with disabilities or other support needs a member state wants to go abroad that year. A certain percentage of the Erasmus+ budget should be automatically allocated for supplementary grants to every Erasmus+ project. The “inclusion budget line” default number should be considered as a minimum threshold and applicants should be able to aim higher and raise the percentage if need be.
- Encourage a strategy for inclusion and involvement for all NAs managing the Erasmus+ programme, where sufficient budget is allocated for co-creation and co-design with relevant NGOs, participants and experts in the field.
- In the reporting of the Erasmus+ programme, include a financial reporting where NAs declare how many applied for the supplementary grant, how many did get it and how many did not, as well as what were the most common reasons for not getting the supplementary grants. This will give more transparency and opportunity to monitor how the programme improves.
- At the reporting stage of the programme, IMA believes it would serve a great value for research, institutions and civil society to make public the data on what the special needs budget has been used for, how it has been distributed and how this improved the programme.

# Recommendations for the National level / National Agencies for Erasmus+ / Governments

## RECOMMENDATION 8: Creating an “Inclusive Office”, a support unit for access needs in Erasmus+

The provision of access services and support in international mobility and Erasmus+ is not always as easy as it may seem. Often insufficiently trained staff, unclear guidelines and vague structures result in neither sending nor host organisation/institution taking the responsibility that at times is required. The IMA partners propose to work with current structures to establish a specific unit/office in every National Agency dedicated to inclusion matters. In complementarity to SALTO Inclusion coordinators that work specifically within the National Agencies for Erasmus+ Youth, our recommendation is to make a broader unit/office that also includes technical expertise. The National Agency inclusion unit/office would fulfill the following functions:

- Have expertise on different forms of access support provided by Erasmus+ and by the institutions/organisations/government in the sending country. This requires knowledge about legal and socio-economic frameworks in the country and at international level.
- Have a list or pool of suggested interpreters, assistants and guides to support organisations and individuals.
- Be in charge of calculating how the supplementary grant (e.g. special needs) is distributed to youth/students with disabilities and organisations applying for grants.
  - The host country should be involved in the calculation of needs, or something similar to a “living costs chart” or “needs cost chart” should be produced by each participating country to facilitate the calculations
  - The calculation of extra costs should be done in collaboration with the person asking for supplementary grant.
  - Establish guidelines to support the work of the officers who calculate. Perhaps create a digital online tool for it.
  
- Maintain contact and consultations with local/national authorities and organisations specialised in the relevant fields. (E.g. Disability, LGBTQI+, cultural exchange, etc.)

- Provide advice and training within the National Agency, that is co-created and co-designed with organisations, participants and experts in the disability and education/youth fields, to create better understanding, awareness, and expertise on different areas of inclusivity. By doing so, applications will be assessed and communication campaigns and services will be designed - from the start - with an inclusive point of view.
- Provide advice and training to relevant institutions outside of the National Agency (HEIs, host and sending organisations, evaluators, etc.) for the same purpose as listed in the previous point. The work done by SALTO in this aspect in the Youth field should be emphasised and increased. And a similar initiative should exist for Higher Education.
- Feedback and complaint mechanisms should be coordinated by National Agencies, through another office or service, and with the support of the intermediary institutions/organisations (HEI/NGO). It should be clear for beneficiaries where to go and how to get their problem solved.

### **RECOMMENDATION 9: Improving clarity on finances and special needs costs**

IMA recommends the NAs - in collaboration with their Ministries and other National authorities - to provide a clear overview of financial streams for support available in each country/region and guidelines of how to apply and combine support funding and services. In order to ensure this, training should be provided to NAs, civil society organisations and institutions to know how to advise beneficiaries about these funding opportunities.

Assistance for planning budget should be provided and it should take into account support specified on support needs and costs of living in different countries. In addition, there should be easy, accessible and transparent procedures for how to apply to or claim financial support, this support would encourage many more to seek Erasmus+ opportunities.

As access costs can be high, receiving advance payments for support should be mandatory, rather than having to ask for a refund.

## **RECOMMENDATION 10: Allowing portability of grants and support services**

IMA urges Erasmus+ participating countries to provide an opportunity to transfer support so that participants of the programme can still benefit from grants and (access to) support (services) from their home countries when abroad.

There should be an EU level agreement where governments agree to allow this transfer of benefit and support for access needs. If not, grant beneficiaries should have the opportunity to benefit from local support schemes. These local support schemes should be easily accessible for those who are not permanent residents, perhaps through EU student card or the EU disability card.



## **Recommendations for host and sending organisations (HEIs, Civil Society Organisations, etc.) and beneficiaries (staff, students, learners, young people, etc.)**

### **RECOMMENDATION 11: Improving partnerships and bilateral agreements**

A disability clause should be added to the bilateral agreements signed between the home and host HEI. Disability should be mainstreamed in the bilateral agreements signed between the home and host university, in particular the hosting university should undertake to meet the educational and support needs of students with disabilities and support them in finding an accessible accommodation according to the students' needs. By doing so, contacts between the two offices can be accessed easily and transparently. When partnerships are being made/updated, they should collect information about accessibility services of the host/home institution. This information should be included in the information packs to benefiting students and staff. Also, information about the NA and about disability organisations in the host country should be added or made available.

### **RECOMMENDATION 12: Providing inclusive communication**

Information made available should be needs-based, clear, user-friendly and understandable for the intended beneficiaries (young people, students). The content needs to be accessible to people with disabilities (subtitling of video messages, audio description of video messages, graphic information should be captioned or transcribed in text, etc.). Easy-to-read versions for persons with intellectual disabilities should also be produced. Beneficiaries (young people and students with disabilities in this case) should be involved in the process of designing the information.

### **RECOMMENDATION 13: Involving Disability Officers in Erasmus+**

We recommend the creation of projects aimed at creating staff mobilities or job shadowing opportunities for Disability Officers to take a mobility abroad using the staff mobility budget available under Erasmus+, to experience the added value of an international mobility directly. Through doing job shadowing with their peers abroad, they will also be able to develop their skills and knowledge, as well as enhance and broaden their professional networks. The creation of a European network of Disability Officers should also be envisaged.

## **RECOMMENDATION 14: Creating of a Peer-Support network**

International Exchange Officers, Disability Officers between home and host institutions should ensure that there are opportunities for students with disabilities to meet fellow students and also other students with (similar) disabilities, if they so wish.

Ambassadors and local mentorship is really important. An option can be to establish a network of trained volunteers willing to support students and mobile youth. Taking stock on the existing networks of volunteers (such as ESN, AEGEE, ESU, etc. where students with disabilities are already welcome), support can also be offered to existing volunteer organisations to help them better support students with disabilities and support needs and to give them the means to be more inclusive.

## **RECOMMENDATION 15: Fostering the use of Assistive Technologies and Universal Design**

IMA recommends that all HEIs carry out an evaluation of the current state of their Assistive Technology to better understand what tools can be used to accommodate needs of the beneficiary and to increase the level of accessibility of these tools. Universal Design should also be investigated by all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

We further recommend that the European Commission and the NAs facilitate better cooperation among HEIs on the topic of assistive technology and Universal Design in order to share innovative practices and foster cooperation among HEIs.

## **RECOMMENDATION 16: Enhancing IRO-DO collaboration within HEIs**

IMA recommends Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to enhance collaboration between their different divisions, notably between the International Relation Offices (IRO) and the Disability Units/Offices (DOs). For example, IROs should create accessible content together with DOs, organise mobility fairs together and make sure that all students with disabilities are invited in an accessible way. DOs should also inform all their beneficiaries, especially students with disabilities, about opportunities for going abroad.

## **RECOMMENDATION 17: Ensuring basic support systems are offered**

There is currently a lack of clarity on who's responsible for what set of support services. The lack of clarity is very apparent when dealing with different types of support for people with disabilities. Here are the suggestions designed by looking at the mobility flow: pre-departure, during mobility and post-mobility experience. The recommendations mention whether it should be the Sending Organisation or Host Organisation's responsibility.

## **Sending Organisation**

### Pre-departure

- Creating user-friendly applications that make it easier for people to apply. Make sure that it is provided in paper format and in digital accessible format.
- Create different accessibility forms, so one can better specify one's needs.
- Simplify the language used to be in an easy-to-read format.
- Assign a contact person that can be contacted throughout the mobility
- Ensure regular contact to provide necessary information.
- Ensure it has been promoted in a variety of places to foster diversity.
- Ensure financial support. There should also be support that helps you prepare and organise your finances. An example: school students - it's your first experience and you don't know how to manage your budget because the finances are usually done by your parents.

### Post-exchange

- Be provided with a mentor, with knowledge of the person, to support in reverse culture shock and how to attain the learning points of the exchange.
- Have the opportunity for peer-learning and sharing of experience with other young people.

## **Host Organisation**

### Pre-departure

- allow for a support person at the host organisation that can be contacted beforehand regarding access needs.
- Carry out awareness raising training with host organisation staff to get familiar with different types of disabilities and support needs. Staff should be able to provide practical and suitable information if it is available or find the information.
- Careful selection of placements and training of the responsible person
- Link with local ESN/AEGEE group and/or any other possible peer-support groups.
- Together with the sending organisation and the young person, prepared a Supportive Mobility Plan (SMP) if the young person believes it would be useful.

### During mobility

- Provide trained mentor with knowledge/awareness of the disability context in the country.
- Provide a proper welcome session.
- Have inclusive meetings suitable for all.
- Possibility to arrive earlier to have a preparation and orientation session of the environment.
- Regular checks between the Host Organisations and the young person, reviewing the Supportive Mobility Plan (SMP).
- Preparation for living together with a mentor/support person, if this is the preference of the participant.
- Problems should be dealt with quickly.

For more information, check also the work done by the European Platform on Learning Mobility (EPLM) on principles for quality learning mobility in the youth field.

