

# Making mobility programmes more inclusive

Inclusive Mobility - From policy  
to inspiration



## Colophon

Authors: Valérie Van Hees (Support Centre Inclusive Higher Education, SIHO) - Irina Ferencz (Academic Cooperation Association), Helga Posset, Anna Wöckinger (Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research).

Contributors: Nadie Baudry, Valerie Mertens (Support Centre Inclusive Higher Education, SIHO), Magalie Soenen, Patrick Willems, Mariëlle Van Heumen (Ministry of Education and Training - Flemish Community/Belgium), Howard Davies (European University Association), Frederik De Decker (Ghent University).

The project Peer Learning Activities and Resources for Social Inclusion in Mobility Programmes (PLAR-4-SIMP) is delivered by the Ministry of Education and Training (Flemish Community/, Belgium) and the Support Centre for Inclusive Higher Education in Flanders (SIHO), in cooperation with the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research and the Erasmus Student Network (ESN).

**PLAR-4-SIMP**  
inclusivemobility.eu

The PLAR-4-SIMP project was co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Commission under Key Action 3, Support to the implementation of EHEA reforms.



Co-funded by  
the European Union

The European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of its contents, which reflect the views of the authors only, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

# Table of contents

---

<b>Context and introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Mixed method approach</b>	<b>6</b>
Literature review	6
Mapping survey	6
Peer learning activities	6
Focus groups	6
Defining disadvantaged students	7
Defining Inclusive Mobility	9
<b>Key findings from the literature</b>	<b>11</b>
Benefits of international exchange programmes	11
Impact on disadvantaged students	11
Participation gap	11
Enablers to mobility programmes	12
Barriers to mobility programmes	12
Enhancing the social dimension in mobility	16
<b>Key findings from the survey</b>	<b>19</b>
Aim of the survey	19
Sample overview	19
Dimensions and definitions of underrepresentation	20
Inclusion measures in mobility programmes	22
Data matrix	37
<b>Key findings from peer learning activities</b>	<b>39</b>
Setting and participation	39
Objective and aims	39
Summary of current barriers, challenges and discussed solutions in approaching social inclusion and inclusive mobility in the EHEA	42
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>47</b>
Inclusive mobility strategies	47
Awareness and cooperation	48
Information provision and promotion	48
Applications, grants and funding	49
Disclosure, support services, housing and student life	50
<b>Next steps</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Glossary</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>57</b>



## Context and introduction

---

Enhancing the social dimension of higher education (HE) has been a central pillar of the Bologna Process since its inception, and was reconfirmed by the 2020 Rome Communiqué. The new Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027 has also put inclusion at the forefront. In this context, higher education authorities and institutions are in the process of considering, planning and implementing reforms to widen the participation of students from disadvantaged groups in mobility programmes.

The project Peer Learning Activities and Resources for Social Inclusion in Mobility Programmes (PLAR-4-SIMP) focuses on achieving more inclusivity in mobility programmes. The project is delivered by the Ministry of Education and Training (Flemish Community/Belgium) and the Support Centre for Inclusive Higher Education in Flanders (SIHO), in cooperation with the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research and the Erasmus Student Network (ESN). Its objective is to support national authorities and higher education institutions across the EHEA in order to reform their policies to widen and allow for better participation of disadvantaged students in mobility programmes. In this framework, the project has implemented research and peer learning activities to strengthen mutual learning and deepen the exchange of practices between the EHEA countries in different implementation stages.

Based on the identified needs, the project has developed supportive resources, including an inspirational booklet on national social inclusion measures to widen the participation of disadvantaged students in mobility programmes, a communication package to promote outgoing mobility towards disadvantaged students in an inclusive way, and an e-training package to equip staff of higher education authorities and institutions with the skills, knowledge, attitudes, and tools required to best organise inclusive student mobility in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

This report summarises the results of the research and peer learning activities, and provides a picture of the current social inclusion measures and practices that have been implemented across the EHEA to increase the participation of disadvantaged students in mobility programmes in which innovative inclusive policy measures and recommendations are highlighted.

## Mixed method approach

Several research methodologies were employed throughout the PLAR-4-SIMP project to map the social inclusion mobility measures and to examine the needs and expectations around inclusive mobility of national authorities, higher education institutions and national agencies across the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

### Literature review

Desk research was conducted to take stock of the mobility data and the knowledge base around the topic of international mobility and disadvantaged students. This desk research also informed parts of the project, such as the survey design and the training package.

### Mapping survey

An online survey targeting Ministries of Education across the EHEA was launched to get a broad picture of the current policies on inclusive mobility implemented by Ministries of Education across the EHEA. About half of the EHEA Ministries of Education (21 out of 48) responded to the PLAR-4-SIMP survey when contacted in May 2020 through the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG).

### Peer learning activities

Two peer learning activities (PLAs) were organised to strengthen mutual learning and deepen the exchange of practices between the higher education authorities of 14 EHEA countries in different implementation stages. The PLAs took a closer look at how governments and institutions are widening the participation of disadvantaged students in mobility programmes. Through a peer-to-peer and counselling approach, participants were supported in drawing up plans to overcome specific challenges.

### Focus groups

Focus groups with a total of 36 representatives were held during the peer learning activities in September 2020 and April 2021. The four focus groups provided a deeper insight into the research results, specifically the project's mobility toolbox. The methodologies used included group discussions, individual reflections and polling exercises.



## Defining disadvantaged students

A key challenge when discussing access to and inclusion in higher education is the **lack of consensus on a definition** across Europe on what ‘disadvantaged students’ are. There is currently no harmonised terminology across the EHEA countries and higher education institutions, as well as a **generalised lack of data** that would allow for cross-country comparisons and for assessing the degree of underrepresentation in (international) higher education.

Often different **terms are used interchangeably** to refer to the same disadvantaged groups, such as students with ‘special needs’ used interchangeably for ‘students with impairments’ or ‘students with disabilities’; ‘students from disadvantaged backgrounds’ or ‘students with fewer/ limited opportunities’ to generally refer to students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, or students without higher education background (at times also referred to as first-generation-into-higher-education students).

How disadvantage and underrepresentation are defined and understood in **partner countries** also seems to be of crucial importance for achieving inclusive mobility in practice, which sometimes leads to a discrepancy between the intended objectives and the reality on the ground. For example, a recent study (EUA, 2020) found that in the International Credit Mobility (ICM) in the Erasmus programme, the focus on students from disadvantaged backgrounds was much weaker than initially intended by the European Commission. This is partly due to the fact that legal definitions of “disadvantage” in the partner countries varied, as did their implementation. Despite disadvantage being an additional selection criterion for students on the basis of equal academic merit, it is rarely used, and selection for the ICM was in most cases solely based on academic and linguistic preparedness.

In the framework of the PLAR-4-SIMP project, we will use the definitions as proposed in the **‘Principles and Guidelines (PAG) to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)’** (Rome Communiqué, 2020):

**Underrepresented students** refers to a group of learners underrepresented in relation to certain characteristics (e.g., gender, age, nationality, geographic origin, socio-economic background) if its share among the students is lower than the share of a comparable group in the total population. This can be documented at the time of admission, during the course of studies or at graduation. Individuals usually have several underrepresented characteristics, which is why combinations of underrepresented characteristics (“intersectionality”) should always be considered.

**Disadvantaged students** often face specific challenges compared to their peers in higher education. This can take many forms (e.g., disability, low-income family, little or no family support, orphan, many school moves, mental health, pregnancy, having less time to study because one has to earn one’s living by working or having care duties). The disadvantage may be permanent, may occur from time to time or only for a limited period. Disadvantaged students may be part of an underrepresented group, but they do not have to be. Therefore, ‘disadvantaged’ and ‘underrepresented’ are not synonyms.

**Vulnerable students** may be at risk of disadvantage (see above) and in addition have special (protection) needs. For example, because they suffer from an illness (including mental health issues) or have a disability, because they are minors, because their residence permit depends on the success of their studies (and thus also on decisions made by individual lecturers), because they are at risk of being discriminated against. These learners are vulnerable in the sense that they may not

be able to ensure their personal well-being, or that they may not be able to protect themselves from harm or exploitation and need additional support or attention.

The PLAR-4-SIMP project also refers to the definition of **'students with fewer opportunities'** of the Erasmus+ programme Guide:

**Students with fewer opportunities** refers to students with physical, mental and health-related conditions, students with children, students who work or are professional athletes and students from all study fields underrepresented in mobility.

The **Erasmus+ Programme Guide** highlights **eight indicative barriers** that can lead to fewer opportunities:

- **disabilities** (i.e. participants with special needs): people with mental (intellectual, cognitive, learning), physical, sensory or other disabilities.
- **barriers linked to education and training systems:** young people with learning difficulties; early school leavers; low-qualified adults; young people with poor school performance.
- **economic barriers:** people with a low standard of living, low income, dependence on the social welfare system or homeless people; young people in long-term unemployment or poverty; people in debt or with financial problems.
- **cultural differences:** immigrants or refugees, or descendants of immigrant or refugee families; people belonging to a national or ethnic minority; people with linguistic adaptation and cultural inclusion difficulties.
- **barriers linked to discrimination:** people facing discrimination because of gender, age, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, disability, etc.
- **social barriers:** people with limited social skills or anti-social or risky behaviours; people in a precarious situation; (ex-)offenders, (ex-)drug or alcohol abusers; young and/or single parents; orphans.
- **geographical barriers:** people from remote or rural areas; people living on small islands or in peripheral regions; people from urban problem zones; people from less serviced areas (limited public transport, poor facilities).
- **(mental) health problems:** people with chronic health problems, severe illnesses, mental health issues or psychiatric conditions.

From an **inclusive mobility perspective**, underrepresentation and disadvantage must be addressed as widely and as comprehensively as possible when designing inclusive mobility strategies, covering at least the needs of the following groups:



- 
- Students with disabilities,
  - Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds,
  - Students without a higher education background (also referred to as first-generation-in-higher-education students; or first-time academics),
  - Students from minority groups (including race, sexual orientation, gender identity),
  - Students with a migrant or refugee background,
  - Working students,
  - Students with family obligations, including caretaker students, and
  - Non-mobile or less-mobile students, i.e. students that may not be underrepresented in higher education in general, but become underrepresented in mobility activities (e.g., students in teacher training etc. who tend to study abroad less often compared to students in other programmes).

## Defining Inclusive Mobility

The term **'inclusive mobility'** is defined in a 2019 definition from the **Inclusive Mobility Alliance**, which forms the basis of the PLAR-4-SIMP project. It refers to *“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 is highly important.”*

This definition highlights the importance of developing **needs-based and individualised approaches** to support the wider participation of disadvantaged and underrepresented students in international student mobility, as well as the creation of **adequate conditions together** with, rather than for, the target groups.



## Key findings from the literature

This chapter presents a summary of the main findings of the desk research.

### Benefits of international exchange programmes

The importance of international mobility for the life opportunities of young people is highlighted in the **Rome Communiqué** and the **Bologna Process**. In 2020, the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) renewed its 2030 aspiration to see 20% of member states' graduates undertaking a study-abroad experience (Rome Communiqué, 2020).

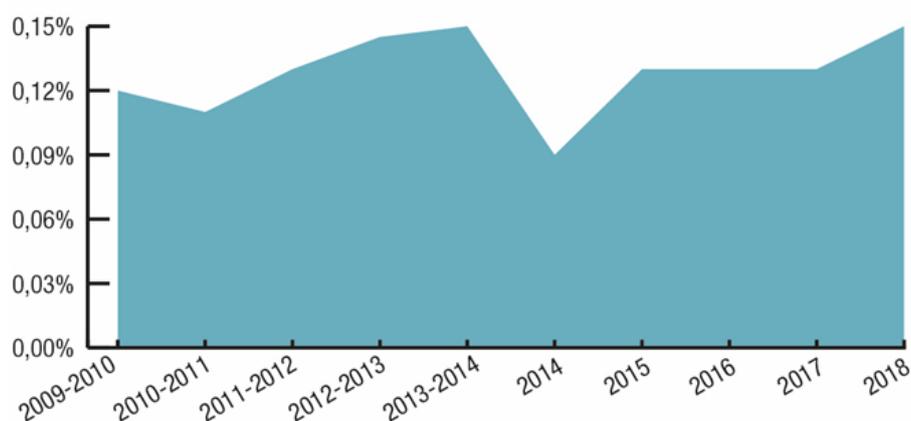
International research has conclusively demonstrated **many benefits** associated with studying or doing a traineeship abroad. These benefits range from **higher academic achievement, increased language skills** and **personal confidence**, to enhanced **international and intercultural competences** and improved **employment opportunities**. It has also been reported that studying abroad helps develop skills around **social cohesion**, such as learning to get along well with people from different cultures and learning to take a **stand against discrimination or intolerance** (European Commission, 2019a).

### Impact on disadvantaged students

In terms of the impact of mobility on disadvantaged students, international mobility exchanges have **advantages that are similar and comparable to those on the general student population** in terms of higher academic and employment achievement, increased language skills, personal confidence and personal development. Several studies in the United States of America and across Europe even suggest that this **impact is magnified for disadvantaged students**, referring to students with disabilities, students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, students with a migration background and working students. For example, Engel's (2017) study indicates that studying abroad is associated with **a higher four-year graduation rate** and that the correlation between studying abroad and the graduation rate is especially significant for minority students. Furthermore, studies by the Irish Universities Association (2018) and Universities UK International (UUKI, 2018; 2019) indicate that disadvantaged students who participated in outgoing study mobility programmes display **enormous enthusiasm** and **positivity** towards the experience, disclosing significant personal and professional benefits. The EPFIME report (2020) also indicates that disadvantaged students who went abroad testified about **a more normalised self-perception**, making them feel more similar to their peers.

### Participation gap

While the overall number of young people and students experiencing international exchanges was rapidly increasing before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, in comparison, this past decade saw **the number of disadvantaged students taking part in Erasmus+ in Europe almost stagnate**. According to the 2020 Erasmus+ annual report, about 21,000 students who participated in a mobility programme in higher education were considered disadvantaged students. This is less than 7%, as the total number of participants within the regular Erasmus+ (previous KA103) is 312,347 students. The proportion of students with specific needs in higher education international exchange programmes that received special needs financial support in the Erasmus+ programme between 2009 and 2018 oscillated between 0.11% and 0.15%, indicating that students with disabilities have been further disadvantaged compared to their peers. This is displayed in Figure 1.



**Figure 1** – Erasmus+ higher education students and trainees who received the Erasmus+ Special Needs Support

Previous studies (e.g., UUKI, 2018; SIEM, 2020) found that students from more advantaged backgrounds were indeed more likely (65% more so in the UK) to participate in outgoing mobility programmes than their disadvantaged peers, despite the fact that the personal and career benefits of outgoing mobility are more pronounced for students from disadvantaged backgrounds when compared to their non-mobile peers. On all counts, the target groups are underrepresented in mobility, and **students with overlapping disadvantages (also called ‘intersectionality’) unsurprisingly had an even lower likelihood of participating in mobility schemes**. The interconnected nature of social categorisations such as race, class and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, are creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage, reinforcing each other, which compounds the barriers facing some student groups.

## Enablers to mobility programmes

The underrepresentation of disadvantaged students in mobility programmes does not mean that disadvantaged students are not interested in such programmes. On the contrary, they are **very interested in studying, training or volunteering abroad**. When it comes to taking part in mobility, they are motivated by the same factors as the general student population. These include the opportunity to live abroad, improving and widening career prospects, expanding social networks, and learning different languages and teaching methods (EMASI, 2017; EPFIME, 2020; UUKI, 2017; SIEM, 2021).

## Barriers to mobility programmes

Closely linked to the specific support needs are the barriers that disadvantaged students face when considering (if at all) international mobility experiences. There are **many types of barriers to mobility** including **practical barriers, environmental barriers, and attitudinal barriers**. While some of these barriers (worries, perceptions) are the same across all target groups, some are specific to certain disadvantaged groups.

What the students from **disadvantaged groups have in common** (British Council, 2017, EPFIME 2020; UUKI, 2018; SIEM 2020, EUROSTUDENT VII) are concerns related to:

- **Finances**, and specifically to the cost of the programme, accommodation, travel, subsistence, course materials, visas, passports, insurances and health services. Only fourteen higher education systems in Europe offer unrestricted portability of domestic support for students taking part in mobility programmes. Graduates who financed their studies themselves reported much lower levels of participation in mobility programmes, while both parental and grant support increased the chance of studying abroad.
- **Accommodation**, linked to the difficulty of finding accommodation within budget; finding accessible accommodation or securing accommodation upon return from a shorter stay abroad than the norm.
- **Language**, namely the uncertainty of having the necessary language proficiency, especially for short-term mobility, to do well in the host country.

By way of example, reported **group-specific concerns** (EPFIME, 2020; UUKI, 2017; SIEM 2020) were the following:

- **Some students from ethnic minority groups** reported worries over how they will be perceived by people in the host country, fearing racism or improper behaviour, for example.
- **Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds** reported fears associated with leaving their support networks and being abroad for the first time, having no frame of reference amongst family or friends. They also reported financial worries, related to requests for upfront payments (for rent, moving costs, and deposits for accommodation, travel, and proof of available funds (which is prohibitive for most students) and worries about the impact on their degree.
- **Students with disabilities** were concerned about the transportability of grant and support systems/services, access to reasonable adjustments, accessible accommodation and medical services in the host country, particularly for emergency situations and crises.
- **Students from religious minorities** feared a lack of access to adequate food in the host country, as well as discrimination.
- **Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds and caretaker students** reported worries about separation from family and friends and losing a paid job.
- **Students from rural areas** reported worries about leaving family and friends to go on a mobility programme.

The **COVID-19 pandemic** also revealed that disadvantaged groups may face new and additional challenges compared to their more advantaged peers in following **online education and virtual mobility**, due to limited access to the necessary infrastructure and technology (computers, internet network, etc.) or to the new modes of delivery not (yet) being aligned to their specific access needs.

For many disadvantaged students, undertaking an international mobility experience given the above concerns remains **“a massive leap of faith”** (UUKI, 2017), and the reality is that without targeted support and a comprehensive approach, many such students might never even consider the possibility of studying abroad. Previous studies (UUKI, 2017) found that students from more advantaged backgrounds were indeed more likely (65% more so in the UK) to engage in outgoing mobility than their disadvantaged peers, despite the fact that the personal and career benefits of outgoing mobility are more pronounced for students from disadvantaged backgrounds when compared to their non-mobile peers. On all counts, the target groups are underrepresented in mobility and students with overlapping disadvantages (‘intersectionality’) unsurprisingly had an even lower likelihood of participating in mobility schemes.

## Inclusive mobility strategies

Although many countries and HEIs have discovered that diversity breeds excellence and are embracing new ways of enabling the participation of students with disabilities in higher education, **the equity, diversity and inclusion strategies differ widely across national and higher education systems in the EHEA**. They depend on the overall societal discourse, the country's welfare system and its legislative framework, as well as the institutional culture and governance structures (Claeys-Kulik, Jørgensen, & Stöber, 2019). Despite a broad political commitment at European and international level to strengthen social inclusion, **very few countries have followed up with concrete actions and systematic measures to foster social inclusion in mobility programmes**.

**Definitions of disadvantaged and underrepresented students** are varied and diverse across the EHEA countries, with some countries having comprehensive definitions, while other countries do not refer to disability at all or have no clear definitions in their (HE) legislation. Although quantitative policy objectives signal a strong political commitment towards increasing the participation of disadvantaged students in mobility programmes, so far, only four education systems have set such an objective or target (namely Austria, Belgium /Flemish Community, France and Slovenia). Furthermore, only six countries, corresponding to eight EHEA systems, monitor the overall participation of students from underrepresented groups in mobility programmes (namely Austria, Belgium – the French and Flemish Communities, France, Germany, Italy and the systems in the United Kingdom) (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2020).

Although **data collection** would be crucial for understanding the current situation and for knowing how to improve the inclusiveness of mobility programmes, data collection is currently not common and often limited to collecting data about outgoing mobility in the Erasmus+ programme. In the countries that do collect this type of data, most respondents indicated collecting data primarily about students with special needs in the Erasmus+ programme. The impact of mobility abroad on disadvantaged students is rarely evaluated by national authorities, including Erasmus+ National Agencies and National Erasmus+ Offices (EPFIME, 2020).

A **new trend** in the EHEA context is that (some) EHEA countries are striving to collectively address a number of underrepresented groups in student mobility that were previously targeted separately, aiming to develop comprehensive, system-level policies and approaches for inclusive mobility and internationalisation.

## Awareness and cooperation

The **lack of awareness about these barriers**, as well as the **lack of communication and collaboration between different stakeholders**, both inside and outside organisations (departments of Ministries, between departments and faculties of HE institutions, National Agencies for Erasmus+, etc.) is in itself a barrier to effectively supporting disadvantaged students in mobility programmes (EPFIME, 2021; SIEM, 2021). Inclusion and international officers and national authorities, including Erasmus+ National Agencies and National Erasmus+ Offices, lack awareness of the challenges faced by international students with disabilities and the support services that are needed and those that are in place. The roles and responsibilities of the different stakeholders are not well defined. There is also a lack of communication and collaboration between different stakeholders (EPFIME, 2021).

## Information provision and promotion

There is a **lack of information about specific mobility grants for disadvantaged students and a lack of promotion of the possibility of going abroad towards these students**. Approximately four out of ten HE institutions (38%) provide additional information for students with disabilities about mobility programmes abroad (EFPIIME, 2020, SIEM, 2021). Among the ways used to provide this information, on-campus events and information days are the most common format, followed by brochures and videos. Specialised materials to inform disadvantaged students in an inclusive way (e.g., including sign language and braille) are virtually non-existent (EFPIIME, 2020).

**Promotional campaigns are too broad and too limited.** They do not reach disadvantaged students, and they simply do not feel targeted. While some HE institutions already actively encourage disadvantaged students to go abroad, only a limited number of HE institutions and no national authorities actively encourage disadvantaged students to come to their institutions or country (EFPIIME, 2020).

## Disclosure, reasonable adjustment and support services

Previous research underlines the centrality of developing **needs-based and individualised approaches** to support the wider participation of disadvantaged and underrepresented students in international student mobility, as well as developing such approaches together with, rather than for, the target groups.

A general distinction is usually made (EFPIIME, 2020; IMA, 2019) in the **needs** of the target groups of students at **three important stages**, namely:

- In the **pre-mobility stage**, with a need for accessible information, communication between actors, respectful procedures, support in the application process, and encouraging activities/incentives to promote mobility.
- **During mobility**, with support services for diverse needs, tools to allow the participants to become more independent, access to accommodation, health care, leisure etc., accessible learning conditions and portals.
- **Post mobility**, with a need for support in providing feedback, accessible/clear assessment tools, the evaluation of inclusivity and reintegration support.

**Disclosure** of the disability or the specific disadvantaged situation is an important topic for disadvantaged students. Higher education institutions do not automatically acknowledge the disadvantaged status as well as the reasonable adjustments offered by the home institution.

Furthermore, disadvantaged students, HE institutions and national authorities report that significant barriers exist during the **application process**. Many grants and support services are not portable abroad. Despite 67% of the responding countries providing mobility grants and/or support services for students with disabilities going abroad, a large portion of students with disabilities and HE staff are not aware of these grants or services (EFPIIME, 2020).

Outgoing students who are not taking part in Erasmus+ or national programmes **often do not receive funding in national exchange programmes for the additional costs arising from their disability or disadvantaged situation**. Without the possibility of taking their support system abroad with them or without the certainty that they will have access to a similar support system in the host country, disadvantaged students are not likely to participate in a mobility programme abroad.

In general, disadvantaged students are **positive about the support services** offered by the host institution. First and foremost, students value staff support during the international mobility period as well as consultations about their needs and preferences.

In addition, **preparatory visits** to the host institution have a significant positive impact by reassuring both the student and the staff in charge of the success of the mobility programme ahead and by reducing doubts and fears. Students as well as their home institutions evaluate preparatory visits as extremely helpful. They serve to examine the accessibility of the destination and the university, to arrange accessible housing, to organise reasonable adjustments and personal assistance, as well as medical help, to reduce doubts and fears of students and the HE staff in charge of the mobility (EFPIME, 2020).

## Housing and student life

**Accommodation barriers for disadvantaged students are** linked to the difficulty of finding accommodation within budget or securing accommodation upon return from a shorter stay abroad than the norm. When choosing a host institution, students with disabilities focus on criteria that revolve around accessibility (city/town, learning, transport, housing and campus). This information is not always easy to find. Students point out the lack of available information regarding the accessibility of the destination, transport, housing and campus facilities, and the best locations to socialise. Students point to the need for more support with everyday life necessities (e.g., medical support, cooking, etc.) (EFPIME, 2020).

## Enhancing the social dimension in mobility

The statistics and barriers clearly show that **further action** should be taken to address the participation gap and barriers and to realise an inclusive mobility experience for every student. Enhancing the social dimension of higher education (HE) in mobility programmes is a central pillar of the Bologna process and the Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027.

## 2020 Rome Communiqué

Enhancing the social dimension of higher education (HE) has been a central pillar of the Bologna Process since its inception, and was reconfirmed by the **2020 Rome Communiqué** two years ago. In the Rome Communiqué in November 2020, European Higher Education Area (EHEA) ministers committed to **tackling the social barriers** and developing policies that encourage and support higher education systems and institutions (HEIs) to fulfil their social responsibility and build an **inclusive, innovative and interconnected EHEA** by 2030. Principle 8 in the Annex II to the Rome Communiqué ‘Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)’ states: *“International mobility programmes in higher education should be structured and implemented in a way that it fosters diversity, equity and inclusion and should particularly foster participation of students and staff from vulnerable, disadvantaged or underrepresented backgrounds”* (Rome Communiqué, Annex 2, 2020).

In line with this principle, public authorities and higher education institutions (HEI) are called upon to ensure **equal access for all to the learning opportunities offered by national and international learning and training mobility programmes** and to **actively address obstacles to mobility for vulnerable, disadvantaged or underrepresented groups of students and staff**. Besides further support to physical mobility, including full portability of grants and loans across the EHEA, public authorities and higher education institutions should also facilitate the use of information and

communications technology (ICT) to support blended mobility and to foster internationalisation at home by embedding international online cooperation into courses. Blended mobility is the combination of a period of international physical mobility abroad and a period of online learning. Such online cooperation can be used to extend the learning outcomes and enhance the impact of physical mobility, for example by bringing together a more diverse group of participants, or to offer a broader range of mobility options” (Principles & Guidelines, 2020).



## Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027

The Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027 has also put **the inclusion ambition** at the forefront. Inclusion, as **one of the four horizontal priorities**, is an underlying principle that informs all aspects of the programme, offering national authorities and HEIs a variety of instruments to engage with an increasingly diverse student community. The programme aims to reach out to people with ‘fewer opportunities’ such as students with physical, mental and other health-related conditions, students with children, students who work or are professional athletes and students from all study fields underrepresented in mobility. Therefore the programme includes special funds to cover costs related to inclusion. The criteria to be applied are defined at national level by the National Agencies in agreement with the national authorities.

The Commission and member states must come up with **national action plans to improve access to learning and mobility for students with fewer opportunities**. In order to make access to student and staff mobility as easy as possible, in line with the principles of the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE), higher education institutions must **ensure equal and equitable access and opportunities** to current and prospective participants from all backgrounds. **Defining internal selection procedures** that take into account equity and inclusion and assess applicants’ merit and motivation holistically is essential in respecting this principle.

Furthermore, higher education institutions are encouraged to **establish built-in mobility opportunities**, such as mobility windows, within their curricula, to help facilitate the participation of students from all study fields. In this regard, blended mobility can help offer additional opportunities that may be more suited to some individuals or student groups. In this context, having **inclusion officers** within the higher education institutions helps address inclusion and diversity. Inclusion officers can, for example, help raise awareness, define strategies for communication and outreach, ensure adequate support throughout the mobility programme in cooperation with relevant colleagues and help facilitate cooperation between relevant staff within the institution with expertise in the field of inclusion and diversity.



# Key findings from the survey

## Aim of the survey

The survey aimed to map the current status of national inclusive mobility measures and practices that have been implemented by Ministries of Education across the EHEA and to map the EHEA countries' interest in participating in the peer learning activities targeted at making mobility programmes more inclusive.

## Sample overview

About half of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) Ministries of Education responded to the survey (21 out of 48) when contacted through the Bologna Follow-up Group. The overview of countries participating in the survey is shown in Figure 2 below.



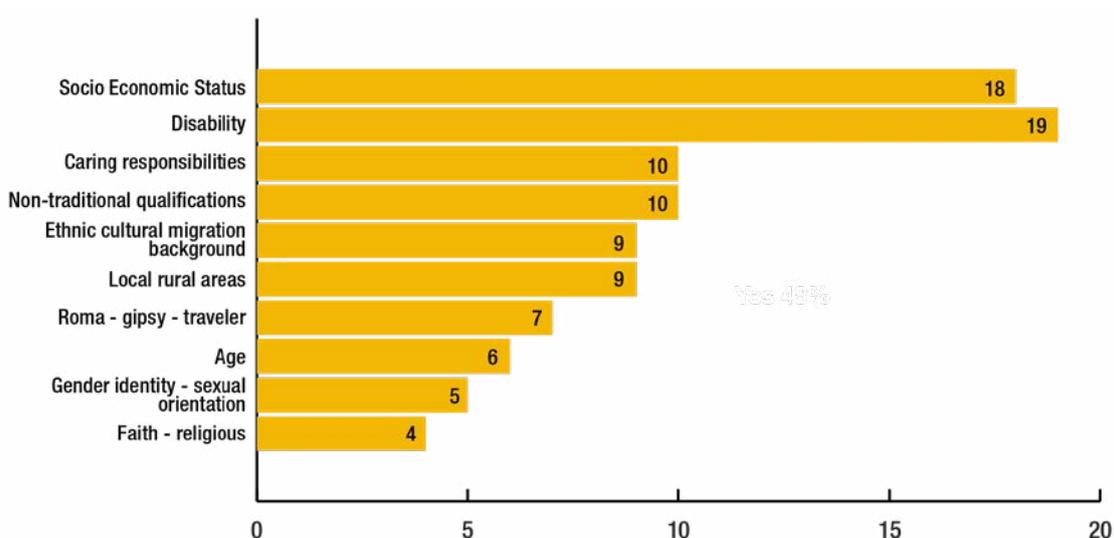
**Figure 2 - Responses EHEA Ministries per country – Albania – Austria – Belgium/Flemish Community – Croatia – Czech Republic – Estonia – France – Georgia – Greece – Hungary – Iceland – Ireland – Kazakhstan – The Netherlands – Norway – Portugal – Romania – Slovak Republic – Slovenia – Sweden – Switzerland. n=21**

Respondents all work directly inside the Ministry of Education of their respective country or within a national agency. They included the directors of the higher education departments, statistics experts, policy advisors for inclusion and equality, members of the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) or civil servants specialised in EU and international affairs in higher education.

## Dimensions and definitions of underrepresentation

### Dimensions of underrepresentation

All participating countries indicated that their countries have national policies that address dimensions of underrepresentation or disadvantage in higher education:

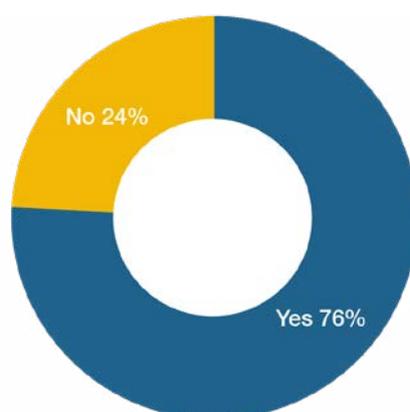


**Figure 3** – Question: Which aspects or dimensions of underrepresentation or disadvantage do your higher education national policies address?\* Please choose all that apply. n=21

Policies addressing low socio-economic background (in the form of low income or the low educational background of parents) and disability, were the most frequently mentioned. These were followed by the dimensions care responsibilities and non-traditional qualifications (10 countries), ethnic cultural migration background and local rural areas (9 countries), Roma students and Travellers (7 countries), mature students/age (6 countries), gender identity and sexual orientation (5 countries) and faith-religion (4 countries).

### Definitions of disadvantaged students

Sixteen countries (76%; Albania- Austria – Belgium/Flemish Community – Croatia – Czech Republic – France – Georgia – Greece – Hungary – Ireland – Kazakhstan – Portugal – Romania – Slovenia – Slovak Republic – Switzerland) have general and/or specific definitions for disadvantaged students. The definition of disabilities and socio-economic disadvantaged backgrounds are the most common.



**Figure 4** – Question – Do you have a general and/or specific definition for disadvantaged and/or underrepresented students in your country? n=21

The definitions are varied and diverse across countries. While some countries have defined disability in a very lengthy way, others have no reference to a clear definition in their higher education legislation. In some countries, the scope for defining disadvantaged groups is larger than simply higher education and is connected to a broader context on the elimination of discrimination against people with disabilities in society (Switzerland, Romania). Other countries directly take the definition from the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Belgium/Flemish Community) or from the World Health Organisation (Romania). Furthermore, in some countries education is not a national competence but rather a regional one and as such, a “national definition” does not exist but is at the discretion of regional and local institutions (Switzerland).

The notion of “socially disadvantaged student” is mostly based on the allocation of clear criteria set for a needs-based grant and these criteria are often linked to the economic situation of the family, defined by an income-based table set at national level.

**Belgium/Flemish Community** - A number of definitions have been developed and included in the law (students with disabilities and working students). Since 2017, the umbrella organisations of the higher education institutions have developed a Charter in which they have defined in a more accurate way the following groups of students as being underrepresented or disadvantaged: students with disabilities, students with a migration background, new entrants, scholarship (and almost scholarship) students, working students, foreign language students, multilingual students, and students from a short-educated or middle-skilled environment.

**Croatia** – In January 2019, the Government of the Republic of Croatia adopted the ‘National Plan for enhancing the social dimension in Croatia’ (2019-2021). The plan was prepared by the Expert Group of the Ministry of Science and Education. The groups and definitions of disadvantaged and underrepresented students in higher education in Croatia are clearly defined. These are students whose parents have a lower level of education, students from lower-income families, female students in technical fields, male students in the humanities, mature students, students with children, students with disabilities, students who have completed vocational education, students who work while studying, students who commute to their place of studies, students who are children of Croatian homeland war veterans, Roma students, LGBTQI students, students from alternative care systems, homeless students and students who are at risk of becoming homeless, students from rural areas, small towns and islands, and refugees and asylum seekers.

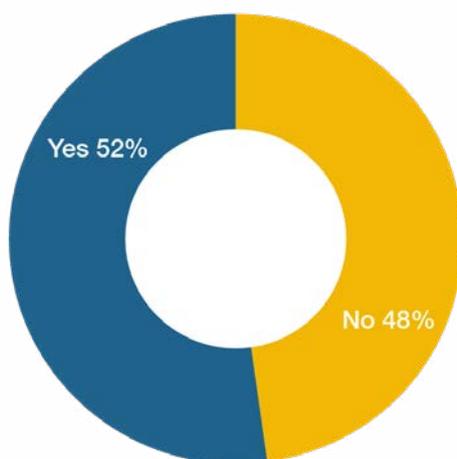
**Hungary** - The 2011 CCIV, the Act on National Higher Education, specifically addresses the support of students with disabilities. Disadvantaged or severely disadvantaged students are also identified through several support programs.

**Ireland** - The 'National Access Plan' identifies six priority groups which have been underrepresented in higher education and sets quantitative targets for each of these groups. These are: entrants from socio-economic groups that have low participation in higher education, first-time, mature students, students with disabilities, part-time/flexible learners, further education and training award holders and Irish Travellers. The National Access Plan also indicates subgroups that require particular support, including single parents, teen parents and ethnic minorities.

## Inclusion measures in mobility programmes

### Internationalisation strategy and social inclusion measures

In 11 countries (52%, Austria – Belgium/Flemish Community – Croatia – France – Georgia – Kazakhstan – The Netherlands – Norway – Portugal – Slovenia – Switzerland) social inclusion measures are part of the national mobility or internationalisation strategy.



**Figure 5** - Question – Are social inclusion measures for disadvantaged students and underrepresented students part of this internationalisation strategy? n=21

When it comes to the target groups addressed in the internationalisation strategy, 33% of the countries address the same target groups as in the general widening participation strategy.

In terms of measures, inclusion measures primarily included scholarships and grants, but also:

- Special admission criteria for ethnic minorities (Georgia);
- Financial incentives to equip the premises of HEI to meet the needs of the disadvantaged students (Belgium/Flemish Community);
- Incentivisation via the national accreditation system if the university addresses social inclusion (Austria).

Several ministries also indicated that their National Agency for Erasmus+ allocates an annual budget for the purpose of including students with disabilities and fewer opportunities in mobility programmes or for organising preliminary visits.

**Switzerland** – The ordinance about international collaboration in the domain of education, vocational training, youth and promotion of mobility explicitly mentions that within the framework of mobility project funding, additional financial resources can be awarded to support individuals with disabilities.

**Kazakhstan** – Students with disabilities have the pre-emptive right to participate in an external outgoing academic mobility programme at the expense of the state. An order of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan called “Rules for the direction of study abroad, including in the framework of academic mobility” states that “when selecting applicants for study abroad, people with disabilities from childhood and children with disabilities have an advantage, if, according to a medical certificate, not contraindicated in the relevant foreign education organisations”.

**Georgia** – There is no general definition but the Decree of the Government concerning state education grants specifies the following socially vulnerable groups eligible for needs-based grants: students from highland areas, graduates from minority schools (Azerbaijani and Armenian), students of the KIA and MIA military families, repatriates, orphans and students from large families, students under state care and students impacted by Russian aggression.

**Greece** – Students from low socio-economic backgrounds are entitled to an extra grant. The criteria for access to this additional grant for low socio-economic backgrounds are determined by the income per capita, taking into account the total number of family members.

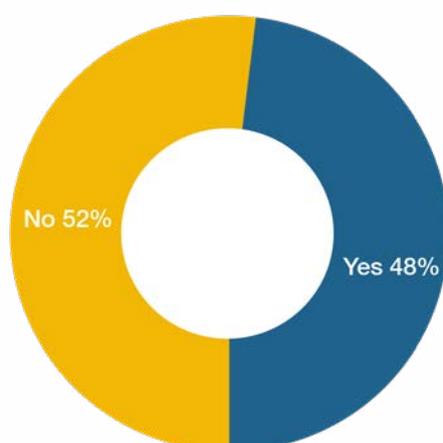
**Czech Republic** – The national guidance on recognising students with a disability is provided in the Financial Rules for Providing Subsidies and Grants to Public Higher Education Institutions by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. These rules are updated annually and they provide a list of categories of students with a disability based on a ‘functional principle’, meaning that recognising students with a disability is not determined by the medical diagnosis but by the practical impact that the disability has on the activities required for their studies. This diagnosis based on the ‘functional principle’ is conducted before the first semester and higher education institutions are responsible for the recognition procedure. Students qualify for increased child support according to a special regulation, provided that the relevant family income ascertained for the purpose of child support does not exceed the family subsistence level multiplied by a factor of 1.5. A bursary is provided for ten months of each academic year for the standard length of studies. The amount of the bursary for one month corresponds to one fourth of the basic minimum monthly wage. The amount of this scholarship shall be rounded up to decimal places. To qualify for the bursary, the student must produce a written notification, issued at his/her request by the social security office that initially granted child support, stating that the family income ascertained for the purpose of child support for the calendar year stated in the notification did not exceed the family subsistence level multiplied by 1.5. The notification for the purpose of awarding the bursary is valid for 21 months from the end of the year for which the family income was ascertained. A student may claim a bursary only once during a specific timeframe.

**France** – The notion of ‘socially disadvantaged student’ is based, for the French Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, on the allocation criteria set for a needs-based grant (‘bourse sur critères sociaux’ or BCS). These criteria are linked to the economic situation, which is defined by an income-based table set at national level.

**Albania** – Students with disabilities do not pay tuition fees in the first cycle and only half the tuition fees in the second cycle. Most often, students will need to pass a needs assessment that is tailor-made and allows for the provision of the support the student needs.

## Quantitative targets

Quantitative policy targets are a strong political commitment towards increasing the participation of disadvantaged students in mobility programmes. So far, half of the surveyed countries (48%, Austria – Belgium/Flemish Community – Croatia - France - Georgia – Greece – The Netherlands – Portugal -Romania – Slovenia) declared having a target at national level for the participation of disadvantaged students and underrepresented students in mobility programmes or are in the process of developing a strategy with targets.



**Figure 6** - Question – Do you have quantitative targets or are you developing targets for the participation of disadvantaged students and underrepresented students in mobility programmes?  
n=21

**Austria** – The aim is to increase participation in mobility programmes by students from ‘educationally disadvantaged’ social groups. Participation in study programmes abroad by students whose parents have no higher education qualifications should be increased to at least 18% by 2025.

**Belgium/Flemish Community** – Action plan for student mobility ‘Brains on the move’. Inclusion takes centre stage in the action plan. The aim was that 33% of graduates should take part in a mobility programme and that 33% of mobile students should belong to underrepresented groups (among them disabled students) by 2020. Therefore, a 25% rule was used in the selection of all scholarships for outgoing mobility. This rule implies that at least 25% of the grants have to be awarded to students from underrepresented groups. The implication of the 25% rule is that, in order to use the full budget that is available for mobility initiatives, there have to be enough applications from students from underrepresented groups. So the opportunities of all students and the opportunities of students of underrepresented groups are connected with each other. This forces the higher education institutions to identify these groups of students and stimulate them to apply for a mobility grant



---

**Slovenia** - In Slovenia, there is no target at ministry level for the participation of students with fewer opportunities in mobility programmes but some larger targets are set in the ERASMUS+ 2018 Work Programme of the “Centre of the Republic of Slovenia for Mobility and European Educational and Training Programmes (CMEPIUS)”. The document indicates that “the share of learners with special needs or with fewer opportunities participating is 1%”. The target was achieved, but there were significant differences between the two groups of students. The share of students with special needs is quite low, only 0.2% (of the projects finalised in 2018). The higher education institutions are asked to report the total number of students with special needs but the reporting might take into account only those who received additional funding. Furthermore, the action plan of the Strategy for the Internationalisation of Slovenian Higher Education (2018-2020), Erasmus + mobile student allowance for outgoing students from a socially weaker environment is targeted at 10-15% of all Erasmus+ students.

**Croatia** – The target value for 2020 was to have 320 or more disadvantaged students participating in Erasmus+ KA103 mobility programmes receive additional support (top-up).

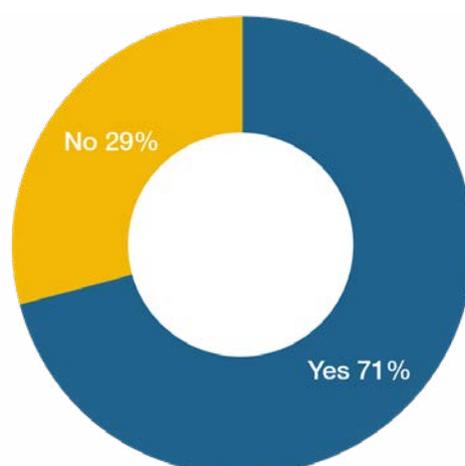
**Greece** – The target aims that 2% of learners participating in mobility between programme countries should have special needs in the context of Erasmus+.

**Romania** – For the Erasmus+ Programme there is an annual target for learners with special needs that take part in mobility initiatives. For students participating in Erasmus+ for their studies or placement, the target for 2020 is 0.13% of the total number of outgoing students.

**The Netherlands** – Targets are in development. The Netherlands is now monitoring the status quo and conducting an inclusion scan and baseline measurement.

## Data collection and monitoring

Measuring the impact of social inclusion policies is essential, which is dependent on defining clear categories of disadvantage and identifying a nationally and contextually appropriate way of generating that data. Data collection in mobility programmes is crucial to get a better understanding of the current situation and know which improvements to make to foster the inclusiveness of mobility programmes. About three out of four countries (71%; Albania- Austria – Belgium/Flemish Community – Croatia – Estonia – France – Greece – Hungary – Iceland – Ireland – Kazakhstan – Portugal – Romania – Slovenia – Switzerland) indicate that they collect data in mobility programmes.



**Figure 7** – Question – Do you collect and monitor data on the participation of disadvantaged students and underrepresented students in mobility? n=21

In half of the countries, this data collection is primarily limited to collecting mobility data about outgoing credit mobility (often in the Erasmus+ programme).

**Austria** – The Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research has registry data on incoming degree mobility, as well as outgoing credit mobility (graduates who had a study period abroad). Additionally, Austria collects data on mobility with regards to underrepresented groups and groups with specific needs in the Student Social Survey (last edition: 2019) and reports on international mobility and international students in additional reports. Moreover, the National Erasmus+ agency (OeAD) collects:

- Erasmus+ Outgoing credit mobility (Programmländer KA103)
- Erasmus+ Outgoing and Incoming credit mobility (Internationale Mobilität KA107)
- Erasmus+ cooperation projects: funds for special costs related to disadvantaged participants

**Belgium/Flemish community** – The Flemish Community monitors the participation of (dis)advantaged students in mobility programmes. As this strategy has been in place since 2013, Flanders has generated five years of comparable data on this issue, which is fairly unique in the EHEA. At present, the statistics show that 22.2% of mobilities are attributed to underrepresented groups (min. 10 credits abroad).

**Czech Republic** – Participants who receive an additional ‘special-needs’ grant are monitored in exactly the same way as the other grant beneficiaries. A final report is also requested by the institution.

**Iceland: Inclusion in mobility** – Iceland participated for the first time in the EUROSTUDENT survey in March 2018. The results showed that 39% of students in Iceland consider themselves to have an impairment, disability or other long-standing health problem, i.e. a higher share than in any other country participating in the survey. This has an impact on mobility opportunities: students with a disability are underrepresented in exchange programme schemes such as Erasmus+, in which only four students with disabilities from Iceland have participated since 2014. This is why the National Agency introduced an action plan in 2018, consisting of the following objectives:

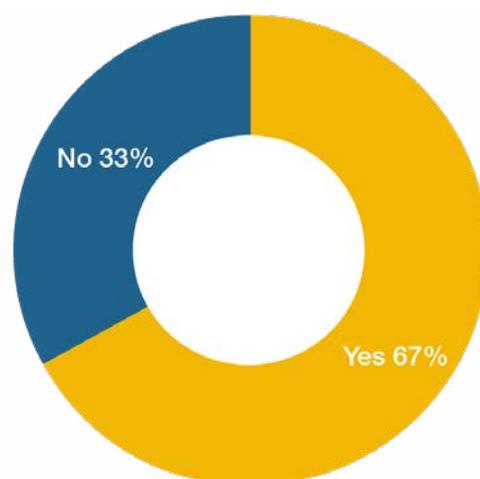
1. Enhanced information about Erasmus+ opportunities and funding;
2. Simplified application process for Erasmus+ special-needs funding;
3. Diverse role models – diverse student body as Erasmus+ ambassadors;
4. Reinforced guidance for higher education institutions;
5. Enhanced inclusion in Erasmus 2021-2027, through secured funding for underrepresented groups and flexibility in the activities.

It has, for instance, been pointed out that short-term mobility may be the solution for students who require intensive support, medical care, therapies and 24-hour assistance. This kind of flexibility may also be helpful for another underrepresented group in the Icelandic national context, namely students with children, which is also identified as a target group for inclusion in the new Erasmus+ period. As preparation for the new programme period, the national agency has reinforced its emphasis on synergies between various target groups in terms of inclusion. Three staff members from different sectors and programmes form a team of inclusion officers, and a comprehensive inclusion strategy will be finalised in the summer of 2022.

**France** – Needs-based grants are monitored by the French Ministry for Higher Education, Research and Innovation with annual statistical outcomes and specific notes which are publicly available. The main items in particular concern student numbers and student shares, evolutions in time, subject areas concerned, average grant and total expenditures for the State.

### Information provision and communication

Around two out of three countries (67%; Austria – Belgium /Flemish Community – Croatia – Estonia – France – Georgia – Greece – Hungary – Ireland – Kazakhstan – The Netherlands – Portugal – Romania – Switzerland) provide specific information on mobility for disadvantaged students and underrepresented students at national level. These countries also have special initiatives/channels to promote mobility for disadvantaged students and underrepresented students (e.g., specific marketing campaigns, success stories from disadvantaged students, ...).



**Figure 8** – Questions – Do you provide specific information on mobility for disadvantaged students and underrepresented students at national level? Do you have any special initiatives/channels to promote mobility for disadvantaged students and underrepresented students (specific marketing campaigns, success stories from disadvantaged students themselves, ...)? n = 21.

---

Among the different ways used to target disadvantaged students when promoting study-abroad programmes, conferences, leaflets and on-campus events and information days are largely the most common ones, followed by videos. Many Ministries rely on their higher education institutions to promote mobility, and there seem to be few structural national initiatives on promoting mobility towards students with disabilities. Only one Ministry (Greece) has indicated using inclusive resources, such as videos in sign language, videos with subtitles, brochures in braille and easy-to-read documents, to promote mobility towards students with disabilities.

**Austria** – Austria organises workshops for the higher education community at annual conferences, as well as information sessions for students, and disseminates reports, interviews with testimonials in OeAD magazine. There is also a partnership with the myAbility Talent Programme for high-potential students with disabilities. Every year, the Austrian National Agency elects an Erasmus ambassador (Counselling services oead4refugees).

**Belgium/Flemish Community** – Conferences & communication campaigns are organised to stimulate disadvantaged students to go abroad. The Handbook of the Flemish Community of Belgium on study and internships abroad dedicated a chapter to students with disabilities. The Support Centre for Inclusive Higher Education in Flanders (SIHO) developed mobility portraits of underrepresented groups that went abroad.

**Croatia** – The national agency (AMEUP) dedicated part of their website to the topic of inclusion in the Erasmus+ programme. Participants with fewer possibilities were involved in giving feedback during the development of the new website. The issue of participants from disadvantaged backgrounds in mobility programmes (Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps) is often addressed by AMEUP at various events (meetings with beneficiaries, promotional events at HEIs, student fairs). In 2019 AMEUP organised a thematic monitoring meeting dedicated to social inclusion in Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes with more than 110 participants from different education sectors and the youth field. Another meeting was organised in 2021 for the HE sector for around 100 participants. AMEUP also appointed inclusion ambassadors for the Erasmus+ programme for the period 2021-2027. The ambassadors, representing all the educational sectors and belonging to organisations with experience in Erasmus+, will use their knowledge and experience to strengthen inclusion practices among Erasmus+ beneficiaries and applicants. Additionally, HEIs provide information and counselling to prospective participants in mobility programmes.

**France** - The Erasmus+ agency promotes student mobility for disadvantaged or disabled students through various communication channels: its website, the Penelope platform guiding E+ project coordinators, its newsletter and publications.

**Greece** – The National Erasmus+ Agency instructs higher education institutions to give priority to students with special needs as long as they fulfil the selection criteria, and it has published leaflets in braille for distribution to Greek higher education institutions.

**Georgia** – External quality assessment standards and criteria require higher education institutions to have mechanisms in place that safeguard students' rights. This implies that regulations of students' mobility should be transparent, fair, and in line with current legislation. Educational institutions should ensure effective and timely implementation of mobility regulations in order to protect student rights and lawful interests. Further information regarding these regulations should be public and accessible to students and other stakeholders.

---

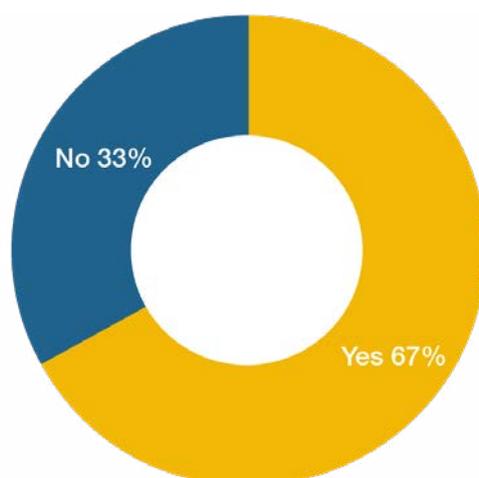
**Ireland** - The EMASI toolkit provides staff at higher education institutions with a practical resource to help them in their efforts to widen and enable participation in outgoing mobility for all students, especially those from disadvantaged/minority backgrounds.

**Romania** - For the Erasmus+ Programme, the annual national open call for applications includes details regarding the additional top-up funding that can be allocated to students from a disadvantaged background who take part in mobility initiatives as part of their studies. Within the call, there is a brief definition of the students eligible for this top-up: students with fewer opportunities who receive a social scholarship or are eligible for it (but do not receive it due to other reasons such as lack of sufficient available funding). This is mainly aimed at informing beneficiaries on the conditions they have to meet for mobility initiatives during the implementation phase of the project ([www.erasmusplus.ro/documente-candidatura](http://www.erasmusplus.ro/documente-candidatura), in Romanian). On the Erasmus Plus Romania website, additional information is provided with regard to the opportunity to allocate additional funding to participants with special needs. The main steps that a student needs to take are specified, while further guidance must be provided by the home university that will provide the grant to the student. Additionally, the Romanian national agency for Erasmus+ provides constant instructions to the beneficiary institutions in terms of promoting these opportunities, offering support and allocating the necessary funding. During biannual meetings with IROs, these topics are brought up and debated among HEI representatives, while also promoting best practices of HEIs and the successful initiatives that are implemented at institutional level.

**Portugal** – Disadvantaged students who are awarded a grant are informed about the mobility supplement when they intend to participate in a mobility initiative under the Erasmus+ programme by their own higher education institution. The Erasmus+ Education and Training National Agency informs higher education institutions about the possibility of additional financial support for higher education students and staff with special needs who are selected for an Erasmus+ mobility period and sends them the eligibility criteria and application form, which are also available on the National Agency's website.

### **Incentives, support services and public grants**

Around two out of three countries (67%, Austria - Belgium/Flemish Community – Croatia – Estonia – France – Georgia – Hungary – Ireland – Kazakhstan - The Netherlands – Norway – Portugal – Slovenia – Sweden) have incentives, support services and/or public grants established by the Ministry of Education and or other departments to increase the participation in mobility programmes of disadvantaged students and underrepresented students.



**Figure 9** – Question – Are there incentives, support services and/or public grants established by the Ministry of Education and/or other departments to increase the participation in mobility programmes for disadvantaged students and underrepresented students? n=21

**Austria** – According to the 1992 Student Support Act (Studienförderungsgesetz 1992), students who are entitled to receive study grants can apply for grants for studies abroad ('Beihilfe für ein Auslandsstudium') under special conditions and for a maximum of 20 months (credit mobility). Within 'mobility grants' ('Mobilitätsstipendium') students can be supported when they complete their Bachelor's or Master's programme at a state-approved University, University of Applied Sciences or a University College for Teacher Education outside of Austria but within the EEA and Switzerland (degree mobility).

**Belgium/Flemish Community** – The national agency EPOS provides a monthly scholarship for disadvantaged students on a mobility programme and special-needs grants and preliminary visits for students with disabilities. The Ministry of Education and Training provides monthly scholarships of 200 euro for disadvantaged students on a mobility programme (e.g., in the context of ASEM-DUO and Washington). HEIs can award an additional grant to students from underrepresented groups.

**Croatia** - Specific public support services for disadvantaged students

The following state scholarships are awarded:

- scholarships for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds;
- scholarships for STEM students;
- scholarships for special categories of students, e.g., students with a disability and students with children.

**Estonia** – Specific public support services for disadvantaged students

- During the Erasmus+ programme: students with disabilities or students with a difficult financial situation have the right to apply for financial support
- Students participating in credit mobility either through EU mobility programmes or nationally-funded programmes are allowed to apply for a needs-based study allowance or scholarships for students with disabilities.



### **France** – Specific public support services for disadvantaged students

Needs-based grants for students from a disadvantaged socio-economic background:

- AMI and BCS, portable across Europe
- Erasmus+: AMI mail tool for supporting student mobility (monthly 400-euro allocation).

**Greece** – The Aristotle University of Thessaloniki has special provisions for the evaluation of students with disabilities: a student belonging to the categories listed in the link may be entitled to 20% bonus points, so that they can increase the possibilities of being chosen. Moreover, persons with special needs who have been selected for a mobility experience can benefit from extra funding through the Erasmus+ programme.

### **Hungary** – Specific public support services for disadvantaged students

- Erasmus+ & the Campus Mundi mobility programmes: additional grants for disadvantaged students and students with disabilities
- National criteria determine whether students can be considered of a disadvantaged background.
- In the previous Erasmus+ programme period, from 2014 to 2020, in the higher education sector additional financial support was available based on social criteria. In the Erasmus+ mobility programme for 2021-2027 the national agency introduced new, extended additional support criteria for students with fewer opportunities.
- In the previous programme period based on the previous social category system, 13% of students participating in a mobility programme were eligible for additional support. In the new phase we expect 25% of students to be eligible.
- Also in both programme periods, real cost-based additional financial support was and is available for students and staff living with disabilities or long-term illnesses.
- The Central European Exchange Programme for University Studies (CEEPUS): at the end of 2021, the Tempus Public Foundation, acting as the national CEEPUS office, decided to offer additional scholarships for outgoing disadvantaged students and students with disabilities. The details are currently being elaborated.

### **Ireland** – Specific public support services for disadvantaged students

- Student Grant Scheme: maintenance support for undergraduate students pursuing approved third-level courses in Ireland/other E.U. member state
- Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD: supports students with a disability in their studies in full-time further and higher education programmes in approved courses in (Northern) Ireland, the UK and other EU countries. The actual level of support to be provided to individual students is decided upon by each HEI, which carries out a needs assessment to determine the types of support and accommodation required. The 2020 allocation to the fund is 9.6 million euro, which is expected to support approximately 14,000 students.

### **The Netherlands** – Specific public support services for disadvantaged students

- Setting up a top-up for this group to have a financial incentive to participate
- Setting up a steering committee.

**Portugal** – Specific public support services for disadvantaged students

The Erasmus+ Education and Training National Agency informs higher education institutions about the possibility of additional financial support for higher education students and staff with special needs who are selected for an Erasmus+ mobility period and sends them the eligibility criteria and application form.

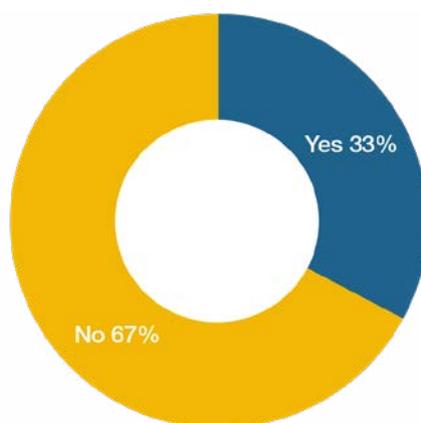
**Sweden** – Specific public support services for disadvantaged students:

In the Erasmus+ programme extra funding is provided for participants with disabilities and students with children. Participants with fewer opportunities may also apply for coverage of additional real costs due to barriers related to cultural, social, geographical and economic factors or barriers within the education system (such as low qualifications and a lack of mobility windows) and discrimination. In the national mobility programmes extra funding is offered for students with disabilities. Student grants & loans are portable to other countries.

**Switzerland** – Specific public support services for disadvantaged students

Within the Swiss-European Mobility Programme, mobility projects that integrate people with special needs can be supported with an additional grant (max. CHF 12.000/mobility).

**Specific body**



**Figure 10** – Question - Does your Government/Ministry fund or coordinate any specific initiative/body in widening participation of disadvantaged and underrepresented target groups in mobility (e.g. a National support centre for inclusion in Higher Education)?

Seven countries (Belgium/Flemish Community, Croatia, Estonia, Hungary, France, The Netherlands and Norway) have indicated that they have a specific initiative/body that aims to increase the participation of disadvantaged and underrepresented target groups in mobility programmes (e.g., a national support centre for inclusion in higher education), while The Netherlands is currently establishing a steering committee.

**Belgium/Flemish Community** – To support the development and implementation of inclusion measures, the Flemish government created the Support Centre for Inclusive Higher Education in Flanders (SIHO). SIHO supports both policy makers and higher education institutions in the development and implementation of inclusion measures for inclusive higher education. SIHO coordinates a learning network on the topic of inclusive mobility.

---

**Croatia** – The Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Croatia coordinates the National Group for the Advancement of the Social Dimension in Higher Education. Based on their input, the Croatian Government adopted the National Plan for enhancing the social dimension of higher education in the Republic of Croatia (2019-2021). In order to support the implementation of the national plan, the Ministry is currently implementing the Erasmus+ KA3 project Sideral (Social and International Dimension of Education and Recognition of Acquired Learning).

**Estonia** – The Archimedes Foundation is an independent body established by the Estonian government with the objective of coordinating and implementing different international and national programmes and projects in the field of training, education and research. The Archimedes Foundation is the implementing body of Erasmus+ and administers several national and international scholarship schemes aimed at improving mobility, marketing Estonian higher education and research abroad. The evaluation of foreign qualifications is carried out by the Academic Recognition Information Centre (Estonian ENIC/NARIC centre), while the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education carries out institutional accreditation and quality assessment of study groups.

**France** – The French Observatory of Student Life ('Observatoire national de la vie étudiante' or OVE) set up by the French Ministry for National Education in 1989, is led by a Council that is very familiar with the realities of higher education and student life, and is working in collaboration with the Regional University Students' Affairs Centres (called 'CROUS'). OVE's mission is to provide the most comprehensive, detailed and objective information on student living conditions and how these impact students' studies, in order to enhance social and political thought, and assist decision-making on these matters. OVE endeavours to collect and process all the available information. It monitors and assesses surveys while conducting its own study and research projects.

**Slovenia** – While studying abroad (Erasmus exchange) students maintain their national grant (including optional top-ups based on disability). The CMEPIUS national agency reserves part of the Erasmus+ KA103 funds every year for additional funding for students with disabilities. The funding is available to outgoing Erasmus+ students, upon request and based on real costs. The ministry responsible for higher education is, together with the European social fund, co-financing an initiative for the mobility of students from underprivileged backgrounds.

**Hungary** – Hungary runs the scholarship project Campus Mundi, which is co-financed by the European Union (European Social Fund) and the Hungarian Government. Within the project, additional support is offered to students with a disability or chronic illness (including food intolerances, among others) that is based on their estimated extra expenses because of their disability or illness. They present their need for support, including an approximate sum and a medical diagnosis, and their request is assessed by two medical experts. The support applied for is typically for pharmaceuticals and special dietary requirements (food intolerances), but can also refer to the need for a personal assistant or caretaker, or travel expenses related to medical examinations that need to be done in Hungary.

National research shows that one of the main reasons for students to decline participation in or not to apply for Erasmus+ is the lack of financial resources. Therefore, the Hungarian national agency extended the category system of applicants with fewer opportunities to provide equal opportunities to outgoing students facing health, cultural, social, economic or geographical barriers to participate in Erasmus+ higher education mobility initiatives.



Hungary also introduced clear measures to enhance social inclusion in mobility programmes:

- The national agency introduced a more accessible digital application process
- Less administrative burden for both the HEIs and applicants
- Regular (online) meetings, Q&A sessions with coordinators
- Close cooperation with the Communication Department of the Hungarian national agency to reach as many students as possible through media campaigns
- Horizontal exchange of experiences across sectors within the Hungarian national agency
- International exchange of experiences (ACA Inclusion Working Group)
- Participation in the EUROSTUDENT international longitudinal research and incorporation of the results in the next project year
- The national agency monitors the results of the new criteria in order to reach out to more participants with fewer opportunities

**The Netherlands** – The Netherlands is setting up a dedicated body, amongst others in the working group ‘inclusive outward mobility’. Since this is mainly a strategic policy initiative, erasmusplus NL is now setting up a steering/advisory committee, on the one hand consisting of experts on inclusion and mobility (cross-sectoral) and on the other hand of student/participant representatives.

## Data matrix

The matrix below categorises the responses of the participating countries on the survey questions. As such it gives an overview of the measures that are used to address social inclusion in mobility programmes across the EHEA.

THEMES	SOCIAL DIMENSION	DEFINITIONS	SOCIAL INCLUSION MEASURES	TARGETS	DATA COLLECTION MONITORING	INFORMATION PROVISION COMMUNICATION	INCENTIVES PUBLIC GRANTS, SUPPORT SERVICES	SPECIFIC BODY
COUNTRY								
ALBANIA	X	X			X			
AUSTRIA	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
BELGIUM – FC	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
CROATIA	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
THE CZECH REPUBLIC	X	X						
ESTONIA	X				X	X	X	X
FRANCE	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
GEORGIA	X	X	X	X		X	X	
GREECE	X	X		X	X	X		
HUNGARY	X	X			X	X	X	X
ICELAND	X				X			
IRELAND	X	X				X	X	
KAZAKHSTAN	X	X	X		X	X	X	
THE NETHERLANDS	X		X	(X)		X	X	X
NORWAY	X		X				X	X
PORTUGAL	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
ROMANIA	X	X		X	X	X		
SLOVAK REPUBLIC	X	X						
SLOVENIA	X	X	X	X	X		X	
SWEDEN	X						X	
SWITZERLAND	X	X	X		X	X		



# Key findings from peer learning activities

This chapter summarises the conclusions of two online peer learning activities (PLAs) that took place within the PLAR-4-SIMP project in September 2020 and April 2021.

## Setting and participation

The participants in the PLAs were nominated by the project team based on a mini survey at the beginning of the project among BFUG members. The participants were then selected so as to achieve a regional mix as well as a mix in terms of the stage of implementation of social dimension measures in the field of mobility. Most of the 14 participating EHEA countries (Austria, Croatia, Belgium/Flemish Community, Estonia, France, Georgia, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, The Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Sweden, Switzerland) were represented by a member of the ministry and a member from a national agency respectively. Some countries were represented by one person (either a ministry or national agency) only. In addition to that, a student representative of the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) and the European Students Union took part. Each PLA was complemented by a keynote from a representative of the European Commission (EC). The project experts from the Academic Association Cooperation (ACA), Ghent University (UGent), the European University Association (EUA) and Universities UK International (UUKI) supported the preparation of both Peer Learning Activities, and acted as moderators, facilitators, and interviewers.

## Objective and aims

The PLAR-4-SIMP project aims to support inclusion in international student mobility programmes. It does so by facilitating peer learning and developing resources for higher education authorities, national agencies and institutions that are in the process of considering, planning and implementing reforms to widen the participation of disadvantaged students in mobility programmes. The two peer learning activities were meant to strengthen mutual learning and deepen the exchange of practices between the EHEA countries in different implementation stages, to get feedback on the pilot mobility toolbox and to consider possible messages on policy making.

The PLAs brought together representatives of national authorities and national agencies in different implementation stages with the aim of:

- exploring measures taken by higher education authorities, national agencies and institutions to enhance the inclusion of disadvantaged students and underrepresented students in mobility programmes; assessing the effectiveness of related policies and practices, with a focus on comprehensive strategies for the inclusion of these groups in mobility programmes;
- supporting higher education authorities and agencies in the process of considering, planning or implementing reforms to widen the participation of disadvantaged students and underrepresented students in mobility programmes. Through a peer-to-peer and counselling approach, ministry representatives and internationalisation and inclusion officers were supported in drawing up plans to overcome their specific challenges;
- equipping higher education authorities and institutions with skills, knowledge and attitudes to optimally organise mobility in the 21st century.

---

## First PLA on inclusive mobility

The first online PLA took place on 21-22nd September 2020 and took a closer look at how governments and institutions are widening the participation of disadvantaged students and underrepresented students in mobility programmes. Hosted by the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training together with the Support Centre for Inclusive Higher Education in Flanders (SIHO), this first PLA gathered 30 participants representing 14 Ministries of Education of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and their respective national agencies for Erasmus+ or their national Erasmus+ Office.

The discussions revolved around the barriers and challenges of organising mobility in an inclusive way for all types of disadvantaged students, but the discussions were solution-oriented and participants had the chance to receive inputs from other countries and experts. In particular, on the first day, participants took part in a panel where the Flemish and Austrian ministries highlighted their national strategy and policy plan on how they try to make mobility more inclusive in their respective countries. Two experts from University UK International (UUKI) and the European University Association (EUA) also shared insights into their respective research reports on the topic.

Through intense online preparatory work and interactive workshops, the participants were able to share challenges and obstacles but also good practices and solutions. A background paper has been published illustrating the current status of inclusive mobility in the EHEA. A virtual gallery walk offered a first glimpse at each country's situation, strategy and the current challenges.

The preliminary results of the EPFIME project were also shared with participants, giving them valuable inputs on the situation of inclusion in mobility programmes for students with disabilities specifically.

On the second day, a session with a representative from the European Commission took place centred on the inclusion aspects in the next Erasmus programme 2021-2027 and how the European Commission and the EHEA can cooperate more on the topic of inclusion. Participants also expressed their needs and expectations in terms of the communication package and training package that will be developed at a later stage of the project.

## Second PLA on inclusive mobility

The second online PLA took place on 19-20th April 2021 and reflected on the progress made and equipped participants with skills, knowledge and attitudes on how to optimally organise mobility in the 21st century. Hosted by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, this second PLA gathered 30 participants representing 14 Ministries of Education of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and their respective national agencies for Erasmus+ or their national Erasmus+ Office.

In particular, on the first day, participants took part in a panel where the Flemish and Austrian ministries highlighted their community approach on setting up international strategies to make mobility more inclusive in their respective countries. Gabrielle Aberman presented the participatory and inclusive approach for the development of the Austrian Mobility and Internationalisation Strategy 2020-2030 (HMIS). Magalie Soenen focused on how the topic of inclusion has evolved since the Flemish mobility strategy was introduced in 2013 and how this is reflected in the new inclusive internationalisation strategy. Three experts, namely Frederik De Decker (UGent), Irina Ferencz (ACA) and Howard Davies (EUA), also shared insights on the topics in an interactive panel.

Through interactive workshops, facilitated by Helga Posset, Anna Wöckinger, Irina Ferencz and Howard Davies, participants were able to share challenges and obstacles but also good practices and solutions for the encountered challenges. Dominique Montagnese and Valérie Van Hees also conducted a workshop in which participants were invited to share their feedback and expectations towards the communication package and e-learning training package that was developed throughout the project.

On the second day, a session with representatives from the European Commission took place titled 'Inclusive Erasmus+ 2021-2027: New opportunities for more people'. After the keynote by the Commission representatives, Frederik De Decker moderated a discussion with participants focusing on how national authorities, national agencies and higher education institutions can cooperate to implement the new measures successfully at national and institutional level.

Helga Posset and Anna Wöckinger closed the PLA by explaining the next steps. A background paper has been published illustrating the current status of inclusive mobility in the EHEA. A research report, a peer learning report, and a communication and training package will be launched at the final conference in April 2022. In the meantime, the PLA countries were supported in drawing up their action plans.



## Summary of current barriers, challenges and discussed solutions in approaching social inclusion and inclusive mobility in the EHEA

The PLA discussions revolved around the barriers and challenges of organising mobility in an inclusive way for all types of disadvantaged students.

The main barriers that were discussed are:

### Identifying and defining target groups

For many countries, the identification of target groups is still a great challenge. Some countries rely on self-identification of students and documentation, and some countries focus on challenges instead of target groups. Furthermore, not all countries have the same legal categories for certain groups. In some countries, data and privacy issues may hinder the country's and institution's ability to define and measure target groups. This must be considered when designing policies and indicators. 'Self-identification' of disadvantage is also a concern.

### Data collection and monitoring

In relation to the challenge of identifying underrepresented groups, many countries do not have sufficient data on underrepresented student groups, and it is not always easy and possible to compare data internationally. The discussion showed, however, that some countries (e.g., Portugal, UK, Belgium/Flanders, Austria) collect data on underrepresented groups on a national level, but not through administrative data for all groups.

### The link between mobility and inclusion

There are notable differences between policy approaches towards mobility and inclusion in higher education in different countries. Some countries have a strong focus on social inclusion; but for mobility, often only low-income students are targeted. In some countries, due to cultural issues, there is a certain reluctance to talk about economic backgrounds and wealth. While some countries focus on a universal design in which inclusion is an integral part of every HE component (teaching and learning, counselling, mobility...), others have separate strategies for inclusion and mobility, which are interlinked.



## **Leadership commitment**

While all stakeholders involved experience a sense of urgency to work on the topic of inclusive mobility, many expressed difficulties with leadership commitment. Evidence-based facts (e.g., The Bologna Implementation Report) are helpful to make leadership aware of the urgency of the matter and to secure their commitment.

## **A lack of information on how support services work**

Stakeholders addressed the lack of knowledge and information regarding how support services work in each country and what students need to do to avail of these services. Many disadvantaged students rely on a variety of support mechanisms in their home institution that may not be as easily or readily accessible in their host institution or country.

## **Inclusive mobility strategies and measures**

It became clear that (targeted) financial support is especially important for underrepresented and disadvantaged groups, but that it also has to be combined with non-financial support. Many of the existing national policies for disadvantage and social inclusion in mobility programmes in PLA countries are not sufficient. Several countries highlight some disadvantaged groups (such as those with a disability or the economically disadvantaged) but need updating, and often also systematic consideration and implementation in the HE context. There is a need for a more elaborated grant system, financial support and needs-based support services.

## **Cooperation between the responsible units/departments and institutions**

All stakeholders involved expressed the need for more cooperation to get a better understanding of the challenges and to work on a more systematic approach to solving the challenges at hand. In practice, they experience a lack of communication and cooperation between the responsible persons or departments (e.g., inclusion officer and internationalisation officer), between different levels (e.g., HEIs, ministries and national agencies), and between host institutions and home institutions. This issue was mainly addressed in connection with incoming mobility, and the fact that the focus is very often on supporting outgoing students. It is crucial to improve communication and cooperation between all stakeholders (internationalisation offices, quality assurance, ministries, national agencies, students' representatives etc.). For example, focus groups with students, ambassadors and role models can improve the exchange of information. The idea of establishing regular monitoring visits at HEIs was suggested as a possibility to improve communication and support. While some representatives of national agencies had the feeling that they knew exactly how to best support HEIs, others felt the need to improve the exchange of information to optimise their work.

## **Barriers of perception**

All stakeholders involved (Ministries of Education, national agencies, HEIs, student organisations, policy makers etc.) expressed the concern that many students from underrepresented groups think that mobility is 'not for them'. They are often not aware of the available support services (e.g., grants, coaching) and do not feel targeted in the current information provision and promotion. In some countries, there is no mobility culture. The challenge that students from underrepresented groups or students with specific

---

needs do not feel that they should take part in mobility programmes during their studies is an interesting one, and it is a problem that cannot (primarily) be solved with financial support. Role models and ambassadors are important to highlight that mobility is also an option for them. ‘Getting the word out’ was also stressed as essential to generating more diverse participation in mobility. Student organisations are key partners in this as they may be able to directly target certain student groups.

## **Information provision and inclusive communication materials**

Clear information on the steps needed to go abroad are very important. All stakeholders report on a lack of inclusive communication material (e.g., no sign language videos). Mostly, only general information and website access are provided. There is no strategic access and not enough awareness about communicating in an inclusive way. Universities should work with marketing and inclusion teams in order to achieve better targeting. Participants stress that it is important to find a way of communicating that can reach all students. Reaching out to parents can also be beneficial (e.g., in some cultures studying abroad is an issue). Communicating about the benefits and the use of role models can be very important to convince parents.

## **Awareness of key criteria on inclusive mobility**

All stakeholders involved (Ministries of Education, national agencies, HEIs, student organisations, policy makers, etc.) expressed a lack of knowledge on the key criteria of inclusive mobility (e.g., What does it mean to be inclusive? What structures are needed?) and on the barriers (structural, personal, linguistic, etc.) different target groups face, specifically regarding students with care obligations, students from rural areas, LGBTQI students, students with different religious beliefs, students with disabilities, students from refugee backgrounds, working students and mature students

## **The structure of study programmes**

The discussion on so-called ‘mobility windows’ in curricula is not new, and during our PLAs, the term ‘discrimination by curriculum’ was mentioned. A different, but closely linked question is that of ECTS portability. Many students face problems with ECTS acquired during a mobility programme. Participation in student mobility should not endanger academic success. Stakeholders are willing to learn about effective strategies and resources to address the mobility participation gap and learn how to design inclusive mobility programmes.

This project mapped social inclusion measures in mobility programmes to make mobility programmes more inclusive for disadvantaged students across the EHEA and examined the needs and expectations around the inclusive mobility toolbox.





# Recommendations

## Inclusive mobility strategies



To ensure the creation of inclusive procedures and environments, **higher education ministries and agencies** should organise **a broad dialogue and consultation** between national authorities (including Erasmus+ national agencies and national Erasmus+ Offices), **higher education institutions**, student and staff representatives and other key stakeholders, including social partners, NGOs and disadvantaged students.



**Higher education ministries, agencies and institutions** should provide **a clear definition, criteria and recognition procedures of disadvantaged students**, and clarity on the criteria for the provision of grants and support services.



**Higher education ministries, national agencies and institutions** should give **the inclusion of disadvantaged students in mobility programmes a more central place** in the national internationalisation strategy or **national or institutional action plan for mobility**.

The plan should include **more concrete measures and activities** to widen the participation of disadvantaged students in incoming and outgoing mobility programmes (e.g., by offering flexible short mobility options or targeted mobility grants, and by providing high-quality support before, during and after a mobility period).

Similarly, **internationalisation and mobility** should find a more prominent place in the **national inclusion strategy** or national access plan in higher education.



**Higher education ministries, national agencies and national institutions** should **collect data** about the participation of disadvantaged students in mobility programmes, agree on **common targets**, and **monitor participation** closely in **different mobility programmes**. Such data collection should ideally be comparable internationally.



**Higher education ministries, agencies and institutions** should **evaluate the impact of mobility on (disadvantaged) students** and track their future employment activities.

## Awareness and cooperation



**Ministries of education, national agencies and higher education institutions** should provide training and capacity building for staff members, and establish **communities of practice and learning networks** amongst different stakeholders. These have been found to be highly effective in improving cooperation and communication, and in deepening the understanding of the support structures and services that need to be put into place to safeguard a successful mobility stay abroad for disadvantaged students.



**Ministries of education, national agencies and higher education institutions** should enhance collaboration at an **institutional level** to share information and expertise between the key stakeholders and **determine clear roles** by defining who is responsible for which set of support services and measures, and communicate about it internally and externally.



**Ministries of education, national agencies and higher education institutions** should set up **external partnerships** with relevant departments/organisations at **national and European level**. This is vital to align policies and regulations in different fields. A learning network at national level between public authority staff, higher education institutional staff and those in relevant national agencies and state bodies, ensures that inclusion issues regarding procedures, application and funding or other relevant topics can be explored and resolved quickly and efficiently. It can also facilitate the redesign of processes.



**National agencies and higher education institutions** should create **ambassadors schemes**. Disadvantaged students who already went abroad are good ambassadors and can therefore stimulate and help prepare other disadvantaged students for their mobility experience.

## Information provision and promotion



**Ministries of education, national agencies and higher education institutions** should provide **clear information on mobility programmes, financial information and support services**.

This overview should clearly indicate who can apply and which national grants and support services can be transferred abroad or are open to incoming students.

This overview should be published through a variety of channels and activities (website, leaflet), and by creating and updating a dedicated page on the platform [www.inclusivemobility.eu](http://www.inclusivemobility.eu).



### **Ministries of education, national agencies and higher education**

**institutions** should promote the added value of mobility for disadvantaged students through targeted campaigns with inclusive resources (e.g., sign language videos, videos with subtitles, brochures in braille, easy-to-read documents). Disadvantaged students who have previously participated in a mobility programme should be involved as ambassadors and encouraged to share their experiences with relevant parties and stakeholders.



### **Ministries of education, national agencies and higher education**

**institutions** should market their country/institution as an inclusive destination to attract disadvantaged students. National authorities, including Erasmus+ national agencies and national Erasmus+ Offices and higher education institutions could raise the visibility of their institution and country by providing inclusion and support information on the platform [www.inclusivemobility.eu](http://www.inclusivemobility.eu).

## **Applications, grants and funding**



**Higher education institutions** should actively encourage disadvantaged students to apply for grants and the Erasmus+ Special Needs Support Grant by default, and support students with the application.



Mobility grants and top-ups should be provided to disadvantaged students by the **relevant ministry in the home country** to cover the mobility access costs of disadvantaged students in non-Erasmus+ mobility programmes. The inclusion criteria for the attribution of grants and funding for the mobility abroad of disadvantaged students should be defined. The portability of grants and support services should be ensured by the relevant ministry in the home country.



**National authorities, including Erasmus+ national agencies and national Erasmus+ Offices**, should encourage higher education institutions to organise **preparatory visits** for disadvantaged students in all mobility programmes, and provide the necessary funding for these visits.

## Disclosure, support services, housing and student life



**Higher education institutions** would benefit from specifying in their **inter-institutional agreements** which measures their institution is implementing to create an inclusive environment and which infrastructure and support services they provide for disadvantaged students.



**Higher education institutions** should carry out a **needs assessment** before the application. The information from partner institutions in the inter-institutional agreements and on [inclusivemobility.eu](https://inclusivemobility.eu) can serve as input to orient students in making informed choices about their mobility destination. The home institution should clarify whether the host institution is able to provide the necessary study conditions and support. Together with the host institution and the student, the home institutions should prepare a **support mobility plan** (SMP) if the student agrees it would be useful for them. The agreement on support is critical for the application for additional grants for access needs.

Higher education institutions should **automatically take over** the **recognition of the disadvantaged status** of incoming students, and provide the necessary support services to accommodate the students' needs.



**Higher education institutions** should offer **accessible housing** and establish assisted living initiatives. They should support the integration of incoming disadvantaged students into the institution and social life by creating opportunities to build a **social network** through the development of a buddy or mentoring system.

Disadvantaged students who already went abroad are good **ambassadors** and can therefore stimulate and help prepare other outgoing disadvantaged students for their mobility experience.



## Next steps

Based on the EPFIME and PLAR-4-SIMP research findings, the project partners have developed a multi-use 'inclusive mobility toolbox' consisting of practical tools that **strengthen and complement each other**. These tools were developed to support ministries of education, national agencies and higher education institutions in implementing a sustainable inclusive mobility strategy at institutional or national level that meets the needs of incoming and outgoing disadvantaged students. Since many of the identified barriers are structural and systemic, the various tools include tips and tricks for supporting the different stakeholders in reorganising internal processes and responsibilities in managing these changes.

### Inclusive Mobility Framework

The Inclusive Mobility Framework was developed through the EPFIME project and aims to support higher education institutions, Ministries of Education and national agencies to understand the policies, concepts and practices that need to be considered to build a good national and/or institutional inclusive mobility strategy. The Inclusive Mobility Framework gives a comprehensive overview of objectives and action points that stakeholders should undertake in terms of mobility strategies, awareness and cooperation, information provision and communication, grants and application procedures, and support services. For example, HEIs can make their internationalisation strategy more inclusive by involving their leadership early in the process, having a diverse student body in their discussions, and starting an institution-wide dialogue involving all departments and faculties. This framework also highlights the need for a variety of mobility programmes to suit the different requirements and aspirations of a diverse student body (short-term mobility experiences, virtual exchanges, joint study programmes at different levels, summer and winter schools, etc.). The framework also points out the need for a concise overview of mobility opportunities and an overview of the available support, highlighting additional information for disadvantaged students (EPFIME, 2021).

### Training packages

The Inclusive Mobility training packages (e-learning) are designed to equip staff of higher education authorities and institutions with the skills, knowledge, attitudes and tools required to best organise inclusive student mobility in the 21st century. The packages address the same structures and themes as the framework but provide very practical tips, tricks and advice to implement the Inclusive Mobility Framework and design inclusive mobilities. The questions addressed include: How to promote mobility opportunities for all students through a variety of accessible and inclusive formats; How to create inclusive and accessible events or design inclusive communication campaigns to promote mobility and study-abroad programmes; and how to ensure the necessary resources, structures and corporations are in place to guarantee qualitative support before, during and after the mobility. The packages also explain how various stakeholders can work together to implement a sustainable strategy at national and institutional level, as it is crucial to take a step-by-step and institution-wide approach. From our day-to-day experience, we know that this is one of the biggest challenges for educational institutions.

### Self-assessment tool

A valuable way for ministries, agencies and institutions to start this endeavour is for the staff involved in internationalisation and inclusion to reflect on the current approach and the ideal approach, with each office doing so from their perspective. The self-assessment tools can support each stakeholder in comparing their current practices with the Inclusive Mobility Framework, to advise on action points for improvement. After completing the self-assessment, the internationalisation and inclusion officers can reflect on the differences and similarities in their responses, discuss their understanding of the Inclusive Mobility Framework from their position, and seek agreement on the strengths and weaknesses of the current institutional policy and practices.



These initial discussions can be a platform for future collaborations on inclusive mobility by key stakeholders across the university (or higher education institution). They can provide a starting point for the collective planning of a wider institutional dialogue with students, departments and faculties, ultimately leading to a joint action plan. This self-assessment practice can be integrated as a routine to illustrate how and if conceptualisations and efforts have changed over time (EPFIME, 2021).

### **Communication package**

A communication package is available to promote outward mobility towards students of underrepresented groups in an inclusive way. The communication materials are created in different formats, allowing national authorities, higher education institutions and student organisations to adapt the outputs to their local context.

All tools are freely available on [inclusivemobility.eu](https://inclusivemobility.eu). They fit together and give clear direction, and they allow for a greater and more in-depth collaboration between the different stakeholders and to increase the quality of support services towards disadvantaged students in the EHEA countries.

# Glossary

**Credit mobility** - a temporary form of mobility – usually for a maximum of one year – aimed at the acquisition of credits in a foreign institution in the framework of ongoing studies at the home institution. ‘Home’ and ‘host’ institutions are used to describe the origin and destination of the mobility programme.

**Degree mobility** - a long-term form of mobility aimed at the acquisition of a full degree or certificate in the country of destination.

**Disadvantaged students** – these students face specific challenges compared to their peers in higher education (e.g., disability, low family income, little or no family support, orphan, many school moves, mental health, pregnancy, having less time to study because one has to earn one’s living by working or having care duties). Disadvantaged students can be part of an underrepresented group, but they do not have to be.

**Disclosure** - the action of making one’s disability known.

**Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE)** - provides the general quality framework for European and international cooperation activities a higher education institution may carry out within Erasmus+. By signing the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE), higher education institutions commit to providing all the necessary support to mobile participants, including linguistic preparation.

**Erasmus+ Special Needs Support** - financial support to cover disability-related costs such as personal assistants or caretakers, sign language interpreters, customised living accommodation, etc. in the framework of Erasmus+ mobility programmes.

**Free mover** – student participating in a temporary mobility programme outside of an organised student mobility programme (for example Erasmus+).

**Grant** - any public financial support that does

not need to be paid back. Such financial support can be targeted (available only for a specific target group) or mainstream (available to all or the majority of students).

**Home institution** - institution where the student is currently enrolled as a degree-seeking student and may be eligible for financial aid. This institution is in charge of selecting students for participation in a mobility programme and sending them abroad.

**Host institution** - institution in charge of receiving students from abroad and offering them a study/traineeship programme or a programme consisting of training activities.

**Inclusion support** - costs related to the organisation of mobility activities for participants with fewer opportunities requiring additional support based on real costs.

**Inclusive mobility** - creating 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 focused on what the individual beneficiary needs to ensure a safe and exciting mobility period abroad. It is important to not generalise needs, as needs are specific and the individualised aspect is highly important. What the person/beneficiary says they need is what they should receive. This applies not only to academic mobility but also to the social aspects that play an important role in the experience abroad and the potential link to connect with the local community (Inclusive Mobility Alliance, 2019).

**Incoming mobility** – this refers to students who have moved (i.e. crossed a national border) to a specific country to study.

**Inter-institutional agreement** - mandatory agreement in the context of Erasmus+ between the host and the home institution prior to the start of the mobility period. By signing an inter-institutional agreement, the institutions commit to respecting the quality requirements of the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education in all aspects of the organisation

and management of the mobility programme, and agree on a series of quantitative and qualitative measures to ensure mobility of high quality and impact.

**Learning agreement** - the home and host institution, together with the students, must have agreed on the activities to be undertaken by the students in a 'learning agreement' prior to the start of the mobility period. Such agreements define the target learning outcomes for the learning period abroad, specify the formal recognition provisions and list the rights and obligations of each party.

**National authorities** - this refers to the structures responsible for the strategic orientation and organisation/management of higher education institutions.

**Outgoing mobility** - this refers to students who have left their country of residence (i.e. crossed a national border) to study elsewhere (where they are considered incoming mobile students).

**Personalised services** - information and guidance provided to individuals on a one-to-one basis addressing the specific needs of the individual. Personalised services can be provided through counselling services with dedicated staff both face-to-face and online.

**Portability** - possibility to take abroad the support available to students in their home country, for credit mobility (credit portability) or degree mobility (degree portability).

**Preparatory visit** - visit organised at the future host institution with the aim of ensuring high-quality activities by facilitating and preparing administrative arrangements, building trust and understanding and setting up a solid partnership between the organisations and all the people involved. In the case of students with fewer opportunities, the preparatory visit should ensure that the specific needs of the participants can be catered for.

**Reasonable adjustments** - necessary and appropriate adjustments to the environment to ensure that persons with disabilities can participate on an equal basis with others (e.g., installing a hearing loop facility, allowing for some extra time for exams, etc.).

**Short-term mobility** – mobility with a duration shorter than one month.

**Underrepresented students** - this refers to a group of learners underrepresented in relation to certain characteristics (e.g., gender, age, nationality, geographic origin, socio-economic background) if its share among the students is lower than the share of a comparable group within the total population.



## References

---

British Council (2017). Broadening Horizons: Addressing the needs of a new generation. London: British Council.

Bunescu, L, Davies, H, Gaebel, M, (2020). Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility - a study of the outgoing mobility of disadvantaged students from Partner Countries. Brussels: European University Association.

Claeys-Kulik, A., Jørgensen, T., & Stöber, H. (2019). Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in European Higher Education Institutions. Results from the INVITED project. Brussels: European University Association.

Engel (2017). IIE Research and Policy Brief Series, Issues No. 1, October 2017.

EPFIME (2020). Research Report - Making mobility programmes more inclusive for students with disabilities. Ghent: Support Centre Inclusive Higher Education

European Commission - Erasmus facts, figures and trends (2009-2010, 2010-2011, 2011-2012, 2012-2013)

European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2020): The European Higher Education Area in 2020: Bologna Process Implementation Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

European Commission (2019a): Erasmus+ Higher Education impact study. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

European Commission (2019b): Erasmus+ Annual report and statistical annex. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union

European Commission - Erasmus+ Annual report and statistical annex (2016, 2017, 2018).

European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018. The European Higher Education Area in 2018: Bologna Process Implementation Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

Eurostudent (2018). Combining Studies and Paid Jobs. European Union.

---

Erasmus Student Network (2019). ESNsurvey 2018: Mapping the challenges and enablers of mobility for students with disabilities.

Ferencz, I., Montagnese, D., Van Hees, V. (2021). BACKGROUND PAPER on inclusion in internationalisation and inclusive mobility. Brussels: PLAR-4-SIMP project.

Flemish Government (2013). Brains on the Move! Action plan for mobility. Brussels: Flemish Government.

Flemish Government (2019). Monitor studentenmobiliteit Actieplan “Brains on the Move” 2013. Brussels: Flemish Government.

Inclusive Mobility Alliance (2019). Recommendations on making the Erasmus programme 2021-2027 more inclusive. Brussels: Erasmus Student Network.

Irish Universities Association (2018). Enhancing Mobility of Access Students Ireland (EMASI). Dublin: Irish Universities Association.

SIEM (2021). Maybe it will be different abroad. Student and Staff Perspectives on Diversity and Inclusion in student exchanges.

Teichler, U., & Janson, K. (2007). The Professional Value of Temporary Study in Another European Country: Employment and Work of Former ERASMUS Students. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 11(3/4).

Universities UK International (2018). Widening participation in outward mobility. A toolkit to support inclusive approaches. London: Universities UK International.

Universities UK International (2019). Gone international: aspirations. Report on the 2016-2017 graduating cohort. London: Universities UK International



