

# Making mobility programmes more inclusive for students with disabilities

## Inclusive Mobility - Booklet of policy recommendations and good practices



# Colophon

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The project Establishing a thought-out Policy Framework for Inclusive Mobility across Europe (EPFIME) 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 Association for Higher Education Access and Disability (AHEAD) in Ireland, the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) and the Irish Universities Association (IUA).

**EPFIME**  
inclusivemobility.eu

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# Introduction and context

**Higher Education Ministries set a target for 2020 that at least 20% of graduates in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) should experience a study or training abroad. The trend for internationalisation continues to grow and the EHEA has helped to pave the way for large scale student mobility, increasing the quality and attractiveness. However, statistics show that students with disabilities are still underrepresented in international mobility programmes, further deepening their already disadvantaged position among peers.**

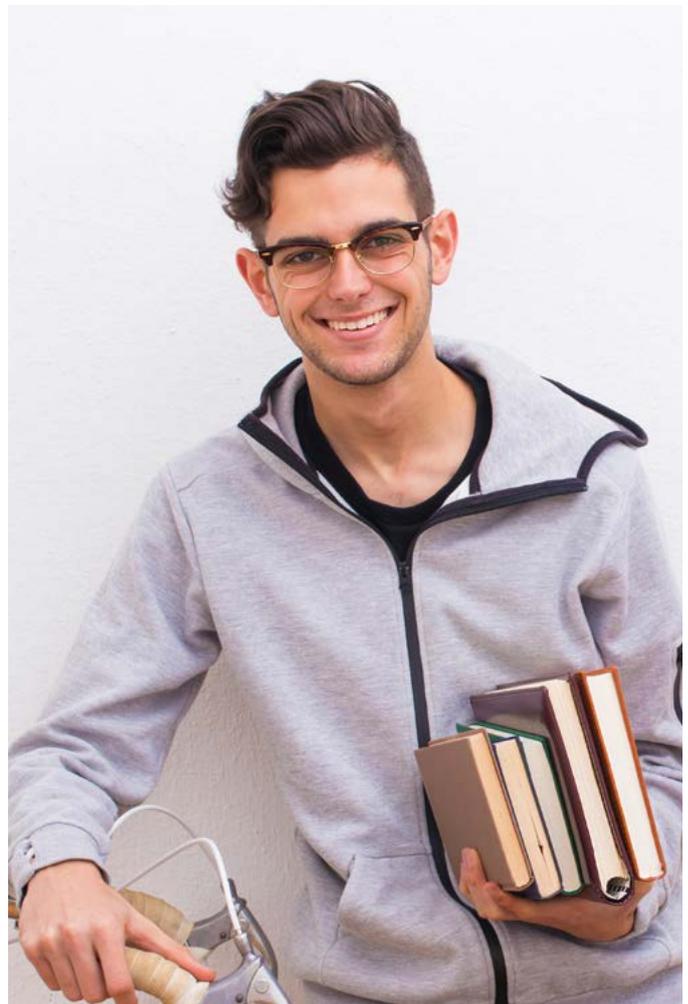
The project Establishing a thought-out Policy Framework for Inclusive Mobility across Europe (EPFIME) is delivered by the Ministry of Education and Training (Flemish Community/Belgium) and the Support Centre for Inclusive Higher Education in Flanders (SIHO), in cooperation with the Association for Higher Education Access and Disability (AHEAD) in Ireland, the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) and the Irish Universities Association (IUA). Three individual experts are also included to provide expertise on the topic of inclusive mobility.

The term ‘inclusive mobility’ is defined in the glossary at the end of this document, and this 2019 definition from the Inclusive Mobility Alliance forms the basis of the EPFIME project. It refers to “creating adequate conditions to learn, work or volunteer abroad for people with fewer opportunities, by addressing their diverse support needs. It is an individual needs-based approach to what the individual person needs to have a safe and exciting mobility period abroad.”

The EPFIME project has examined in-depth the needs and expectations with regard to inclusive mobility of students with disabilities, higher education institutions, and national authorities across the EHEA, while focusing on how higher education institutions and national authorities can collaborate more strongly to increase the quality and the transportability of support services for both incoming and outgoing students with disabilities in mobility programmes.

To achieve this purpose, a number of research methodologies were carried out, including desk research, focus groups, and online surveys. 1,134 students with disabilities, 114 higher education institutions, and 23 EHEA Ministries of Education participated in the online surveys. This was followed up by four focus group sessions with 27 participants in total, representing students with disabilities, higher education institution staff, policymakers, and representatives of national and European organisations from the fields of mobility, disability, youth and higher education. The methodology and the results of these research activities are compiled in the publication “Making Mobility Programmes more Inclusive for students with disabilities: Inclusive Mobility - Research Report” and form the basis for all the project outcomes.

Find out more at [www.inclusivemobility.eu](http://www.inclusivemobility.eu)



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The policy booklet is based on the full research report. It has consolidated the research findings into the six most pressing main issues to be addressed:

- **Inclusion in mobility strategies**

Inclusion measures or regulations, as well as targets, to ensure social inclusion in mobility towards students with disabilities are rarely existent at country and institutional level.

- **Information provision and mobility promotion**

The information provision and promotion on mobility abroad for students with disabilities is lacking. Campaigns are limited and their one-size fits all approach doesn't reach students with disabilities.

- **Applications, grants and funding**

Students with disabilities, higher education institutions, and national authorities report significant barriers in the application process and the transportability of grants and support services abroad.

- **Disclosure, reasonable adjustments, and support services**

Disclosure of the disability is an important topic for students with disabilities. Institutions of higher education do not automatically acknowledge the disability status as well as the reasonable adjustments offered by the home institution.

- **Housing and student life**

Students with disabilities point out the lack of available information regarding the accessibility of the destination city/town, transport, housing and campus, and the best places where to go socially in the student life.

Students point also to more support with everyday life necessities (e.g. medical support, cooking, etc.).

- **Awareness and cooperation**

The lack of awareness about the barriers, as well as the lack of communication and collaboration between different stakeholders, both inside and outside organisations (departments of Ministries, inter-departments of higher education institutions, National Agencies for Erasmus+, etc.) are a barrier to supporting students with disabilities in mobility programmes effectively.

In addition to key facts and figures concerning the identified issues, good practices and recommendations are pointed out.

But first, a rapid introduction to the topic is necessary, with a statement that should be straight-forward for everyone but that is often overlooked: "Students with disabilities do want to take part in mobility programmes".





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The exchange period really had a moving impact on me as a person. I truly created a different picture of mine in terms of confidence, expectations, achievements I could make, and an overall new perspective on what I could do and could not do. I had never had the chance to live in a community other than mine [...] where no one sees you as a normal person [...]. In the community where I lived during the exchange program, I met with a different perspective on blindness. They supported every movement I made and also the people I met in the street were highly more informed than those in my home country. Plus the opportunities to participate in various programs and activities as a person with disabilities were far greater at the host institution and beyond. This had an amazing impact on me and I started integrating more into the community. I gained better social skills, I also acquired better mobility skills as the infrastructure of the city was of course appropriate for blind pedestrians.

**EPFIME respondent - Student**

# Backdrop - Why aim for inclusive mobility

The percentage of the mobile student population receiving the Erasmus+ Special Needs Support has stagnated between 0.11% and 0.15% since 2010.<sup>1</sup> However, this underrepresentation does not mean that students with disabilities are not interested in a mobility programme. On the contrary, they are very interested.

## Facts & Figures<sup>2</sup>

- Like other students, students with disabilities want to take part in **mobility programmes**:
  - 22% of the responding students with disabilities have been abroad for their studies or traineeship;
  - 41% of the responding students with disabilities have not participated but plan to go abroad for studies or traineeships;
  - In total, 63% of the responding students with disabilities have either been abroad or are planning to go abroad in the future.
- **All types of disabilities** are represented among responding mobile students with disabilities.
  - The most represented types of disabilities are: dyslexia (39%), chronic illness (30%) and physical disability (25%)
  - The types of disabilities that are least represented are autism and visual impairment (17%), mental illness and hearing impairment (14%) and psychiatric disorders (6%), dyspraxia (5%), dyscalculia (4%), tic disorder (2%) and stuttering (1%).
- Concerning the **type of mobility programmes**, the Erasmus+ programme has by far the highest participation rate for students with disabilities:
  - 68% of the mobile students with disabilities took part in the Erasmus+ programmes. Other EU and non-EU programmes are significantly less common, respectively 3% and 6%.
  - Only 2% of the responding mobile students with disabilities participated in Erasmus Mundus, and only 3% of the respondents have a mobility experience as a free mover.
- When it comes to the **duration of mobilities**:
  - The majority of mobile students with disabilities were enrolled for three to six months (46%);
  - 16% of responding mobile students with disabilities took part in mobilities of one to three months and 16% in mobilities of less than one month. The flexibility of those short duration period was valued;
  - Mobilities of two semesters abroad or more were valued as less accessible for students with disabilities, with 18% who took part in a 6-12 months programme and 4% in a programme that lasted more than 12 months.
- Regarding the most **popular destination** countries, Italy, United Kingdom, Portugal, United States of America and Spain have been most commonly reported as top destination countries by students with disabilities. This is somewhat expected, since Italy, the UK and Spain are all popular Erasmus destinations, and the USA is the most popular destination worldwide for international students.



<sup>1</sup> European Commission - Erasmus facts, figures and trends (2009-2010, 2010-2011, 2011-2012, 2012-2013). European Commission - Erasmus+ Annual report and statistical annex (2016, 2017, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> All the facts & figures in this booklet are taken from the EPFIME survey project. Find out more in the Report "Making Mobility Programmes more Inclusive for students with disabilities: Inclusive Mobility - Research Report." - [www.inclusivemobility.eu](http://www.inclusivemobility.eu).

- Similar to the general student population, the **main motivators** for students with disabilities to take part in an international mobility programme are:
  - The opportunity to live abroad (64%)
  - The opportunity to improve and widen career prospects in the future (55%)
  - To expand their social network (53%)
  - To develop soft skills (52%)
  - To experience different learning practices and teaching methods (50%)
- The **main barriers** for students with disabilities hindering them to take part in an international mobility programme are:
  - Expected financial burdens (46%)
  - Separation from partners, children, friends (42%)
  - Problems with finding adequate and accessible accommodation in the host country (47%)
- In terms of the impact of mobility on students with disabilities, international mobility exchanges have **advantages** that are similar and comparable to the general student population in terms of:
  - Higher academic and employment achievement
  - Increased language skills
  - Personal confidence
  - Personal development

In addition, students with disabilities who went abroad testified about a more normalised self-perception, making them feel more similar to their peers.





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There is a lack of quantitative and/or qualitative targets in the national policies on participation of students with disabilities and proper data management tools.

EPFIME respondent  
Higher Education Ministry representative



# Index of Problems faced

## Inclusion in mobility strategies



### Facts & Figures



**Definitions of disability are varied and diverse across EHEA countries, with some countries having defined it comprehensively, while for others there is no reference to or no clear definition of disability in their (higher education) legislation.**



**Although data collection is crucial to better understand the current situation and know which improvements to make to foster the inclusiveness of mobility programmes, it is currently not common and often limited to collecting mobility data about outgoing mobility in the Erasmus+ programme.**

- Most definitions **focus on a medical impairment** and refer to individuals who have non-temporary physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments. The concept of “non-temporary” impairment is sometimes clearly defined (e.g. a period of more than six months) but remains mostly undefined and up for interpretation in most cases.
- Some countries also refer to societal and “environmental barriers which can hinder the full and effective participation of these persons in society, on equal terms with the others” (cf. the definition of the UN convention), hence not only approaching the definition of disability from a medical point of view but also from a **social and societal perspective**.

- 60% of the responding countries collect data about the participation of students with disabilities in **outgoing credit mobility**.
- 32% of the responding countries collect data about the participation of students with disabilities in **incoming credit mobility**.
- 52% of the responding institutions collect data about the participation of **outgoing students with disabilities**.
- 53% the responding institutions collect data about the participation of **incoming students with disabilities**.
- Data collection in institutions is mostly restricted to collecting data about the outgoing mobility in the **Erasmus+ programmes**.



**Inclusion measures or regulations, as well as targets, to ensure social inclusion in mobility towards students with disabilities are rarely existent at country and institutional level.**



**The impact of mobility abroad on students with disabilities is rarely studied by national authorities, including Erasmus+ National Agencies and National Erasmus+ Offices.**

- 40% of the responding countries currently have a set of **national policy measures or regulations** to ensure inclusion of students with disabilities in mobility.
  - 32% of the responding institutions have a specific reference towards students with disabilities in their **strategic plan or internationalisation strategy**.
  - 14% of the responding countries have a **target at national level** for the participation of students with disabilities in credit mobility programmes.
  - 13% of the responding institutions have a **target at institutional level** for the participation of students with disabilities in mobility programmes.
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- None of the surveyed **countries** have studied at national authority level the impact of mobility abroad on students with disabilities.
  - Some national **non-governmental organisations** such as Universities UK international (UUKi) and Irish Universities Association (IUA) and few European research reports such as the Erasmus+ Impact Study, have taken first steps to expand the evidence base in this area.



## Recommendations



Higher education institutions and national authorities should provide a clear **definition and recognition of disability, and clarity on the criteria for the provision of reasonable adjustments**, based not only on medical impairments but also taking into consideration social and societal barriers faced by students according to the definition of the UN Convention of Persons with disabilities, making sure students are not being excluded because of their disability.



Higher education institutions and national authorities should **collect data** about the participation of students with disabilities in mobility programmes, agree on common **targets**, and **monitor participation** closely in **different mobility programmes**, taking action to increase it if needed. Such data collection should ideally be comparable internationally.



Inclusion of students with disabilities in mobility programmes should be given a **central place in the national internationalisation strategy or national action plan for mobility**. The plan should include concrete measures and activities to widen the participation of students with disabilities in incoming and outgoing mobility (e.g. offering flexible short mobility options or targeted mobility grants, providing qualitative 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.



To ensure the creation of inclusive procedures and environments, 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 people with disabilities should be organised on a regular basis.



Higher education institutions should **evaluate the impact** of mobility on students with disabilities and track their future employment activities. A research project **analysing the impact of student mobility on students with disabilities** at European and national level is needed. It would help to communicate the benefits of mobility programmes and motivate more students with disabilities to take the initiative to study or train in another country throughout their education.

## Good practices



**Belgium - Flemish Community - Ministry of Education and Training** - In 2013, the Ministry of Education and Training has adopted the action plan for student mobility 'Brains on the Move'. In this internationalisation strategy, inclusion was given a central place and a benchmark was set concerning the mobility of underrepresented groups in higher education. The Flemish Government strives for 33% of all outgoing mobile students to belong to underrepresented groups (among them students with disabilities). Furthermore, concrete actions have been taken to promote mobility among these groups. A monthly top-up scholarship is available for these students and at least 25% of the Flemish outward mobility grants have to be awarded to students from underrepresented groups. The implication is that, in order to use the full budget that is available for mobility actions, there have to be enough applications from students from underrepresented groups. So the opportunities for all mobile students and the opportunities for students of underrepresented groups are connected with each other. This compels higher education institutions to identify these groups of students and encourage them to apply for a mobility grant. 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. Statistics show that in the academic year 2018-19, 22% of all 'initial mobile degrees' are attributed to students from underrepresented groups. An obtained degree is considered to be a 'mobile degree' when minimum 10 credits are cumulatively achieved abroad during the educational programme leading to the degree.



**United Kingdom - Universities UK international (UUKi)** - There is limited evidence at a national level which examines the relative impacts of mobilities on students with disabilities. Universities UK international (UUKi) took a first step to expand the evidence base in this area. Their research shows that all mobility experiences, regardless of length, have a positive impact on students. The latest Gone International report (2019) found that short-term options of four weeks or less now account for 21% of all reported mobility, or 1 in 5 mobilities, compared with 15.3% for the previous year's cohort. There were 2,270 students in the 2016-17 graduating cohort that were reported as undertaking a single period of mobility that was short-term. Graduates who participated in short-term mobility programmes had an unemployment rate of 2.3% compared with 4.2% for non-mobile peers. 86.7% of graduates who participated in a short-term mobility were in a graduate job six months after graduating compared to 73.2% of non-mobile graduates. Overall, 34,870 (14.8%) of the 2016-17 graduating cohort declared a disability. The mobility rate of those who declared a disability was 7.0%, compared to 8.0% for those with no known disability, although participation rates vary according to declared disability. Mobile students with a disability are less likely to be unemployed, and more likely to be in further study than non-mobile peers.



**Belgium - Flemish Community - Vives University of Applied Sciences** - The internationalisation strategic plan addresses the inclusion of students with disabilities. The internationalisation strategic plan ensures necessary structures so that all students and staff can gain an international experience by removing all possible barriers (including financial, physical and mental barriers) and by offering qualitative support for both incoming and outgoing students with specific needs (e.g. short mobility options, targeted mobility grants, qualitative support before, during and after a mobility period).





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I have not heard of any information about an Erasmus programme for disabled students.

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Much of the information on the foreign exchange programmes is given via public talks without captioning, interpreters or video recordings, and questions are generally taken verbally or over the phone, which is inaccessible to me as a deaf person.

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When I requested information I was sent to various departments who failed to offer help or support. The responsible person in the international mobility office did not have any supplemental information regarding the international mobility of people with disabilities, so we discovered things concerning my period abroad together. The lack of clear answers to my questions therefore made me feel unsure about the outcome of my period abroad.

EPFIME respondent - Student

# Information provision and mobility promotion

## Facts & Figures



Some higher education institutions already actively **encourage students with disabilities to go abroad**, but only a **limited number of higher education institutions and no national authorities seem to be actively encouraging students with disabilities to come to their institutions.**



The **information provision and promotion on mobility abroad for students with disabilities is lacking. Campaigns are limited and do not reach students with disabilities.**

- 29% of the responding **countries** are actively encouraging students with disabilities to go abroad.
- 57% of the responding **institutions** already actively encourage students with disabilities to go abroad.
- 0% of the responding **countries** try to attract students with disabilities to their country.
- 26% of the responding **institutions** take initiative to attract incoming students with disabilities to their institutions

- 50% of the responding **countries** provide specific information on mobility for students with disabilities and 40% have a marketing channel, targeting specific students with disabilities.
- 38% of the responding **institutions** provide specific information on mobility for students with disabilities and 14% have marketing channels, targeting specific students with disabilities.
- Campus events and information days are largely the most **common ways** (99%) to promote study abroad programmes to students with disabilities.
- The **information provided** focuses primarily on supplementary grants for students with disabilities (73%). Information about reasonable adjustments abroad (26%) and accessible housing (28%) are less provided.
- **Specific materials** to inform students in an inclusive way (e.g. sign language and braille) are rare (5%).

## Recommendations



Higher education institutions and national authorities, including Erasmus+ National Agencies and National Erasmus+ Offices, should provide **clear information on mobility programmes, financial information** – including upfront costs, living costs, available grants, and other internal and external funding sources – and **support services** through a **variety of channels and activities** (website, leaflet) and by registering and updating the dedicated page on the platform [www.inclusivemobility.eu](http://www.inclusivemobility.eu). This overview should clearly indicate which national grants and support services can be transferred abroad or are open for incoming students to apply.



Higher education institutions and national authorities, including Erasmus+ National Agencies and National Erasmus+ Offices, should **promote the added value of mobility** to students with disabilities through **targeted campaigns with inclusive resources** (e.g. videos in sign language, videos with subtitles, brochures in braille, easy-to-read documents). Former mobile students with disabilities should be involved as **ambassadors** to share their experience with relevant parties and stakeholders.



A more **proactive approach** should be taken by National authorities and higher education institutions to **attract students with disabilities to their country/institution** and to send their students with disabilities to study and train abroad. Specific initiatives should be taken to attract such 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 the inclusion and support information on the platform [www.inclusivemobility.eu](http://www.inclusivemobility.eu).

## Good practices



**Germany - National Agency and the Ministry for Education** - have specifically created a website and online campaign of two students who regularly post on their social media channels about their day-to-day life as a student with impairment abroad with a dedicated hashtag. A social media wall linked to their Instagram accounts has also been created: [Tina](#) and [Julia](#).



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



**Belgium - Flemish Community - KU Leuven** - developed a detailed English website about studying with a disability. In addition, the disability office has developed a checklist that (future) students can download via the website to prepare their stay. Furthermore, international students can submit an application from November to study at the university for the following academic year. The fact that students can already indicate on their application form that they want more information about studying with a disability at the university is an added value. Students fill in this application form well before their definitive registration so that the university can contact students well before the start of their studies (no later than four months before the start of the academic year). Students are also warmly invited to pre-visit the university in advance.



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The problem is you have to calculate all costs before (the total amount with the explanation for your calculation is part of the application process) and then collect all the invoices in your host country. If expenses are higher than calculated, you will have to pay this from your own pocket. If your expenses are lower than calculated, you will have to pay the money back. Reality is that you always have some unexpected costs which you hadn't in your original calculation, so you have to calculate the worst case scenario to have some space for unexpected costs (because shifting costs is allowed).

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The greatest barrier is the limitation of funds, which makes it difficult to cater for all the needs of students with disabilities. Outgoing students, who are not taking part in Erasmus+ or national programmes, do not get funding for the additional costs due to their disability”

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Some forms of financial support (e.g. sign interpreters, pedagogical help, etc.) can in principle also be deployed abroad, but some regulations are very complicated and require a lot of administration. .

**EPFIME respondent - Higher Education Institution representatives**

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The application process for more financial support was too huge and too complicated. I had troubles with my health insurance to get an attestation for further support. My health insurance didn't want to pay for services abroad.

**EPFIME respondent - Student**



# Applications, grants and funding

## Facts & Figures



**Students with disabilities, higher education institutions and national authorities report significant barriers in the application process and the portability of grants and support services abroad. Without the possibility to take their support system with them abroad or without the certainty they will be able to receive a similar support system in the host country, students with disabilities are not likely to undertake a mobility abroad.**

- While 67% of the responding countries provide **additional specific mobility grants** and/or support services for students with disabilities going on mobility abroad, a large portion of students with disabilities and higher education staff don't know which extra support and supplementary grants are available.
- **Outgoing students** who are not taking part in Erasmus+ or national programmes usually do not get funding for the additional costs due to their disability.
- 56% of the responding higher education institutions want to find **information on national grants and support services** available for students with a disability in mobility programmes on [www.inclusivemobility.eu](http://www.inclusivemobility.eu). There seems to be a lot of uncertainty about which grants and support services are portable.
- Although some forms of **financial support** (e.g. sign interpreters, pedagogical help, etc.) can in principle be deployed abroad, the regulations are very **complicated** and require a lot of **administration**.
- 80% of the responding countries do not provide any additional mobility grant or support service for **students with disabilities coming to their country** for a mobility period.
- 35% of the responding mobile students applied for an **additional grant**, in which the Erasmus+ special needs support grant was the most popular (81%).
- 17% of the students who applied for an additional grant point out barriers in the **process of portability of grants**. The main obstacle indicated to the portability of grants and support services is the lack of legislation and regulations.





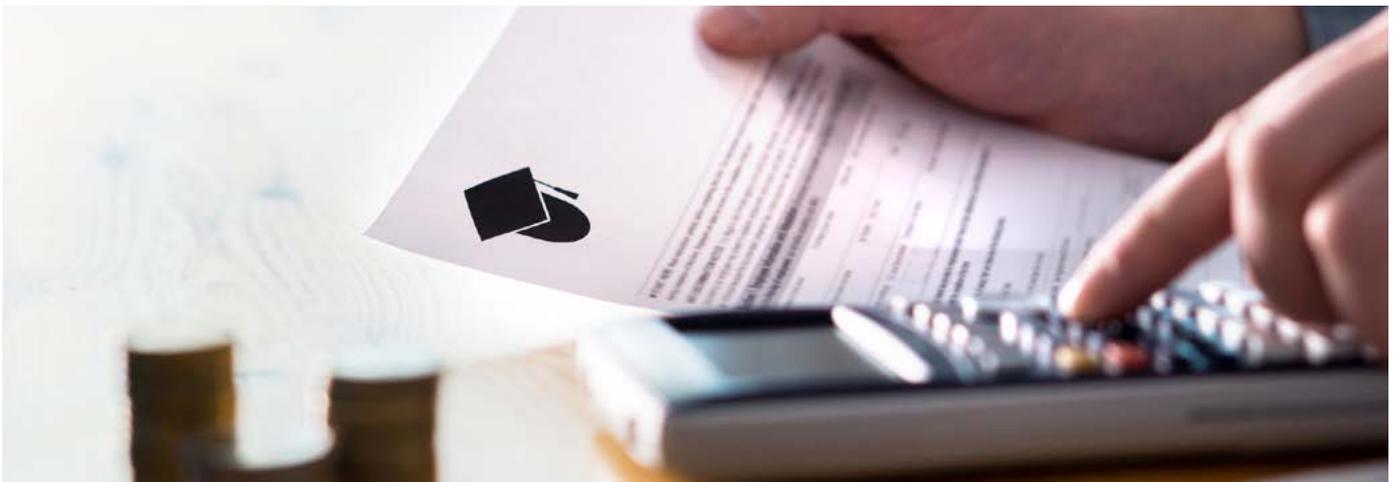
**When an additional Erasmus+ special needs support grant was approved, the overall satisfaction regarding the covering of financial expenses was positive.**



**Preparatory visits are valued as extremely helpful for students with disabilities as well as for the home institution. They serve to examine the accessibility of the destination and of the university, to arrange accessible housing, to organise reasonable adjustments and personal assistance, organise medical help, reducing doubts and fears of students and higher education staff in charge of the mobility.**

- 29% of the responding **students** indicate that more than 80% of the expenses are covered from the Erasmus+ special needs support grant.
- 20% of the responding **students** state that most of the expenses (60-80%) are covered from the Erasmus+ special needs support grant
- 25% of the responding **students** indicate that around half of their expenses was covered (40-60%)
- 10% of the responding **students** state the costs were covered less than 20% of the expenses.
- A great barrier for **higher education institutions** is the limitation of funds, which makes it difficult to cater for all the needs of students with disabilities. Outgoing students, who are not taking part in Erasmus+ or national programs, often do not get funding for the additional costs due to their disability.

- 13% of the mobile students had the chance to have a **preparatory visit** to their host institution.
- 25% of those students received **financial support** for the preparatory visit.
- Preparatory visits to the host institution before the mobility takes place have an important **positive impact** on reassuring both the student and the staff in charge of the mobility, reducing doubts and fears.



## Recommendations



Higher education institutions and national authorities, including Erasmus+ National Agencies and National Erasmus+ Offices, should create **user-friendly applications**. That makes it easier for students with disabilities to apply. They should make sure that it is available both in paper format and in digital accessible format. Applications should invite students with disabilities to disclose their individual needs.



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



**Mobility grants and top-ups** should be provided to students with disabilities by the relevant ministry in the home country to cover for the mobility **access costs** of students with disabilities in non Erasmus+ mobilities. Inclusion criteria for the attribution of grants and funding for the mobility abroad of students with disabilities should be defined. The **portability of grants and support services** for students with disabilities 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 students with disabilities in all mobility programmes, and provide the **necessary funding** for it.



## Good practices



**Belgium - Flemish Community - EPOS** - The Flemish Erasmus+ National Agency, developed an easy funding application process for preparatory visits. A trusted person/coach can also accompany the student on this preparatory visit. A preparatory visit along with the students is usually set up in order to ensure that any reasonable adjustments recommended for the student are put in place where possible; if not, alternatives are negotiated. This preparatory visit is also used to gather information and practical experience of travelling to the host institution and familiarisation to the new town or city.



**Hungary - Tempus Public Foundation** - The Foundation runs the scholarship project Campus Mundi, which is co-financed by the European Union (European Social Fund) and the Hungarian Government (Ministry for Innovation and Technology in Hungary). Within the project, an additional support is offered for students with disability or chronic illness (including also e.g. food-intolerance) 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. Support is typically applied for pharmaceuticals and special dietary requirements (food-intolerance), but can also mean a need for a personal attendant, or travel expenses related to a medical examination that may need to be carried out in Hungary.



**Belgium - French Community** - For people with special needs, in addition to the mobility grant, since 2018 € 10,000 per year from the FAME budget (Fond d'Aide à la Mobilité Étudiante) and € 5,000 from the Erasmus Belgica budget for students with special needs, is allocated to students with disabilities. The student submits an application to the Agency via the institution. This subsidy covers additional costs (purchase of specific equipment, support staff, etc.). Interested students should contact the international office of their institution for more information.



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Initially I didn't want to be labelled nor did I feel that I needed support. Once I disclosed and got the support of my institution's disability services, my options opened up.

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I was given no information about the accessibility of my destination university or city and when asked, the exchange service did not know anything about accessibility and the disability service did not know anything about exchanges. I was not given a contact person or way of implementing adjustments at my destination. Several members of staff at my home university advised me against studying abroad and thought I would not be able to cope in another language because my disability affects communication (despite the fact that I have the required qualifications/ability in the language). I was too afraid to disclose my disability to the exchange office or my destination university because I thought it might impact their judgement of my language ability (on which my exchange is conditional).

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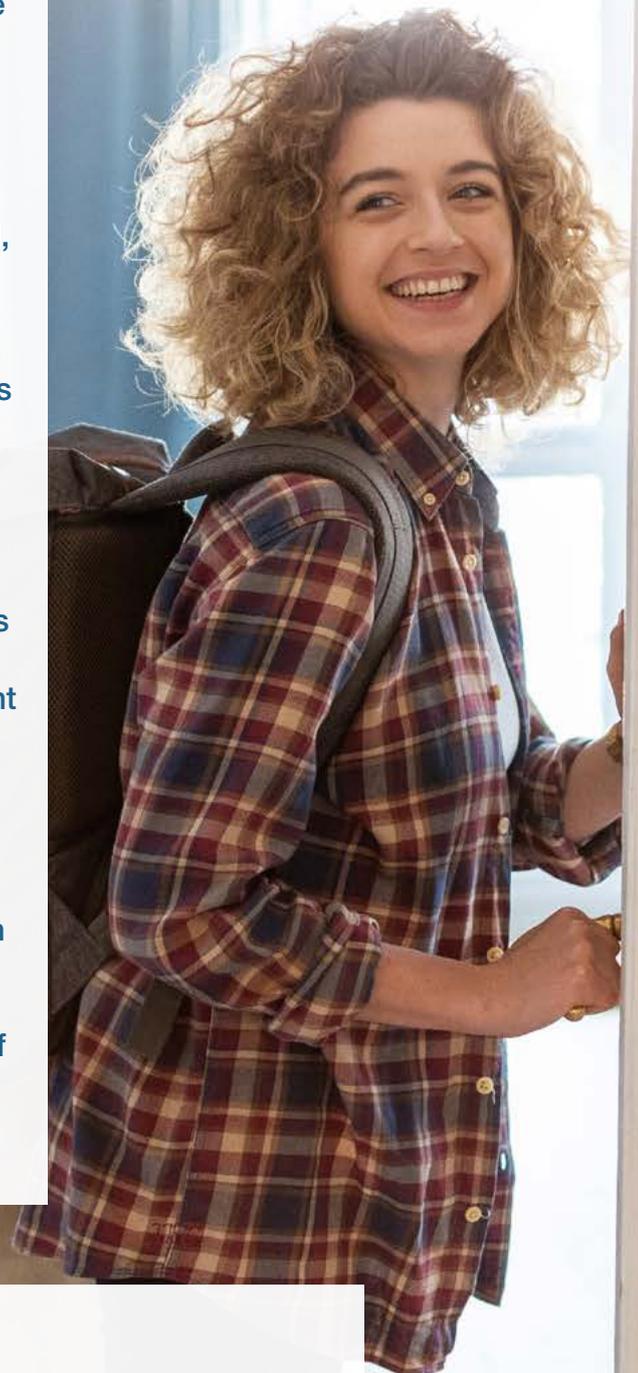
I had the possibility to find a good accessible accommodation, pre-visit the university and visit an information center for people with disabilities in my host city, which helped me organise medical aids and to search for personal assistance in advance of my mobility.

**EPFIME respondent - Students**

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It takes a lot of time to organise the support abroad. The Erasmus+ funding is often not confirmed until very late. No guarantee that additional costs can all be covered by this funding. Students are fearful of not getting support abroad, students need a support network which would not be available abroad. It is particularly difficult for students with physical and sensory disabilities who are often reliant on family members for support needs. They may have to organise their own supports outside of college hours (e.g. Personal Assistant, transport, etc.).

**EPFIME respondent - Higher Education Institution representative**



# Disclosure, reasonable adjustments and support services

## Facts & Figures



**Disclosure** of the disability is an important topic for students with disabilities. When preparing their mobility abroad, many students disclose their situation both to the home and the host institution



Institutions of higher education do not automatically acknowledge the **disability status** as well as the **reasonable adjustment** offered by the home institution.

- 71% of the responding students **disclose** their disability to the assigned officer/office supporting students with disabilities at their home higher education institution.
- Disclosure of the disability is **less common** for students with a psychiatric disorder (51%), ADHD (60%), mental health and/or chronic illness (66%), in comparison to students with a physical disability (82%) or visual impairment (83%).
- 29% of the respondents do not disclose their disability. The most common **reasons students with disabilities did not disclose** their disability are: not being asked by their institution (39%), thinking that it is not important (34%) and not wanting to be labelled (25%).
- 64% of the responding higher education institutions **automatically acknowledge the disability status** of incoming students and the reasonable adjustment offered at the home institutions.
- 36% of the responding higher education institutions ask students to hand in a **medical certificate** regarding their condition before recognising them as a student with disability.
- Among those students who decided to disclose their disability, 62% disclosed their situation **both to the home and the host institution**, 32% of them disclosed it only to the home institution, 6% did it only to the host institution.
- Disclosure is again **less common** or less evident for students with an invisible impairment, in comparison to students with a physical disability or visual impairment. Approximately half of the students with a psychiatric disability (55%) and autism (48%) do not disclose their disability when preparing their mobility abroad. Also one out of three students with mental health issues, ADHD, dyslexia and dyscalculia did not disclose their disability before the actual exchange period.



**Students with disabilities are positive about the support services offered by the host institution. Students value foremost the support from staff during the international mobility period and consultation about their needs and preferences.**

- 41% of higher education institutions point out a significantly **different cooperation** with the host or home institution when it comes to meeting the needs of students with disabilities as opposed to students without disabilities. Most students experience similar or better support conditions at the host institutions during the mobility period:
  - 45% of the responding mobile students experience similar conditions for academic success and personal well-being at the host institution compared as what they have at their home institution.
  - 31% of the responding mobile students evaluate to have better conditions at the host institution,
  - 24% of the responding mobile students experience better conditions at the home institution
- When asked in which areas the **host institution** supported them most during the mobility period, the most cited options are: support from staff during international mobility period (32%), consultation about the needs and preferences (28%), accessibility of academic life (25%), accessibility of learning materials (24%), availability of accessible housing facilities (20%).



## Recommendations



Communicating more openly about the specific measures offered and adjustments possible at the host institution can reassure students and encourage them to disclose their disability at both institutions. It is important and beneficial that higher education institutions nurture an atmosphere where students with invisible disabilities are encouraged to **disclose** their disability, and encouraged to be themselves, instead of feeling the need to hide their identity.



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



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://www.inclusivemobility.eu) can serve as input to orient students to make informed choices about their mobility destination. The home institution should clarify if the host institution is able to provide sufficient study conditions and support. Together with the host organisation and the student the home higher education 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 disability status** of incoming students with disabilities, and **provide the necessary reasonable adjustments** and support services to accommodate the students' needs. Higher education institutions should insert a disability clause in their inter-institutional agreements regarding the recognition of the disability status, as well as the reasonable adjustments and support services that can be offered to students with disabilities.



Higher education institutions should keep a close **cooperation in communication** with mobile students and partner institutions at all stages of mobility concerning their accessibility needs.



Higher education institutions should **support the reintegration of outgoing students** into the home university. This can be done by allocating a mentor with knowledge of the person to help with reverse culture shock and to reflect on the learning points of the exchange.

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## Good practices



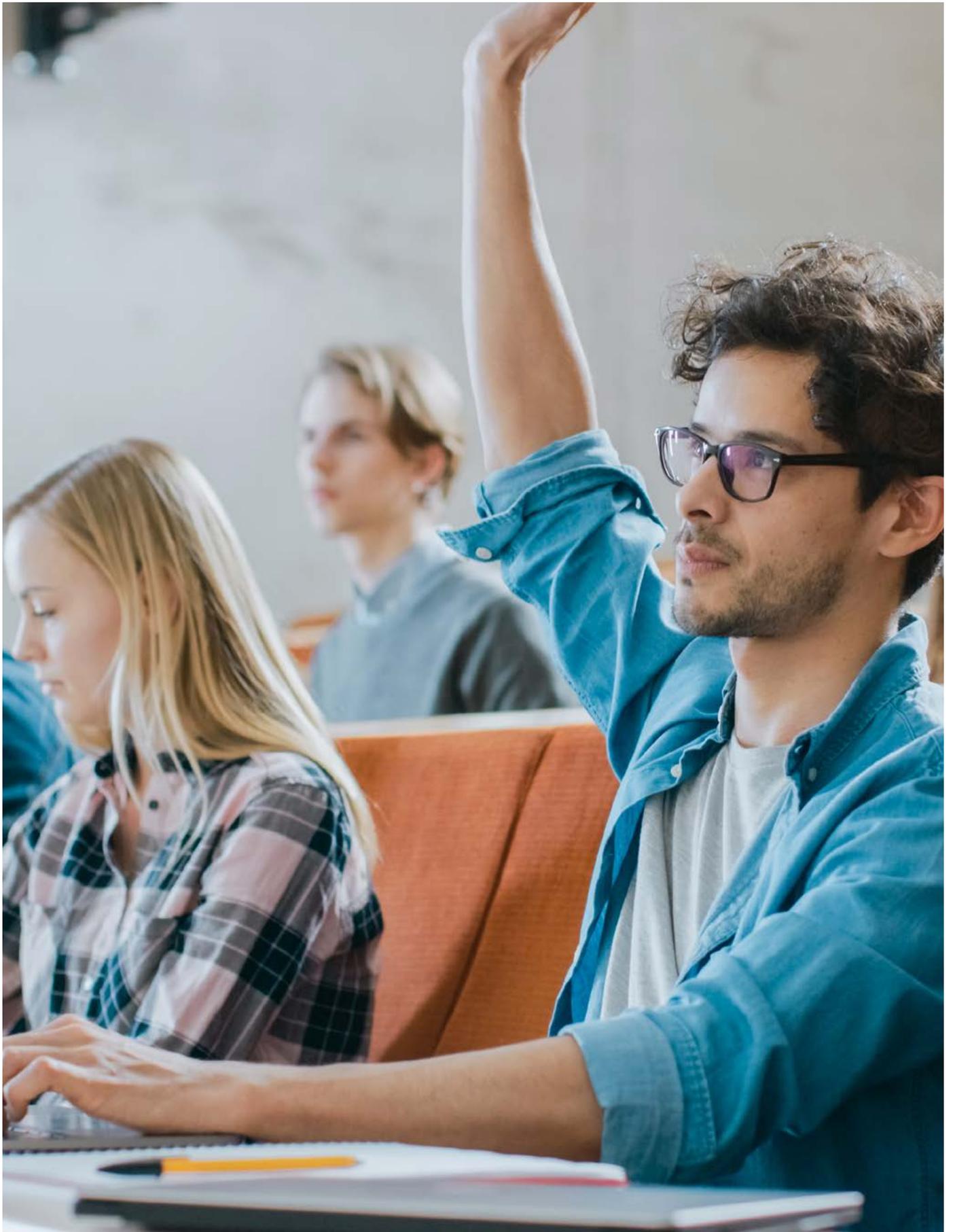
**Slovak Republic - Academy of Performing Arts** - The Academy in Bratislava provides comprehensive information for the host institution: the description of the disability, the latest medical report and a detailed overview of the needs during the mobility period. Students with disabilities are monitored more frequently during their mobility period.



**France - Université de Lorraine** - In the Erasmus+ inter-institutional agreements, the Université de Lorraine mentions explicitly the engagement and capacity to welcome incoming students and staff with disabilities. Regarding outgoing mobility, at least 4 months before the mobility takes place, a meeting is held between the student, the international officer, the disability officer and the academic department concerned to identify all the individual needs of the student in the host institution. During this meeting all the procedures and the next steps to take are explained to the student.



**Ireland - University College Cork** - At the university, the relevant academic coordinator remains in contact with all students throughout their period abroad. Students are required to provide updates regarding their study progress by the submission of learning agreements and work plans/logbooks. In a number of programmes, there is a structured approach to providing students with the opportunity to reflect on the issues which they face while studying abroad. The International Office also remains in contact with all students abroad via email and social media. The College has an Erasmus Facebook page for all outgoing Erasmus+ students in order to keep in contact throughout the period abroad. The International Office assists students with any issues that may arise and is the main point of contact for all students during their study period abroad. Students are provided with an emergency contact number for UCC which is available 24 hours, should it be required. Staff of the International Office make every effort to undertake at least one visit per academic year to partner institutions where students are studying. This is very worthwhile as it allows to meet with students in-country and assess how they are coping with the challenges of studying abroad. The Disability Support Advisor also stays in contact with the students and with staff in the Disability support service in the host institution for the duration of the programme.





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My student dorm is managed by the office of equal opportunities, therefore it is specialised for students with disabilities. Therefore the management also knows how to help us. And the people are also kind and helpful in this dorm.

**EPFIME respondent -  
Student**

# Housing and student life

## Facts & Figures



Although the satisfaction regarding the offered **student housing** is positive, students point out the lack of available information regarding the **accessibility of the destination, transport, housing and campus, and the best places to go socially.** Students point to more support with **everyday life necessities** (e.g. medical support, cooking, etc.).

- While 24% of the participants are very satisfied and 49% are satisfied with the student housing offered by higher education institutions, students underline the **need for more support** with everyday life necessities (e.g. cooking, medical support).
- The key criteria for choosing a host institution to study at heavily depends on **accessibility criteria** (city/town, learning, transport, housing and campus), which are not always easily found.
- More and more institutions have established their own **buddy and mentoring systems** and around one out of two higher education institutions (46%) collaborate with student NGOs (e.g. Erasmus Student Network, student councils/unions, etc.) in the provision of support for incoming students with disabilities. In the case of support provision for outgoing mobility, one out of three of the surveyed institutions (36%) collaborate with student NGOs.

## Recommendations



In addition to offering accessible housing, higher education institutions should establish **assisted living** initiatives and support the integration of incoming students into the institution and social life of the host town. Developing a **buddy or mentoring system** will help students with disabilities to adapt to their new environment, as well as to overcome everyday challenges.



**Peer support networks** for students with disabilities are an added value. Local branches of the Erasmus Student Network and its volunteers who are supporting international students can foster the integration of all students, including students with disabilities in the local community and provide opportunities to meet other students with and without disabilities.



Students with disabilities who already went abroad are good **ambassadors** and can therefore stimulate and help prepare other students with disabilities for their mobility.



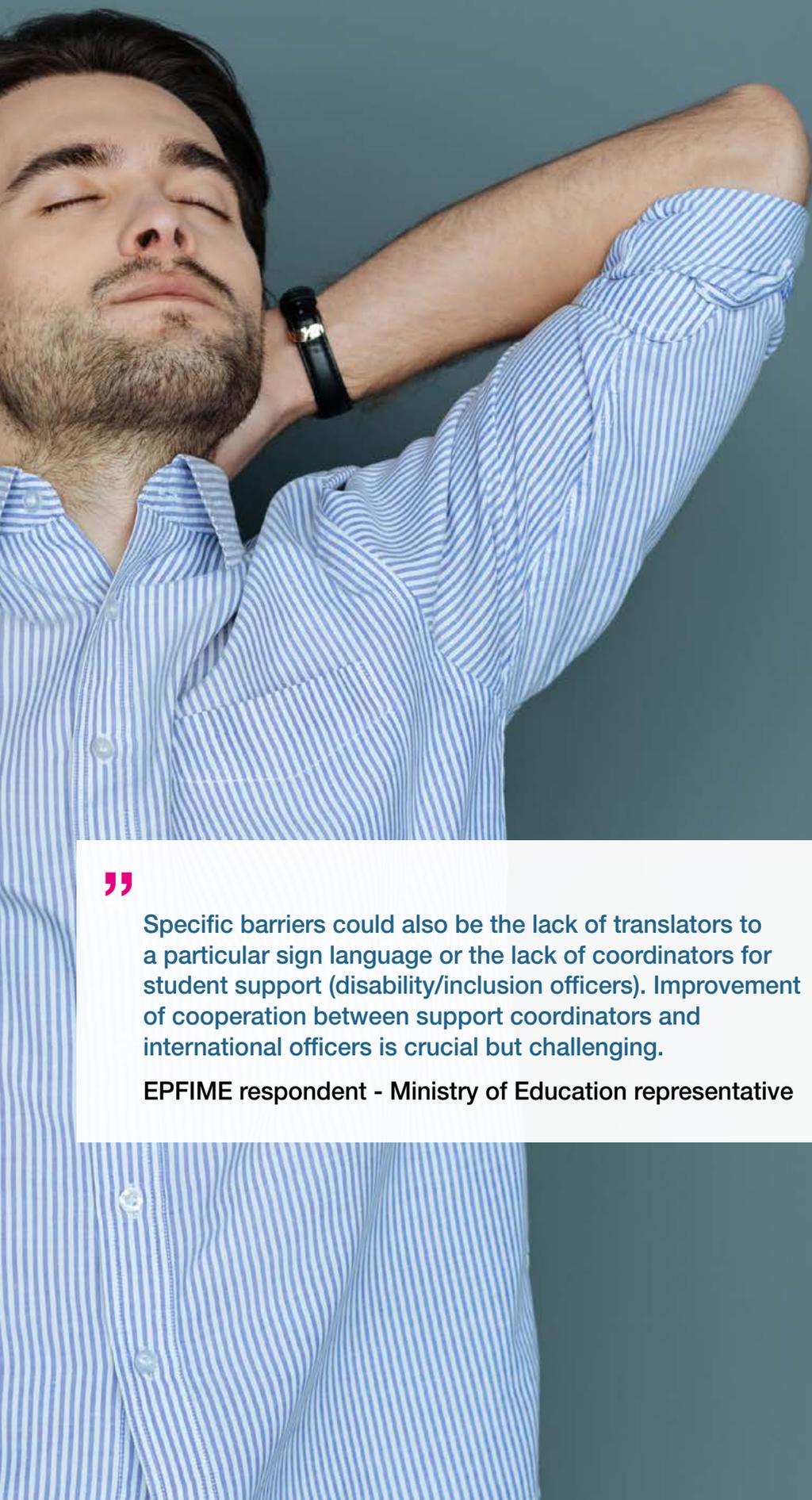
## Good practices



**Belgium - Flemish Community - KU Leuven** - offers suitable housing and assisted living support groups in subsidised residential facilities of K.U. Leuven for students with disabilities. Assisted living support groups consist of 10 to 15 students from diverse courses of study who are doing their basic studies at KU Leuven Association. They stay in a subsidised residential facility owned by KU Leuven. Every assisted living support group also has one or more students with disabilities. In the first place, these students with or without a functional impairment just stay together in their residence hall, just as in all other student's residence halls. However, in addition to this, the students without disabilities commit themselves to investing some of their free time in assisting a fellow student with a functional impairment. In an assisted living support group, the student with disabilities can ask the fellow students for assistance for daily activities such as personal care, shopping, supplying study materials, cooking, eating, etc. If the condition of the student with disabilities requires for a 24-hour-availability, the student-volunteers ensure, via a flexible rotation system, a 24-hour availability for the fellow student(s) with disabilities. This means that each student agrees to be available for 4 to 6 hours per week on average in the residence hall, as well as one night every two weeks on average.



**Italy - Università degli Studi di Trento** - The university cooperates with the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) to welcome and integrate their incoming students, especially those with disabilities. This cooperation focuses mostly on organising campus tours with the international students and searching for buddies to support students with disabilities to overcome everyday challenges.



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Specific barriers could also be the lack of translators to a particular sign language or the lack of coordinators for student support (disability/inclusion officers). Improvement of cooperation between support coordinators and international officers is crucial but challenging.

**EPFIME respondent - Ministry of Education representative**



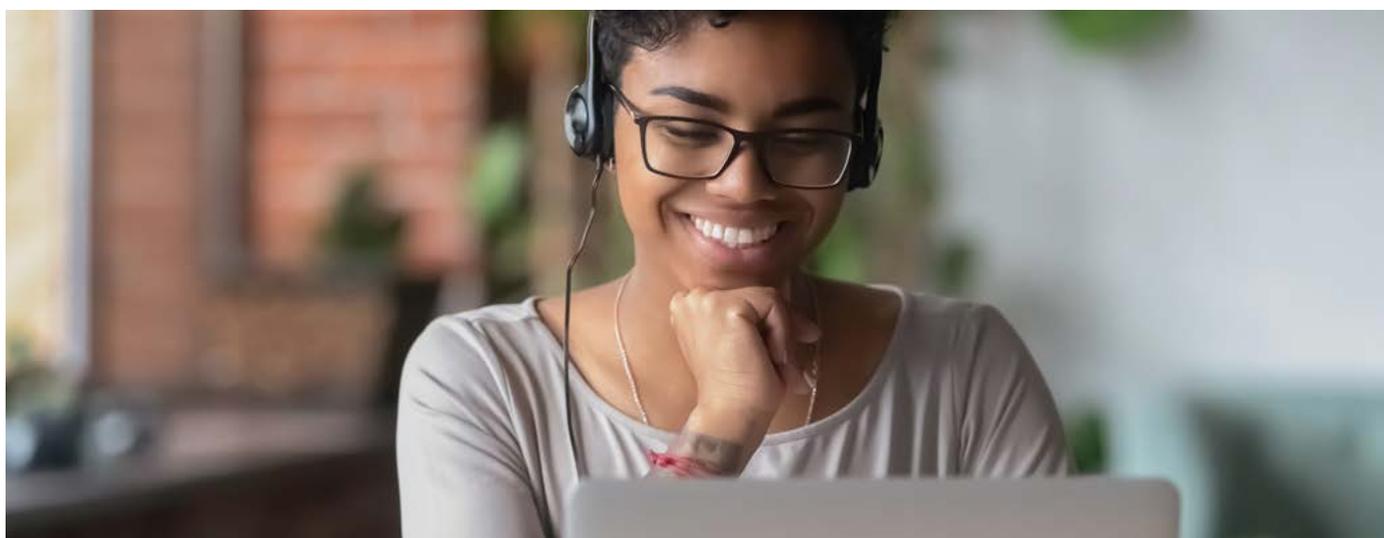
## Awareness and cooperation

### Facts & Figures



The lack of **awareness** about the barriers, as well as the lack of **communication and collaboration** between **different stakeholders**, both inside and outside organisations (departments of **Ministries**, inter-departments of higher education institutions, **National Agencies for Erasmus+**, etc.) are a barrier to supporting students with disabilities in mobility programmes effectively.

- **Disability 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 in place. They often come up with ad hoc solutions for both incoming and outgoing students with disabilities.
- **Higher education institutions** point out the need to provide more information on [www.inclusivemobility.eu](http://www.inclusivemobility.eu): information about national grants and support services available for students with a disability in mobility programmes (57%), information about support services available at higher education institutions (53%), and tools and training material for university staff (34%).
- **Ministries of education** point out the need to find on [inclusivemobility.eu](http://inclusivemobility.eu): information about national grants and support services available for students with a disability in mobility programmes (70%), information about support services available at higher education institutions (52%), and tools and training material for university staff (39%)
- **Roles and responsibilities** between different stakeholders are not well defined. Communication and collaboration between different stakeholders is lacking.



## Recommendations



**Training and capacity building** for staff members, and establishing **communities of practice and learning networks** amongst different stakeholders has been found to be highly effective in improving cooperation, communications and deepening understanding of the support structures and services that need to be put into place to safeguard a successful mobility abroad for students with disabilities.



**Collaboration at an institutional level** to share information and expertise between the key stakeholders, such as student support services, international and disability offices or representatives of different ministry departments is critical to making arrangements and policies that provide the student with a disability with a smooth pathway to mobility abroad. It is essential to determine clear roles by defining who is responsible for which set of support services and measures, and to communicate about it internally and externally.



Students with disabilities who already went abroad are good **ambassadors** and can therefore stimulate and help prepare other students with disabilities for their mobility.



## Good practices



**Ireland - Higher Education Authority** - As part of their audit and monitoring visits to Irish HEI's participating in Erasmus+, the HEA (Higher Education Authority) international section actively engages with disability officers based at each institution to communicate the opportunities available to students with disabilities to partake in Erasmus+, and about the additional supports available for them.



**Slovak Republic - Ministry of Education** - The Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport created the "Council of the Minister for the Support of Students with Specific Needs". Representatives of higher education institutions and NGOs are the members of the council. The council is the platform for the cooperation between the Ministry, higher education institutions and NGOs. The main objective is to ensure the systematic policy and approach towards the study of students with specific needs.



**Belgium - Flemish Community - Support Centre Inclusive Higher Education** - The Support Centre is a cooperation between the Flemish Government and the university associations, has established a learning network on the topic of inclusive mobility for inclusion, international officers and policy makers of all higher education and national bodies. Through coaching, training and a peer-to-peer counselling approach, all stakeholders are supported to draw-up plans on how to make their daily practices and policies on mobility more inclusive.



# Next steps

Based on the research findings and this recommendations policy booklet, the EPFIME team created a variety of tools to support Ministries of Education, national agencies and higher education institutions to make their mobility programmes more inclusive for students with disabilities:

- The **Inclusive Mobility Framework** builds further on this policy booklet by bringing a comprehensive overview of strategic objectives and action points that higher education institutions, national agencies and Ministries of Education could undertake to tackle the identified barriers and to reach a sustainability inclusive mobility strategy;
- The **self-assessment tool** allows higher education institutions, national agencies and Ministries of Education to assess the inclusiveness of their policies and practices;
- The **guideline** with a variety of tips and tricks and resources supports higher education institutions to establish a sustainable inclusive mobility strategy at institutional level;
- The **online platform**, [www.inclusivemobility.eu](http://www.inclusivemobility.eu), brings an overview of policies, practices and services of higher education institutions and national authorities on inclusive mobility for students with disabilities.

These outputs give clear direction and allow for a greater and more in-depth collaboration between the different stakeholders and ensure/increase the quality and transportability of support services among EHEA countries.





# Glossary of terms

## Credit mobility

A temporary form of mobility – usually a maximum of one year – aiming 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 period.

## Degree mobility

A long-term form of mobility which aims at the acquisition of a whole degree or certificate in the country of destination.

## Disclosure

The action to make 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 provide all the necessary support to mobile participants, including linguistic preparation.

## Erasmus+ National Agency/National Erasmus+ Office

Refers to agencies in charge of the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme in the EHEA

## Erasmus+ Special Needs Support

Financial support to cover disability-related costs such as personal assistants, sign language interpreters, customised living accommodation, etc. in Erasmus+ mobilities.

## Free mover

Student participating in temporary mobility outside 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 at the same institution. This institution is in charge of selecting students and sending them abroad.

## Host institution

Institution in charge of receiving students from abroad and offering them a study/traineeship programme or a programme of training activities.

## 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 to what the individual beneficiary needs to ensure a safe and exciting mobility period abroad. It is important to not generalise needs, needs are specific and the individualised aspect in it is highly important. What the person/beneficiary says they need is what they should receive. It is not only about academic mobility but also about 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

Refers to students that moved (i.e. crossed a national border) to a specified 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 themselves to respecting the quality requirements of the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education in all aspects of the organisation and management of mobility 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. These 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**

Refers to structures with responsibility for the strategic orientation and organisation/management of higher education institutions.

### **Outgoing mobility**

Refers to students who left their country of residence (i.e. crossed a national border) to study elsewhere (in which they are counted as incoming mobile students).

### **Portability**

Possibility to take the support available to students in their home country abroad for credit mobility (credit portability) or degree mobility (degree portability).

### **Preparatory visit**

Visit organised at the future host institution before the actual mobility takes place, in order to visit the facilities, the campus, the city and get acquainted with all aspects of accessibility and support services available

### **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.

### **Reasonable adjustments**

Necessary and appropriate adjustments to the environment to ensure persons with disabilities can participate on an equal basis with others (e.g. installing a hearing loop facility for a deaf student).

### **Short-term mobility**

Mobility with a duration shorter than one month.

### **Students with disabilities**

Students who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others (United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, UNCRPD).







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