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Supporting Erasmus+  
International trainees with disability –  
ACCOMPANYING PERSON



## *About the project and objectives of the report*

Involvement of people with disability into VET projects is a constant struggle. Vocational schools, hosting companies, vocational centers, and other VET providers lack the knowledge and understanding about key factors which can improve this situation.

**VET4ALL** project was an initiative financed by the European Union within Erasmus+. It aimed at gathering data regarding areas worth improving in order to increase the inclusion of people with disability in the VET sector. The project was implemented by 6 organisations:

- Zespół Szkół Ponadpodstawowych w Bystrzycy Kłodzkiej (Vocational school, Poland)
- Dobre Kadry Centrum badawczo-szkoleniowe Sp.z o.o. (Research and training center, Poland)
- Institute for Training, Employability and Learning Mobility (Hosting and intermediary organisation, Italy)
- Asociación Mundus (Hosting and intermediary organisation, Spain)
- Kaakkois-Suomen ammattikorkeakoulu oy, South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences LTD (University, Finland)

All of the Partners during 22 months focused on collecting good practices from various regions and different stakeholders (VET school, hosting companies, sending institutions, intermediary organizations) in the VET sector. The following report represents one of the 4 main outcomes of the project.

VET4ALL allowed the Partnership to gather data regarding 4 key areas worth improving when it comes to inclusion of people with disability in VET sector:

- 1. Accompanying persons in VET projects** – group supervisors during vocational mobilities (safety procedures, principles of savoir vivre when it comes to interacting with people with disability, the most common educational and behavioral problems and counteracting methods, etc.).
- 2. Vocational education schools** (including adaptation of vocational workshops, tools for teachers of vocational subjects, mechanisms of involving people with disability in school activities, etc.).

- 3. Vocational mobility projects** in terms of increasing participation of people with disability (including recruitment rules, integration training to include people with disability in the mobility group, support during preparation and mobility for people with disability, methods of evaluation and monitoring adapted to the specificity of people with disability, etc.).
- 4. Hosting companies** when it comes to supporting them in hosting people with disability.

The following report will focus on : **Accompanying person in VET projects.**





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## Introduction

The aim of this report is to show the most common educational problems that frequently occur and solutions that should be used by the accompanying person (here mentioned also as “supervisor”) when supporting groups with people with disability in the vocational education and training sector (VET).

According to CDC (Centre for Disease Control and Prevention) “a disability is any condition of the body or mind (impairment) that makes it more difficult for the person with the condition to do certain activities (activity limitation) and interact with the world around them (participation restrictions)”. There are many types of disabilities, such as those that affect a person’s: vision, movement, thinking, remembering, learning, communicating, hearing, mental health, social relationships. Two people with the same type of disability can be affected in very different ways. Some disabilities may be hidden or not easy to see.

According to the World Health Organization (World Health Organization, [International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health \(ICF\)](#)<sup>external icon</sup>. Geneva: 2001, WHO), disability has three dimensions:

- 1. Impairment** in a person’s body structure or function, or mental functioning; examples of impairments include loss of a limb, loss of vision or memory loss.
- 2. Activity limitation**, such as difficulty seeing, hearing, walking, or problem solving.
- 3. Participation restrictions** in normal daily activities, such as working, engaging in social and recreational activities, and obtaining health care and preventive services.

The supervisor is a person who accompanies a student/group of students throughout the mobility and usually has the following responsibilities:

- assist and guide the participant in the training period and verify, in collaboration with the company mentor and supporting organization, his/her correct performance;
- monitor the activities and address any critical issues that may arise from them;

- manage relations with the context in which the activities are developed, liaising with the company mentor and the supporting organization;
- inform the sending organization and the institution of origin of the participants about the progress of the activities in a transparent and regular manner;
- promote the evaluation activity by the student involved, on effectiveness and consistency of the activities carried out;
- supervise the participants so that they respect the rules set by the destination city and the structure in which they stay;
- supervise the participants by limiting, according to common sense rules, dangerous behaviors or not suitable for the rules of legality and security of the host country;
- ensure that the participants carry out the activities and meet the commitments on time and with correctness;
- inform the company mentor and the supporting organization if the participant cannot carry out the activities for objective reasons (e.g. illness) or is late;
- make sure that the documents required for the activity are adequately processed during the mobility and that within the term of the same they have been properly completed and signed;
- ensure that the student completes the “training log” day by day and participates in the activities of monitoring and evaluation.

Given the importance of his/her role, there are a lot of key competences and there is a precise preparation that should be completed before starting the mobility that a supervisor working with students with disability should have.

This report provides guidance on understanding the practical recommendations, procedures and relevant information that need to be followed based on experience, research and good practices gathered via study visits conducted within the project VET4ALL.

In addition to that, it aims to assist the understanding of the role of the supervisor of the group during international vocational internships when it comes to helping students with disability by presenting tools, methods and good practices.

## *Review of previous solutions*

In this section we will present some good examples of solutions that may be helpful for various VET providers when it comes to implementing inclusion and additional support for people with special needs in VET projects.

Before starting the mobility preparation, it is highly recommended to take some time to get familiar with various tools which are available for accompanying persons and participants with disability when conducting the VET mobilities. A little bit of desk research will go a long way to improve the quality of the mobility.

Here are some examples of tools that the supervisor might find useful:

1. **VALUABLE NETWORK** – a European network created within the Erasmus + “On my own...at work” project, designed, developed and tested the three tools which are now promoted by the network:
  - a. [ValueAble On My Own – App](#) a **digital support to workers with intellectual disability** that reminds them of every single step to be carried out to complete an assigned task, the tools to be used, the daily and weekly agenda. Images, texts, fonts and colors are the result of a study based on the criteria of accessibility and easy reading for people with intellectual disability.
  - b. [ValueAble Network Video](#), **videos addressed to employers and employees** to provide examples about correct relationships and behaviors between people with intellectual disability and their co-workers.
  - c. [ValueAble Courses](#), an **e-learning platform for managers of the hospitality sector** aimed at certifying the efforts of the company towards job inclusion and showing how to include people with intellectual disability in the workplace: attitudes, methods and tools to make the best of it.
2. **ALL INCLUSIVE SCHOOL** – another ERASMUS+ Project whose aim was to favor the inclusion of students with intellectual disability by creating innovative and technological tools to be used by teachers/educators:

- a) [ALL-IN-IDENTIKIT\\_EN.pdf](#), a research analysis for the development of the inclusive European teacher's identikit with specific tools, teaching strategies, pedagogical guidelines and innovative teaching methods to promote inclusion in schools.
  - b) [ALL-IN TEACHER KIT](#), a practical manual on educational and innovative strategies and methodologies to help the inclusive European teacher (link for the English version).
  - c) [ALL-IN Social Books Cooperative Press](#), a free web app for the creation of free, inclusive and accessible digital content.
3. **EXCHANGEABILITY** – thanks to this project, created by an international partnership, a practical booklet dedicated to raising awareness about what disability means and what the specificities of young people with disability are was created (link here [ExchangeAbility Handout pdf](#)). This booklet gives many good practices divided according to the disability and can be of benefit to anyone who would like to broaden their knowledge about the disability and young people with disability.





## *Identification of good practices*

Thanks to VET4All project and to the many visits conducted within the international meetings, it is possible to list three main categories of good practices for supervisors to be followed when supporting groups with people with disability in the vocational education and training sector (VET):

### 3.1

#### *Pre-departure*

##### 3.1.1.

#### *Interview and selection*

The first important procedure to follow by the accompanying person before leaving for a VET mobility with a student with disability is to have an interview with the supporting organization and discuss some questions like the following:

- Do you have a valid educational qualification certifying adequate basic training related to supporting people with disability?
- Do you have contact and references of doctors, hospitals or healthcare centers in case of emergencies?
- Do you have experience with young people with disability?
- What is your English level? Do you have experiences abroad?
- How would you organize a free day with a student with disability?
- Which fears/concerns could the student have during the mobility? How would you solve them?
- Which are your concerns about the organization of this type of mobility?
- What do you expect from the sending institution?
- Which kind of information/documentation do you need?

### 3.1.2. *Meeting with student/family*

Getting to meet the student and his/her family as soon as the selection process is confirmed is fundamental. It gives the opportunity to receive all the needed information, many tips and tricks based on experience and all the details that the supervisor might need to plan and organize the support during the mobility.

Here are some questions to be asked to the student and the family during this first meeting that will help the supervisor better understand the impact of the student's disability on his daily life and adjust his/her role according to the answers:

- Does the student take medicines? How and when? Do they make it unsafe for him to do any of the job's tasks?
- Does the student need assistance in daily life activities (cooking, going to the bathroom, taking a shower, etc.)
- Which support tools does the student use in daily life?
- Has the student ever had problems with his special equipment? How did he and his family react? Which solution did he find?
- How did the student adjust his house to his needs? Which tips can the student give you when dealing with a different accommodation?
- Is the student able to travel by bus/train on his own?
- Does the student need any special work arrangements so he can do his job easily?
- How many breaks does the student need during working hours?
- Does the student have ideas on how to improve his work place during the internship?
- Does the student have ideas for making his workplace safe?
- Could the student describe his daily routine? (Knowing how he/she spends time at school and home will help the supervisor recreate a familiar routine in a different environment)
- What is the biggest challenge that the student foresees in this job?
- How does the student normally stay motivated?
- How does the student normally monitor his health?
- How does the student usually react when he feels unsafe?
- If you see that the student feels unsafe, does he want you to interfere?
- Is the student motivated to go abroad?

### 3.1.3. *Pre-departure Training*

A supervisor ensures the protection and safety as well as the effective learning during the mobility experience of the vet learners. Since the accompanying person will accompany participants with disability, probably fewer opportunities and with little experience outside their own country and sometimes even outside their own familiar environment, we recommend a pre-departure training. During the mobility the supervisor will be a professional and specialized figure that the students will see as a point of reference. It is, therefore, essential to make supervisors aware of exclusion factors that prevent some participants from taking fully part in mobility activities. In order to help them develop the ability to better understand the participants and their needs, supervisors have to know that working with students with special needs might be stressful since they require more attention.

A supervisor of students with disability has first of all to know that being their tutor involves closer contact, more frequent meetings and more time assigned to task implementation. This guarantees step-by-step support of the participants during project activities, as well as outside working hours.

A supervisor should help the student to overcome fear during mobility and having a basic knowledge of pedagogy for people with special needs help to accompany the students in activating their potential and own abilities (which might be put in crisis with strangers or in non-ordinary situations). In addition to that, during the mobility supervisors will have the task to mediate and facilitate communication, integration and relationship and this training will help them act as an intermediary between the student with disability and other people.

Offering a variety of content types allows to create a richer training experience for all of the supervisors. Here are some examples:

- **Informational course** – provides supervisors with information on the general responsibilities of an accompanying person when dealing with different kind of disabilities.
- **Interactive assessment** – online quiz that incorporates a variety of question types and scenarios when dealing with a person with disability. The objective of this part of the training is to measure the supervisor's level of knowledge relevant to the work he/she will do, then proof the completion of learning activities.
- **FAQ interaction** – gives the supervisors the opportunity to access information and frequently asked questions, providing more additional information.
- **Role-play scenarios** – helps the supervisors build communication skills by applying their knowledge in

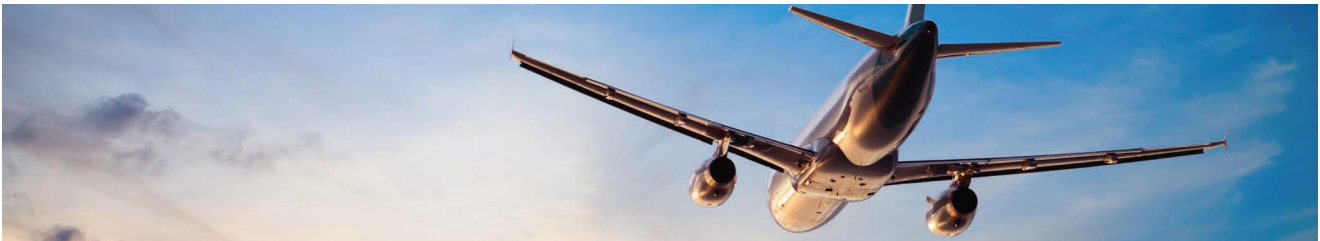
conversations and put them into practicing in a realistic, yet risk-free environment, which is perfect for training. During this training experience the students and their families will be involved in order to allow the accompanying person to apply his/her knowledge and measure their performance.

The main tasks of the supervisor, when dealing with students with disability, will be:

- assistance in the expression of alternative languages;
- support and supervise the student during motor activities;
- prevent and/or interrupt harmful or risky behavior;
- assist mentors during the first days of work activities;
- accompany and care of the basic needs of the student;
- employ support techniques for deambulation, mobilization and transport of non-autonomous students in their movements;
- apply techniques and correctly use aids and equipment, suitable for the mobility and transfer of the student.

Therefore, the pre-departure training should cover the following topics:

- introduction to different types of disabilities;
- accessibility and the digital world;
- effective communication;
- identification and management of challenging behavior;
- appropriate intervention strategies for supervising children with special needs;
- students' emotion and distress outside their comfort zone;
- principles and approaches for disability inclusion;
- professional support network.



### 3.1.4. *Trial period after the training*

After the training, a trial period should take place whenever it is possible: a meeting in person is more effective with students with special needs, therefore during this period the supervisor will have to follow the student during his daily activities to put into practice everything that has been discussed and if any problem comes up, he can find a solution together with the student/family and adjust it according to the situation. The supervisor should also try to work on things which the student doesn't feel compatible with and even though the problems that might arise during daily life are different from the ones that might occur during a VET mobility, it is still the closest way to finalize the pre-departure phase.

The purpose of this is for the supervisor to make sure he/she is setting a clear expectation with the student and his/her disability and the student and his family can get to know the accompanying person and to determine if he/she meets the requirements and expectations of the mobility responsibilities.





## 3.2

*During mobility*

It is fundamental to encourage personal development, intellectual and physical fulfillment, social and professional insertion of students living with a disability during the mobility.

**Here are some good practices that the supervisors can follow:**

## 3.2.1.

*Logistics*

**Plan all the logistics ahead** and check if the plan regarding all the services that the hosting country provides is ready: mobility connection is one of the major obstacles to disability-inclusive development, that is why the supervisor should always check if he/she has all the contacts of the supporting organization and the transports company's customer service. Another check to be done is if he/she has solutions for potential problems related to logistics (delays, route changes, strikes etc.).

**REMEMBER:** since many people with disability cannot participate in motor transport or local public transport, they are dependent on passenger transport by charitable institutions or specialized bus companies that can provide this sensitive type of transport with all its requirements.

**Include the student** during the planning so that he/she can agree with all the arrangements before the departure and consider the different boarding times according to the disability, specific pick-up times or different destination and departure facilities.

## 3.2.2.

*Safety procedures*

When it comes to solving problems with students with disability, the first thing to bear in mind is to demonstrate your respect through your behavior. When you interact with people with disability, remember that their disability is just one of the many characteristics they have. "People with disability have the same needs we all do: first

and foremost, among them is to be treated with dignity and respect” (Rehabilitation Services Brochures, Illinois Department of Human Services).

Feeling safe is one of the most important aspects of a person’s life. It gives people the opportunity to enjoy their lives without the fear that they could be harmed physically, psychologically, or financially. Being safe at home or in public takes some preventative measures, precautionary planning and building confidence. Like every other student, also students with disability could be unsafe both outside or at home and when this happens, the first person to be contacted will be the supervisor who has to be prepared to help the student.

Here are some basic practical advices for the supervisors that could reduce risks in common situations during the mobility:

- Be prepared to face difficulties in a calmed and relaxed way in order not to scare the student with disability.
- Do not react with panic during crisis situations.
- Take a first aid course.
- Always take a first aid kit that can help prevent an injury from getting worse and can potentially save some students with disability from a panic attack or physical reaction (come autistic people might consider a small cut as a big injury and having a first aid kit could help them feel safer).
- Be aware of every student’s disability.
- Understand the limits of the student’s disability and how they might affect his/her ability to react in case of danger.
- Make sure to know the area where the student lives and works.
- Keep all emergency numbers (ambulance, police, firefighters etc.) as well as family contacts.
- Make sure that the students have with them a paper with their physical condition.
- Check if the student has all his medications and make sure they know how and when to take them
- Check government sites for information on residential and medical facilities.
- Record a message that can be played to ask for assistance if the student cannot speak or has difficulties when talking to strangers.
- Prepare visual aids or other means of support to indicate where it hurts, how intensive is the pain, etc.
- Always have technical aids and equipment in a bag (plaster, sterile gauze dressing, safety pins, disposable sterile gloves, tweezers, alcohol-free cleansing wipes etc.).
- Set up procedures in advance – what to do/who to inform in which order in an emergency.

### 3.2.3. *Communication tools*

There are some universal communication steps to be considered by the support person/accompanying person that can be listed on this report:

**Always ask before giving assistance:** just because a person has a disability, it does not necessarily mean that he/she needs or wants your help. The supervisor has to respect the student's independence and know that sometimes giving help when not required might create tension or dangerous reactions for the person and the people around (panic attack, involuntary movements, impulsive reactions etc.).

**Communicate naturally and with expressions:** it is necessary to make sure that when speaking to someone with a disability the supervisor is not being insensitive by talking slowly or raising the voice. Also, if necessary he/she should kneel or sit down to communicate at eye level. As it is explained in the publication "Go4Diversity" written by the Research and Training Centre Dobre Kadry, there are some basic rules that need to be followed when in contact with people with disabilities:

- Use appropriate phrases: replace the word "disabled" with the term "a person with a disability", say "a person with diabetes", not "a diabetic", "a person using crutches or a wheelchair", not "a person tied to a wheelchair".
- Avoid words that are perceived negatively, such as "handicapped".
- Be natural in contact with a person with a disability.
- Do not be afraid to use common phrases or expressions.
- In direct contact, try to take a position which is comfortable for both sides.
- When talking to a person with a disability, including intellectual disabilities and hearing impairment, address them directly, not their attendant or (sign language) interpreter.

**Focus on the person and not the disability:** when speaking or dealing with person with disability, the attention should be on the person and disability should not be the first definition.

**Never pretend to understand if you do not:** when the speech of a student with a disability is not clear, it is better to ask for clarification many times than to pretend. Pretending, in fact, can potentially cause confusion later in the conversation.

As a supervisor, you can **download some useful apps** if you notice some difficulties: technology and technological gadgets have become an indispensable support for many people with disability all over the world. Regardless of whether the student has vision or hearing problems or difficulty moving around, there are dozens of hi-tech devices that can help people with disability carry out very useful actions in everyday life.

Here is an example list of different apps that might be helpful during the mobility (but also in daily life):

- [Strillone](#) – for visually impaired people;
- [Symbole Swiftkey](#) – to facilitate communication;
- [BraillePad](#) – for writing messages of all kinds thanks to a Braille keyboard;
- [Padius](#) – to help people with hearing impairments to make calls;
- [Immaginario](#) – to facilitate communication thanks to visual aids;
- [Soundscape](#) – to enable people with visual disability to have a richer awareness of their surroundings.

### 3.2.4.

#### *Contacts with supporting and hosting organization*

**Preparatory visits:** in order to be more aware of the environment where the student with disability will work, a visit in the city and workplace could be very helpful both for the supervisor and family members to give personalized support and to estimate the individual needs of the participant. The supervisor might receive a check-list on what to check during the visit (physical obstacles, attitude of the tutor and colleagues, emergency procedures, etc.) In case the visit is not possible for the supervisor or the family, a student's teacher could go and share all the information received. Visual materials could also be very helpful.

**Frequent visits to the companies** in order to check the workplace, the environmental safety according to the student's disability, the relationship between the trainee and the people working in the hosting organization.

**Interactive and non-formal meetings** with the students every day to check with them how the experience is going and what could be improved.

**Inclusive online blog** very useful to follow the project day-by-day and let the students share everything with the families and their friends.

## 3.3

*After mobility*

## 3.3.1.

*Feedback for improvement*

Feedback is of great help in leadership and communication: it creates a clear picture and increases transparency. Gathering feedback from the student and his/her family is very important not only for the supervisors who are directly concerned about their performance and their learning, but also for the future students and families who might be involved in mobility projects.

By asking the students for feedback, it can actually motivate them to express all their feelings and concerns and feel valued and appreciated: being asked to provide feedback that can help formulate internship decisions and can be used to motivate to build better working relations empowers everyone.

Here are some tips for the supervisor when conducting a feedback:

- **Know the goal** in asking for feedback: gain an accurate picture of what you are doing well and where you can improve.
- **Prepare the right questions** reflecting on whether there are areas where you often struggle or where you feel that improvement is needed.
- **Create an online form** that the students can fill with the help of family members/teachers according to the disability.
- **Use different type of questions** for a wider and more detailed feedback: open-ended questions, yes/no or rating based questions, follow up questions.
- **Take notes on your feedback** to help you evaluate yourself and your work and also how the student with disability perceives you.
- **Organize the feedback** so that you can refer back to it and make a step-by-step plan that outlines how you'll implement the feedback in tangible ways.



### 3.3.2.

#### *Pictures/videos for future students/families*

After receiving the authorization from students and families, sharing pictures and videos through a variety of channels, social contexts, and settings will increase other students' motivation to participate in mobility projects too and will reassure them before leaving their comfort zone.



## *Conclusions and recommendations*

In conclusion, the role and responsibilities of the accompanying person during a mobility with students with disability are crucial to ensure a smooth and safe experience for the students. The accompanying person plays a key role in providing assistance and support to the students throughout the mobility program. This includes helping with practical arrangements such as transportation, accommodation, and meals, as well as providing emotional support and ensuring that the students have access to any necessary medical or therapeutic services.

The accompanying person is responsible for ensuring that the students are able to participate fully in all activities and that any necessary adaptations or accommodations are provided. This requires the accompanying person to have a good understanding of the students' individual needs and disabilities and to work closely with the host organization and other relevant stakeholders to ensure that the necessary support is in place.

Overall, the role of the accompanying person is critical in ensuring that students with disability are able to fully participate in mobility programs and gain valuable experiences and skills. By providing the necessary support and assistance, the accompanying person can help to facilitate a successful and rewarding mobility experience for all students involved.

Understanding the role of the supervisor of the group during international vocational internships when it comes to helping students with disability is crucial for a positive outcome and thanks to this report many teachers or support people who want to be the supervisor of these students can have more practical tools to take into consideration before, during and after the mobility.

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