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Preparation of VET Students with Disability
for participation in Erasmus+ Mobility projects:
Focus on “before-mobility” phase





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Introduction

Organizations participating in Erasmus+ projects must ensure equal access and opportunities for all participants, regardless of their background or specific characteristics. This includes accommodating for the inclusion of students with physical, mental, or health-related conditions. **To ensure that students can fully participate in these projects, organizations should provide guidance, reception services, physical accessibility accommodations, and pedagogical and technical support adapting to individual needs of each participant.** Furthermore, extra funding may be necessary to cover any additional costs.

This report aims to provide examples of effective practices and recommendations for including students with disability in international vocational mobility projects, with special focus on the stage of the preparation of the students/group **before the mobility**.

After conducting desk research on the topic of the preparation of students with disability for international vocational mobility projects, we have found that it can be challenging to find information and resources when working on a mobility project, especially if the project is focused on a specific topic or population, in this case students with disability. The majority of available data pertains to official Erasmus+ documents promoting mobility, inclusion, and the involvement of students with disability, such as the *„Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Inclusion and Diversity Strategy”* or publications and reports of the The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (EASNIE)¹. While there are a few articles in the press about the mobility experience of students with disability, primarily focused on higher education (over-18) students. The scarcity of resources and information on this subject highlights the need for more support and guidance in this area.

1. <https://www.european-agency.org/>

This report is focused on selecting good practices and procedures to be implemented in the “before mobility” stage. Through the study visits, interviews, group discussions with experts we gathered concrete tips and good practices to be applied with students with disability and other actors involved in the preparation of VET mobility projects.

* Note: in this report when we say “students” we always refer to “students with a disability”



2

Key aspects of Mobility preparation

2.1

Selecting partners in the project

A strong partnership is crucial for the success of any project. For that reason, when starting your project you should think about the experts which can collaborate with you and contribute to successful project development. It's recommended to start this communication with your potential hosting partners already during the stage of preparation of the project application.

When choosing your hosting partners have in mind following:

- Careful selection of partners based on complementarity and experience, as well as consideration of both local and international perspectives, is essential.
- Clearly defining objectives and working collaboratively with partners is the key for successful organisation of mobility (even during the project application preparation stage).
- Make sure you define and make clear tasks & responsibilities for the each organisation.
- Assure they can organise mobility according to specific needs of your future participants.
- Avoid misunderstandings by asking direct questions and requesting clarification if needed during the stage of preparation with partners, open and fluent communication is the key.
- Additionally, consider using other forms of communication such as images, online tools and other means in order to assure smooth communication.
- If in your project there are students with disability please remember to provide detailed information regarding their needs and ensure that all hosting companies will have the capacity and resources to properly organise and implement traineeships.

- * In order to establish all the right conditions before mobility, you can also consider asking for “The Advanced Planning Visit”² (APV). Those are a valuable opportunity to strengthen trust and understanding among partners and can be a good opportunity to involve young people in the project development. It normally lasts for 2 days, not including travel days. The APV can be a great tool and the key moment in the process of building a solid partnership amongst the organisations participating in the project.



2. Check Erasmus + Guide for more information and explanation
<https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/es/document/erasmus-programme-guide-2023-version-1>

2.2

Preparation of the Project Team

Effective team work is essential for a successful mobility project, and it is important to assemble a team with complementary experience and competencies. Project team is formed by staff from both Sending and Supporting/ Hosting organisations.

Here some tips to assure good teams coordination:

- To facilitate team work, we recommend taking the time to get to know each other (even by phone/ Online calls, f2f visits).
- Identify and distribute roles and tasks early on, clear your expectations for each organisation.
- Foster complementarity skills amongst your team members–youth/social workers, educators, interns...– with a balance between professionals and encourage the exchange of experience.
- Consider including some additional experts to the team (from your organisations or some external/ local organisations – for example interpreters, translators, pedagogues, specialists for the specific disability, etc). – they should also be treated as equal partners.
- Communicate regularly with the host institutions/organisations.
- Anticipate how could you manage possible risks during mobility.
- Create communication protocols for the cases of emergency (who to contact first, why, etc).
- Consider conducting additional meetings/training for the team before departure.
- Consider involving parents in the communication process with your partners.
- Make sure you exchange detailed information about participants needs and all necessary medical paperwork.
- Make sure you exchange all other administrative documentation.
- Make sure you assure the confidentiality of personal data during the whole process.
- Determine how are you going to monitor and evaluate the whole organisation and implementation process.

2.3

Selection Process

The selection process for students with a disability participating in Erasmus+ mobility projects should be inclusive and non-discriminatory. It is important to note that each student with a disability has different needs, so it is important to consider them individually and find the best way to include them in this stage and make sure they have equal opportunities as all other students. This can be achieved by following a few key principles:

- **Accessibility:** Ensure that all aspects of the selection process, including application forms, interviews, and assessments, are accessible to students with disability. This may include providing alternative formats such as large print, audio, or electronic versions of documents.
- **Reasonable conditions:** Provide appropriate conditions for students with disability during the selection process, such as sign language interpreters or assistive technology.
- **Flexibility:** Be flexible in the selection criteria and allow for students with disability to demonstrate their qualifications and skills in alternative ways.
- **Support:** Provide support to students with disability throughout the selection process, such as information about what do you expect from them during the selection process.
- **Communication:** Communicate clearly with students with disability about the selection process and the support available to them. Make sure they comprehend all the stages of preparation process and mobility.
- **Encourage:** often students with disability are shy and need extra encouragement. Talk with them, offer your support and explanation regarding their participation in the project. You can use individual or group sessions.

2.4

Communication with Participants (Students & Accompanying person)

Direct communication with participants can facilitate the preparation process. Students with disability are the “main experts” which can give you the best tips and instructions on how to facilitate mobility. For that reason make sure you:

- Communicate directly with the students in order to draw on their motivations and expectations (consider parents support only if needed).
- Create the form/interview or other adapted methodology for the students needs assessment and collect data.
- Ask to provide relevant information and documentation such as psychological or medical reports (if available); always considering GDPR rules.
- Ask details about the previous types of supports in education/employment.
- Ask them to explain how they imagine they mobility in the hosting city/company.
- Ask about their hobbies and personal interests, as well as work preferences.
- Asses their fears & expectations.
- Asses their strength & weaknesses.
- Ask about potential issues and problems they think they may face.
- Check is the person used to plan and organize the work on their own.
- Check how they usually relate to other people.
- You can use testimonies from former participants and organisations to make them feel more motivated, comfortable and identified with the others.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT –

Who should be involved in the needs assessment process?

The needs assessment process for determining specific conditions for students with a disability is typically a structured conversation between the student and the Erasmus + coordinator and students class teacher. However, input may also be gathered from medical professionals through provided medical reports and specific subject teachers/coordinators to understand the support which the traineeship might need. In cases where the assessment is specifically for a mobility period, the accommodations and actions should be developed and agreed upon by the student, the home institution, and the host institution. You should also consider including parents in this process.

- * **IMPORTANT:** Permission and informed consent for the sharing of the contents of a needs assessment should be gained in writing from the student before sharing and information provided on the purpose for collecting/ sharing of the information, how it will be used, who will broadly have access to it and how it will be stored and disposed of in line with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Apart from that, it's recommended to agree with the student to share their diagnosis/needs directly with the company in order to assure the traineeship process is as safe and adapted to their personal needs as possible.



2.5

Planning of Traineeship Programme and Working Space

Preparation of the training program is very important for the successful organisation of vocational mobility. During this process you should consult the student, parents, vocational teachers, etc. – try to gather as much information as possible in order to balance the needs of the trainee and resources which the company can offer. In order to plan and implement the program adapted to concrete needs of each student you should bare in mind the following:



- Check the previous working/learning experience – what were the challenges and what were the strong points of the student?
- Defining concrete learning objectives which student can accomplish.
- Define the list of concrete activities students is able to complete (in case they need support with certain tasks specify this information).
- Define the level of support students need on the daily basis.
- Define if the accompanying person will be involved in the working process and if yes in which measure ? (Only the first few days, some hours each day, etc.).
- Get to know personal preferences and interests of the students.
- Match work tasks with students individual needs and expectations.
- Consider if there are any difficulties understanding the language – what is the communication level? How should work instructions be adapted?
- Check they are used to plan and organize the work on their own.
- Check if they have any physical limitation (use of tools, moving around).
- Check how they normally related to others in the group in order to find the proper mentors in the company and identify the save surrounding for the student.
- Check how frequent they need a break.
- Check preferences and needs related to working space and surrounding (space, noise, temperature, distance with other people and similar).
- Consider the physical accessibility/distance from the accommodation and means of transportation to the company (is any additional transport organisation needed).
- Selecting partner companies with experiences with working with people with disability, that can provide a safe space for the students.

2.6

Logistics Organisation

When it comes to logistic planning, the key word is 'anticipation'! Anticipating students' individual needs in the planning process can help participants settle in and establish daily routines. Logistic planning includes travel, accommodation, local transportation etc. Reasonable accommodation requires that you consider in the planning of your programme the time and effort required from participants and staff to do all the planned activities and deal with daily routines (transfers, meals, showers, interpreting, etc.). The first days are especially important to get settled in the new environment and set up rituals for daily life.



Here some of the most important recommendations:

- To make travel easier, whether it be international or local, contact travel companies, train stations, and airports to inquire about available services.
- Don't hesitate to ask to visit the airport and have a rehearsal of the security checks so as participants can feel safer and more confident on the actual travel day.
- Get information in your city about the possibility for people with disability to use the means of local transportation.
- Check which is the student's level of independence in moving around – how much support do they need?
- Check the accessibility of the places for the cultural activities – provide extra support if needed (example: private transport, instructions for the guides/monitors, etc).
- Check what are the needs related to accommodation – can students be accommodated in private accommodation/hotel/other? Can they share the accommodation with other students from the group? Do they need any support from an accompanying person?
- Assure that the accommodation is accessible and fulfils participants specific needs (e.g. eliminating any mobility barrier).
- Assure enough time for all logistic activities (transfer, meals, ..).
- Don't neglect the planification of the breaks and time for rest in the schedule.
- Check what are the stressed situations for that person and consider if needed when planning all the logistic aspects.
- Make sure all participants organisations involve have emergency contacts and know how to act in some possible emergency scenarios.

2.7

Communicating with Families

Including parents in the Erasmus+ mobility process for students with disability can be beneficial for both the students and the program. It is important to remember that every student with a disability is unique and so are their parents, so it is important to tailor the inclusion of parents to the needs of each student and family. Here are a few ways to include the parents:

- **Communication:** Keep parents informed about the mobility program and the support available to their child. This can be done through regular updates, meetings, or phone calls, online groups in social media, blogs of the project, etc..
- **Parental consent:** Obtain parental consent for the student's participation in the mobility program, and ensure that parents understand the program's goals and expectations.
- **Parental involvement:** Encourage parents to be involved in the program by providing opportunities for them to participate in events and meetings.
- **Support:** Provide support to parents by providing the information on funding and accommodation and all logistic aspects of the organisation.
- **Information about the student:** ask parents to provide all the information about their child they consider the accompanying person/hosting company and the group must know about the student. Double check the information already provided by the student and the school.
- When working with parents of students with specific conditions, it is important to be open to their concerns and needs, and try to address them as best as possible.
- Don't forget to explain what will be the communication dynamic with the student during the mobility stage.
- Set the rules of contact with the guardian/parent (when to contact the student, when the guardian/parent) – to provide independence as much as possible.

Main aspects of pre-departure training for students with disability

The preparatory work with participants should begin at an early stage, regardless of the type of mobility you are going to implement. You can organise workshops in which you can use non-formal education approaches to bring participants to reflect on their motivations, their expectations, their fears, etc. It allows participants to gain awareness of the intercultural dimension of the project and to prepare themselves for their departure. It can also address disability/accessibility related questions. The value of an early preparation also lies in the opportunity for you to clearly identify the needs of the participants to plan relevant accommodations for the mobility.

The key aspects of training should include following aspects:

ASPECT OF PREPARATION	RECOMMENDATIONS
PSYCHOLOGICAL, SOCIAL AND PHYSICAL WELLBEING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparing and conducting as many trainings/meetings as needed before departure for all the groups involved (participants, teachers/tutors, colleagues and friends of people with difficulties, employers, etc). • Including relevant experts in pre-departure training, as well as other groups of participants if needed. • Use of dynamics for getting to know students expectations and fears. • Assure the time to answer all the questions that student might have. • Use dynamics for student to relate with the group/accompanying persons. • Organise a short online meeting with the hosting company in order to establish the first contact with their mentor and exchange some first information. • Provide all emergency contacts and explain various emergency procedures and how the student should act.



CULTURAL PREPARATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage student in activities related to hosting countries culture and costumes. • Engage student in activities related to food, music and other relevant traditions/events which might be happening during the stay. • Check with students who do imagine the participation in cultural activities in the hosting city – what they want to/can do?
LINGUISTIC PREPARATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try to engage student in hosting country language classes (if possible). • Show options about how to use different apps for the language learning. • Demonstrate the use of different translation tools to the student. • Train the communication process and use of tools: AAC communication devices, additional communicative devices, e.g. Braille, translation, plain language, communication cards, mobile apps, video services. • Prepare and deliver the mini glossary for outgoing students and carers with terminology directly related to the place of practice/internship and with vocabulary related to disability. • Prepare and present to the students simple cards with colours which the student can show when they want to take a break/have a conversation/etc.
ADMINISTRATIVE PREPARATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure the students understand all the paperwork included in the mobility process, especially the documents they are signing. • Use enough time to explain and make them comprehend the content. • Adapt documents/use the most appropriate format of the documents adapted to students needs. • Provide the checklist with all personal documents students should bring. • Explain the possible use of medical documents with the host organisation. • Present the packing tips for parents/students, creating a checklist (what to take).
TRANSPORT AND LOGISTIC PREPARATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide information about the complete trip from their home to location in hosting country . • Provide information related to airport and flight procedures – if necessary consider organise a visit to the airport to practise (if possible). • Provide information related to local transport. • Provide all the information related to accommodation characteristics and access. • Provide tips /checklists for the “accommodation rules” and how to manage the stay.

Conclusions and recommendations

To effectively organise mobility for students with disability, effective communication and coordination among all parties involved is crucial. This includes the hosting, sending, supporting organisations, students, parents, accompanying person and other support staff. By involving all stakeholders in the planning process from the early stages, the implementation of mobility can be made more manageable.

Our report provides a wide array of tips and instructions for all participants in the mobility project, with many suggestions being relevant for both the preparation and implementation stages. While there is no one-size-fits-all approach to organising mobility projects for students with disability, we offer numerous suggestions for assessing the needs of each participant and developing procedures tailored to their unique circumstances.

During the planification process, it can be challenging to find the information and resources when working on a mobility project, especially if the project is focused on a specific topic or population as for example students with disability. However, there are a few things you can try to find more information and resources:

- **NETWORKING:** Reach out to other organizations or individuals who may have experience in the area you are working on. They may be able to point you in the direction of helpful resources.
- **ONLINE RESEARCH:** Use search engines, databases and social media to find information and resources on the topic.
- **PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS:** Check with professional organizations in your field. They may have a library of resources or be able to connect you with experts who can help.
- **GOVERNMENT AGENCIES:** Many government agencies have resources and information available on their websites.
- **CONSULTANTS:** You can also hire a consultant who has experience in your field and can provide you with resources and information.
- **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:** Consider taking professional development courses or workshops to gain knowledge on the topic.

Pre-departure checklist

FOR SENDING ORGANISATION

- Create different accessibility forms, so people can better specify their needs.
- Preparation of checklist for host institutions verifying: having qualified staff, preparation of the traineeship place and traineeship plan.
- Prepare a list of questions to the student and the parent before departure to analyse what specific needs the student has and pass some tips/suggestions to the hosting company.
- Verifying participants their knowledge of strengths, weaknesses and limitations resulting from disability or other individual needs.
- Informing parents about the whole process – travel, accommodation, traineeship plan and organisation, accompanying person, etc.
- Preparing and conducting trainings/meetings before departure for all the groups involved (participants, teachers/tutors, colleagues and friends of people with difficulties, employers, staff of the hotel/boarding house).
- Make sure you understand the limits of the student’s disability and how they might affect his/her ability to react in case of emergency/danger.
- Prepare/deliver all emergency numbers/family contacts.
- Assure the preparation of all medical needs (medicines, instructions, permissions, etc).
- Consider preparation of “medical dictionary” – focused on the disability, containing the most important phrases so that the student can easier explain the disability.
- Consider preparation of the list of equivalents of medicines in a particular country are called or what ingredients these medicines contain.
- Prepare the check – list for the parents and students with packing tips.
- Assure the appropriate accommodation which can satisfy personal needs of the student.
- Assign and introduce the accompanying person to the student/group during the pre-departure trainings.
- Assure all travel needs and commodities for the student.
- Provide and sign all administrative documents before departure.



FOR HOST ORGANISATION

- Assure organisation according to the requirements of the sending organisation.
- Careful selection of placements and training for the student and assigning appropriate mentor in the company
- Assure the support person (mentor or other) at the host organisation who can be contacted beforehand regarding access needs.
- Company staff and mentors should be informed only of their role in providing what a student needs, rather than the disability or medical condition in detail. In some cases it is recommendable to motivate the student to share more about their medical condition in order to provide safety and understanding in the company.
- Think about the link with possible peer support groups in the hosting city.
- Carry out awareness training with host organisation staff in order to help them familiarise themselves with different types of disability and support needs. Staff should be able to provide practical and suitable information if it is available, or alternatively be able to find the information.
- If needed, implement the training with the involved people who do not always deal with the students with disability (supervisor, mentor, colleagues, accommodation staff etc.).
- Assuring the medical care and/or support available if needed according to individual needs (physiotherapy and other regular practices, individual supporting plans).
- Assuring social support (individual supporters, e.g. family members, friends, personal assistants).
- Psychological support (helping with the fears and anxieties the individual may have, calming information, preparation to answer any questions).
- Try to obtain the checklist of actions to be done or NOT to be done when dealing with the personal space of each student (ex. Hugging, touching tools etc.).

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