# Implementation guidelines

# Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Inclusion and Diversity Strategy

**Version 1 – 29/04/2021**

European Commission

Education, Youth, Sport and Culture

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# 1. Introduction

The principles of equality and inclusiveness are part of the core values of the European Union. At the same time, societies are increasingly diverse in many respects. This results in a greater need to learn to navigate diversity and to create inclusive and cohesive societies in Europe. The EU Programmes Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps (hereafter "the Programmes") are key programmes that can support this.

European Union (EU) programmes should provide opportunities that are accessible for all. However, some people cannot benefit equally from these opportunities because they face various barriers. Inclusion of people facing access barriers or having fewer opportunities in education, training and youth work is a key objective of several policy initiatives. Whereas the EU educational, youth and sport programmes have focused on inclusion in the past, evaluation of and research point to a need for further widening access and inclusiveness.

As an impetus for inclusion and diversity in the new programme generation of Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps, the regulations for these new programmes include a dedicated chapter on inclusion, among other elements requesting the European Commission to establish a dedicated framework for inclusion measures outlining the main areas of work for the next seven years in this regard. In parallel to the inter-institutional negotiations for the regulations establishing the two programmes, and to ensure that the new programmes include this important horizontal dimension right from the start, work on a more inclusive Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps has been co-developed together with Member States, Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps National Agencies and the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), networks, NGOs, experts and final beneficiaries, including those with fewer opportunities.

This document is the result of this co-creation process and builds up on the experiences across the different sectors of the Programmes and encourages mutual inspiration and motivation amongst them. It features shared definitions across the different sectors, target groups and specific inclusion-related objectives, and has been developed in close cooperation with  the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps National Agencies and other external stakeholders, with a view to bringing the Erasmus+ programme and the European Solidarity Corps also within reach of people with fewer opportunities.

In this document, the following aspects are covered: in section 2, the policy background is spelt out, building on experience from previous programmes in relevant fields. The objectives of the strategy are further detailed in section 3.
Section 4 helps to provide the necessary definitions, while the measures available within the programmes to ensure their broadest accessibility are outlined in sections 5 and 6. Section 7 provides guidelines for National Agencies, Resource Centres and the European, Education and Culture Executive Agency on how to apply the strategy to the activities supported through the programmes. Examples of good practices and how to make the best use of relevant tools are provided in section 8.

## 2. Background

### a) Policy framework and drivers

The principles of equality and inclusiveness are part of the core values of the EU and are enshrined in the EU Treaties[1]: "In all its activities, the Union shall observe the principle of the equality of its citizens, who shall receive equal attention from its institutions, bodies, offices and agencies."

Inclusion of people facing access barriers or having fewer opportunities in education, training and youth work  is a key objective of the Commission's initiative towards a European Education Area[2] as well as of the EU Youth Strategy[3] and of the European Youth Goals[4]. The European Pillar of Social rights states that "*everyone* has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning"[5]. It is also in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development[6] of the United Nations that aims, amongst others, to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all".

The European Council[7] highlighted in this respect that "education and culture are key to building inclusive and cohesive societies", and in that light called on Member States, Council of Ministers and European Commission to take work forward with a view to "stepping up mobility and exchanges, including through a substantially strengthened, inclusive and extended" programmes.

Furthermore, Sport is a framework for personal, social and learning skills and promoting tolerance, solidarity, inclusiveness as well as other sport values and EU values. One of the goals of the new EU Workplan for Sport is to increase participation in sport and health-enhancing physical activity in order to promote an active and environment-friendly lifestyle, social cohesion and active citizenship.

Against this political background and taking into account input from stakeholders, the principle that programmes should be accessible for all[8], regardless of the barriers people may face, underpins all the opportunities they offer to individuals and organisations from within the EU and outside with the aim of leaving no-one behind and leading to more inclusive, just, greener and more digitally-fit societies.

### b) Societal context

Societies are increasingly diverse in many respects (cultures, abilities, social groups, sexualities, political opinions, identities, education, training, literacy levels etc.). This results in a greater need to learn to navigate diversity and to create inclusive and cohesive societal systems, through informal, formal and non-formal educational activities. Europe's vision is to provide the necessary support to tackle the challenges people might face in this process.

Modern societies and political systems rely on the inclusion and active participation of citizens in the democratic process and public life regardless of their background or

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[1] Article 9 of the consolidated version
[2] European Commission Communication COM(2018) 268 of 22 May 2018
[3] Council Resolution 14080/18 of 15 November 2018 setting out an EU Youth Strategy for the period 2019-2027
[4] https://ec.europa.eu/youth/policy/youth-strategy/youthgoals_en
[5] https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en
[6] https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/international-strategies/sustainable-development-goals_en
[7] Conclusions of its 14-15 December 2017 meeting
[8] [Reference to the legal bases]

circumstances[9]. In this respect, participating in the programmes can contribute to develop a sense of shared citizenship and to foster a greater involvement in society, as shown in the mid-term evaluation of Erasmus+ 2014-2020 and in a number of research activities[10].

## c) Building on experience from previous programmes

More than 10 million participants have benefited from EU programmes in the field of education, training, youth and sport between 1987 and 2020. In 2014-2017, the proportion of people with fewer opportunities accounted, on average, for 11.5% of the total number of participants[11], across all programme sectors. However, there were significant variations among them. For instance, youth projects involved up to 30% of young people with fewer opportunities, while one in three sport projects tackled issues connected to social inclusion.

And, while the Erasmus+ programme[12] reported better results than its predecessors in involving people with fewer opportunities, the mid-term evaluation of the programme pointed to a need for further widening access and inclusiveness[13].

The previous programmes did not feature shared definitions across the different sectors, target groups and specific inclusion-related objectives. This resulted in significant complexity to meaningfully compare data across sectors and to setting comprehensive strategies at national and EU levels.

Strategic orientations were set out at European level on inclusion and diversity and the way they were implemented on a national basis varied from country to country. However, at times beneficiaries reported[14] there was scope to improve communication and coordination on inclusion matters among projects regardless of whether they were supported through actions managed through the European Education and Cultural Executive Agency (EACEA) in Brussels or through the Erasmus+ National Agencies in the different Programme Countries participating in the programmes.

A common strategic approach towards inclusion and diversity provides an opportunity to build on the experiences of inclusion in each sector and encourage mutual inspiration and motivation across sectors. Hence this comprehensive strategy for Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps 2020-2027. The strategy can benefit from the well-established know-how of the National Agencies, of the Resource Centres and of the Executive Agency.

## 3. Aims of the Strategy

This strategy aims to help create equitable opportunities of access for everyone to these programmes. This should be achieved by addressing the barriers different target groups (described below) may face in accessing such opportunities within Europe and beyond. This strategy provides an enabling framework for inclusion and diversity projects supported through the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes.

Moreover, the strategy seeks to promote diversity of all kinds as a valuable source of learning and strives to equip programme stakeholders, in particular project organisers

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[9] European Education and Training expert panel – Issue paper Inclusion and Citizenship (Forum of 24 January 2019)

[10] For instance, in youth: www.researchyouth.eu; in higher education: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-19-2548_en.htm

[11] Source : Report from the Commission [COM(2018)50] to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the Mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme (2014-2020), page 2

[12] As the European Solidarity Corps was established as a programme in its own right in October 2018, a meaningful assessment of its inclusiveness can only be made during the 2021-2027 edition

[13] See footnote n° 11

[14] Eg, conclusions of EACEA Thematic cluster meeting, October 2017

and participants, to interact positively with diverse people from different backgrounds in all type of projects.

This should ultimately lead to more and better projects either directly involving people with fewer opportunities, or focussing on inclusion and diversity issues. Both types of projects aiming to foster inclusion and diversity should trigger positive change for people with fewer opportunities and for society, ultimately contributing to reducing inequality.

The strategy aims to achieve this by:

1. Establishing a common understanding of those who may be considered people with fewer opportunities and set op a coherent framework for including them in the programmes;

2. Increasing commitment to inclusion and diversity from all actors in the programmes' actions and a positive approach to diversity of all kinds in the projects;

3. Supporting beneficiary organisations in establishing more quality projects involving people with fewer opportunities (e.g. provide training, tools, funding, coaching etc.);

4. Reducing barriers to participation in the programmes for people with fewer opportunities and helping applicants and potential applicants to overcome these barriers, as well as establishing appropriate conditions for learning, working or volunteering by addressing their support needs;

5. Fostering the recognition of the experience and competences developed by people with fewer opportunities in the programmes and by the people working with them;

6. Ensuring that the focus on inclusion and diversity is taken into account at all stages of the programmes' management and project life-cycle: before (promotion, outreach, support, assessment, etc.), during (participant selection, preparation, implementation, results, etc.) and after the project (evaluation, dissemination and exploitation of project outcomes, follow-up, etc.).

7. Increase the visibility of inclusion and diversity and its role in the high-quality implementation of the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Programmes.

These aims and measures are meant to complement and spell out the definitions and objectives established in the programmes' legal bases[15].

# 4. Definitions

## a) Target groups

The Regulations establishing the Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps programmes define *"(young) people with fewer opportunities' as "(young) people who, for economic, social, cultural, geographical or health reasons, due to their migrant background, or for reasons such as disability or educational difficulties or for any other reason, including a reason that could give rise to discrimination under Article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, face obstacles that prevent them from having effective access to opportunities under the Programme;"*[16].

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[15] Indicators to report on the progress of the programmes toward the achievement of the general and specific objectives are laid down in the annex of the respective Regulations

[16] Although these texts are based on the political agreement between the co-legislators, the two Regulations are undergoing adoption procedure by co-decision at the time of writing, thereby implying that the text referred to for both of them should be considered as draft till they officially enter into force.

Therefore, the main target groups of this strategy are people with fewer opportunities in life, which put them at a disadvantaged situation compared to their peers as to participating in the programmes and/or in education and training systems. Those people may find themselves in such a disadvantaged situation because of one or more of the exclusion factors referred to in the following list.

These factors can make it difficult to access opportunities in the programmes, especially in correlation with certain structures and practices of outreach, communication and project design, and thus become barriers. It depends on the context and it is up to the judgement of knowledgeable staff involved, taking into account the feedback and input from the participant(s), whether a particular project or participant should receive additional support for inclusion and diversity.

## b) Barriers in accessibility and outreach

Previous experience helps to identify the main barriers which may prevent people with fewer opportunities from participating more in the programmes as participants. The list of such potential barriers, spelt out below, is not exhaustive and is meant to provide a reference in taking action with a view to increasing accessibility and outreach to people with fewer opportunities. These barriers can hinder their participation both as a stand-alone factor and in combination among them.

### i. Disabilities

This includes physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder someone's full and effective participation in society on the same footing as others[17].

### ii. Health problems

Barriers may result from health issues including severe illnesses, chronic diseases, or any other physical or mental health-related situation that prevents from participating in the programmes.

### iii. Barriers linked to education and training systems

Individuals struggling to perform in education and training systems for various reasons, early leavers from education and training, NEETs (people not in education, employment or training) and low-skilled adults may face barriers. Although other factors may play a role, these educational difficulties, while they may also be linked to personal circumstances, mostly result from an educational system which creates structural limitations and/or does not fully take into account the individual's particular needs. Individuals can also face barriers to participation when the structure of curricula makes it difficult to undertake a learning or training mobility abroad as part of their studies.

### iv. Cultural differences

While cultural differences may be perceived as barriers by people from any backgrounds, they can particularly affect people with fewer opportunities. Such differences may represent significant barriers to learning in general, all the more for people with a migrant or refugee background – especially newly-arrived migrants -, people belonging to a national or ethnic minority, sign language users, people with linguistic adaptation and cultural inclusion difficulties, etc. Being exposed to foreign languages and cultural differences when taking part in any kind of programme activities may put off individuals

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[17] United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html

and somehow limit the benefits from their participation. Such cultural differences may even prevent potential participants from applying for support through the programmes, thereby representing an entry barrier altogether.

### v.     Social barriers

Social adjustment difficulties such as limited social competences, anti-social or high-risk behaviours, (former) offenders, (former) drug or alcohol abusers, or social marginalisation may represent a barrier.
Other social barriers can stem from family circumstances, for instance being the first in the family to access higher education or being a parent (especially a single parent), a caregiver, a breadwinner or an orphan, or having lived or currently living in institutional care.

### vi.    Economic barriers

Economic disadvantage like a low standard of living, low income, learners who need to work to support themselves, dependence on the social welfare system, in long-term unemployment, precarious situations or poverty, being homeless, in debt or with financial problems, etc., may represent a barrier.
Other difficulties may derive from the limited transferability of services (in particular support to people with fewer opportunities) that needs to be "mobile" together with the participants when going to a far place or, all the more, abroad.

### vii.   Barriers linked to discrimination

Barriers can occur as a result of discriminations linked to gender (gender identity, gender expression, etc.), age, ethnicity, religion, beliefs, sexual orientation, disability, or intersectional factors (a combination of one or several of the mentioned discrimination barriers).

### viii.  Geographical barriers

Living in remote or rural areas, on small islands or in peripheral/outermost regions, in urban suburbs, in less serviced areas (limited public transport, poor facilities) or less developed areas in third countries, etc., may constitute a barrier.

## c) Understanding diversity

Diversity in the context of this strategy refers to differences of all kinds. Some types of diversity are more obvious than others, such as ethnicity, religion, culture and language. But diversity expands beyond just these aspects. It also refers to different (dis)abilities, educational levels, social backgrounds, economic situations, health statuses, or the place of origin – as described in the definition of "people with fewer opportunities".
This document sets out to embrace and celebrate diversity so that difference becomes a positive source for learning rather than the cause for negative competition and prejudice. Participants and organisations involved in the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Programmes should be equipped with the necessary competences to work with diversity and make the most of what diversity has to offer to enrich the programme. This will encourage positive interactions between people of all walks of life and ultimately improve the situation of people with fewer opportunities.

# 5. Programmes' mechanisms to support inclusion and diversity

The activity formats actively create face-to-face and online interaction between people of different backgrounds (cultures, abilities, views, etc.). The programmes offer the methodology, structures and networks to encourage and enable positive personal encounters during these activities. The acquired competences help people to navigate diversity upon return and contribute to social cohesion. Dialogue between non-marginalised people and those with fewer opportunities should be encouraged throughout all activities, also with a view to helping the latter not to feel stigmatised because of their background.

The programmes include, in particular, the following features and mechanisms to support and foster inclusion and diversity.

## a) Inclusion and diversity as priorities in the assessment process

In both programmes, inclusion and diversity are part of the criteria to select applications for funding and to allocate financial support. Quality projects that actively address inclusion and diversity and that involve participants with fewer opportunities, newcomer and grass-root organisations should be given priority in the grant awarding process.

Equally, active implementation of the principles of inclusion and diversity forms a part of initial assessment of applications for accreditation in mobility actions, as well as part of criteria for continuous assessment of accredited beneficiaries. In order to better identify the potential, follow and provide guidance to projects aiming to foster inclusion and diversity, dedicated guidelines and specific training opportunities are provided to evaluators.

## b) Accessibility and user-friendliness of the programmes

Both programmes strive to follow a user-friendly approach in making programme guidance, application and reporting mechanisms, documents and forms clearer, shorter and more understandable. This includes, where possible, the use of different languages and formats as well as ensuring the user-friendliness and accessibility of digital learning environments. Online platforms (e.g. eTwinning, the School education Gateway, the European Youth Portal, EPALE and the Erasmus+ Mobile App) are designed to cater for equal accessibility for everyone, to make participation easier for all, but especially for participants with fewer opportunities, e.g. visually impaired people or people with low digital competences.

## c) Preparatory Visits

As a component of funded projects, and in particular when participants with fewer opportunities are involved in mobility activities, project organisers can carry out planning visits to the organisations hosting the activity in a different country, together with these participants, if relevant. In certain actions, these visits can also be carried out by the individual participant alone or with a family member or accompanying person. The purpose of these visits is to ensure high quality activities by facilitating and preparing administrative arrangements, building trust and understanding and setting-up solid partnerships between organisations involved. The preparatory visit can also help to provide personalised support and to assess the individual needs of the participant - together with the project organiser when relevant-, and related arrangements to be made by the involved organisations.

## d) Reinforced mentorship

'Reinforced Mentorship' is a concept that describes an intensified mentoring process that can be used to support participants with fewer opportunities in certain actions of the programmes, if they are not able to implement an activity independently or with normal mentoring or tutoring support. Reinforced Mentorship involves closer contact, more frequent meetings and more time allocated to task implementation. This guarantees a step-by-step support of the participants during project activities, as well as outside working hours. Reinforced Mentorship enables the participants to gain as much autonomy as possible, thus contributing to the successful implementation of the project.

## e) Dedicated financial support

The programmes offer financial support mechanisms[18] to enable and foster inclusion and diversity across projects:

o additional funding aimed at covering costs of any specific needs of participants experiencing fewer opportunities to allow participation on equal footing as their peers, including for instance reinforced mentorship, or costs linked to adapted travel and accommodation, personal assistance or specific intercultural or linguistic preparation;

o additional financial support for organisations who run projects actively fostering inclusion and diversity – specifically to reach out to hard-to-reach groups, for the additional workload that may result and for staff dedicated to support the full participation of people with fewer opportunities in the project;

o flexible and easy-to-understand financial mechanisms, in order to better adapt to the needs of the different targets groups at national level and to accommodate possible synergies with other national/European funds; including the possibility to finance in advance or on an ongoing basis the costs linked to individual needs to take the financial burden away from the participant(s) with fewer opportunities, as well as from the applicant organisation, or to encourage the portability of national support when participating on mobilities abroad.

o dedicated funding specifically intended to support smaller organisations with little or no prior experience in submitting applications under the programmes, including a simplified and more flexible funding procedure.

The additional financial support options should be clearly explained and transparently made available to potential beneficiaries.

## f) Smaller, easier-to-access actions

Due to its design and funding rules models, certain sections of the programmes are particularly suited for organisations with smaller administrative capacity (as organisations supporting people with fewer opportunities can sometimes have) or who are newcomers to the programme. These actions are characterised by smaller and more flexible grant amounts, simpler administrative and reporting requirements, as well as shorter project duration. At the same time, these actions are conceived as a way in towards other

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[18] Beyond the additional support referred to here, the programmes should strive to pay regular grants as early as possible, before the projects start (so that participants don't have to advance money).

funding opportunities, allowing them to grow and build their capacities within the different actions offered by programmes.

### g) Step-by-step capacity building pathways

The different project formats in Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps allow to offer cross-border experiences according to people's (particularly those with fewer opportunities) needs and possibilities in different stages in their life, thus building up capacity step by step. Organisations are encouraged to use the programmes as tools for the personal and educational development of the participants.

### h) Project format and mobility duration

Short-term and small-scale mobility can be a first experience for individuals with fewer opportunities who, due to their circumstances, cannot take part in or do not feel prepared for a standard mobility duration. A first experience can help these groups to consider, as a second step, to take part in longer-term and bigger-scale projects. Furthermore, group projects can be followed by individual activities, and a short physical mobility can be combined with online experiences through participation in virtual mobility and blended intensive programmes.

### i) European activities at the local level

Certain actions provide learning opportunities at the local level - always paired with a strong European dimension - through the involvement of international participants, through the project theme, or both. These types of activities can provide a first experience in the programmes for those participants lacking self-confidence to engage for the first time in activities abroad. For participants with fewer opportunities, these European projects in a more familiar environment can serve as a bridge to other cross-border experiences.

### j) Online exchanges

The programme also offers intercultural exchanges online as an additional and complementary option for the participant(s) with fewer opportunities. Projects such as Virtual Exchanges connect people from different geographical regions around thematic projects. These online exchanges can also be a bridge to a physical cross-border mobility at a later stage and should rather complement than replace them. Virtual classrooms and virtual learning spaces are used for distance learning but also to enhance the support of tutoring of mobility students.

### k) Language learning support

Given that language competence is regularly mentioned as a barrier to participate in the programmes, these include language learning opportunities supporting mobility activities. This support is provided either through the Erasmus+ Online Language Support or through other financial linguistic incentives when the latter is not available or for activities requiring specific linguistic learning. It be provided in other forms, such as the use of sign language, when online learning is not the appropriate tool to reach the target groups.

# 6. The role of organisations in preparing, rolling out and following-up projects

Applicant organisations should address inclusion and diversity in their projects. Organisations have a key role in making inclusion a reality, particularly in terms of

organisational development (acquiring and building more capacity in handling inclusion projects and spreading it across the organisation), and of outreach to and interaction with participants before, during and after the project. The following guidelines support the planning and implementation of these activities and projects.

### a) Networking and capacity building for inclusion and diversity

Organisations are invited to address inclusion and diversity in line with their needs and those of their community. Staff dealing specifically with issues of inclusion and diversity and with participants with fewer opportunities in their organisations can benefit from working together with peers from other organisations to support people with fewer opportunities. They are in a good position to organise projects in the programmes that focus on inclusion and diversity. The programme formats and support structures provides a good opportunity for them to develop their own approach towards inclusion and diversity within their organisation. Organisations need to build up competences by continuously training, evaluating and developing their capacities to enhance social inclusion and foster diversity. Different forms of support, such as training sessions, peer learning experiences and job shadowing opportunities, can be arranged with a view to helping to increase their capacity in this respect.

As for mobility projects, organisations should strive for reciprocity in terms of hosting participants with fewer opportunities and plan their projects accordingly in their partnerships. This will provide an opportunity to increase trust and expertise in the partnership. Organisations running mobility projects should promote cooperation within the organisation between relevant staff with expertise in the field of inclusion and diversity.

Organisations should also use the training opportunities on offer in the programmes. Through cooperation or networking activities managed by the National Agencies, the Resource Centres or other experienced organisations, or through opportunities offered by online platforms like EPALE, the School Education Gateway or eTwinning, they can increase their capacity to run high-quality projects aiming to foster inclusion and diversity and establish a network of trusted partners. These activities need to be organised in a way that they are accessible to everyone, including from a logistic point of view.

### b) Equitable and transparent selection of participants

The selection procedures of the organisations should take into account equity and inclusion and they should assess applicants' merit and motivation holistically. It is important to strive to grant an equitable access to opportunities and to provide a personalised support to participants based on their needs. In order to widen participation, organisations are encouraged to create built-in opportunities within the learning provision (such as, for example, the "mobility windows" in the field of higher education) and should consider different mobility formats to reach their target groups and facilitate their participation (e.g. blended and short-term mobility). Organisations are encouraged to take advantage of different project formats in the programmes, based on the needs of the target group.

### c) Awareness-raising and outreach

Outreach activities are of paramount importance for the programmes in order to make sure all the opportunities are known and also reach those target groups that face difficulties to access the programmes.

Organisations should raise awareness on the various opportunities and support mechanisms. People with fewer opportunities should be reached out to in their respective personal environments by tailoring the approach to their specific information needs. An

important success factor for providing information to under-represented groups is the cooperation with stakeholders working with these target groups at local/regional level. Concrete approaches and measures to reach out to people with fewer opportunities include:

  i. Face-to-face meetings or events with specific target groups with fewer opportunities (i.e. dedicated info-days for them);

  ii. Cooperation with organisations and individuals active in fields relevant to the inclusion of people with fewer opportunities as intermediaries to reach out to particular target groups if necessary;

  iii. Targeted promotional material and publications in relevant languages, including sign language, and appropriate formats such as large print, easy-to-read and braille, with information on to possibly benefit from extra funding available to support people with fewer opportunities;

  iv. Clear and understandable language for information and communication. Avoid abstract language and unnecessary complexity and make use of visuals to the extent possible;

  v. Testimonials, "ambassadors" and role models: former participants with fewer opportunities and alumni networks and organisations such as the Erasmus Student Alumni  Alliance (ESAA), the Erasmus Ambassadors or the Europeers, etc. can help promote the programmes to people with fewer opportunities by sharing their own experience with friends, fellow-students, staff in their organisation, journalists or schools.


## d) Preparation and support of participants in all project stages

Organisations should prepare the participants well for their project and support them before, during and after their experience. Participants' needs and input should be actively inquired about, assessed and taken into account as much as possible across all the project phases, particularly when it comes to the type of activities that are more suitable for them and the way these are rolled out.

### i.    Before the project

Organisations are encouraged to simplify to the greatest extent possible their internal procedures for participation in their projects. Organisations should support potential participants to enter the programmes: support them with the administrative work (registration, documents, reports, etc.). Participants should receive personal empowerment, linguistic support, cultural preparation and understand what is expected from them and whom to contact for educational, administrative and personal support during the activities.

### ii.    During the project

Activities should be tailored to the needs of participants with fewer opportunities, e.g. inclusive teaching methodologies or support from accompanying persons during the mobility. Organisations should provide a range of support activities to facilitate social inclusion and positive contact with diversity of different kinds. There should be a staff member or a peer at the organisation with whom they can exchange about their experience and prevent or address any kind of difficulties.

Considering the strong impact the programmes can have on people with fewer opportunities, special attention should be given to the reflection on the learning process and outcomes during the project, as well as to the documentation of the developed competences after or towards the end of the project.

### iii.    After the project

Organisations should evaluate the project experience and its impact with the participants and support the recognition of the learning experience. They are encouraged to involve the returned participants in local activities (information, support activities) in order to maximise the experience and to encourage future participants.

### e) Encourage and support community participation

The programmes have a positive impact on social inclusion and dealing with diversity beyond those who are directly involved. Inclusion-related activities should be closely linked to community needs. In this respect, organisations should encourage participants to take part in local communities and civic engagement activities during their project and be recognised for it in various ways. They can also involve former participants and local participants who are not able to join physical mobility (yet) in order to increase the local impact of the international activity. Organisations should give, through existing tools, formal recognition to participants for their voluntary work when possible.

## 7. The role of National Agencies, Resource Centres and the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA)

National Agencies are vital to support projects with a view for these to being as inclusive and diverse as possible. To implement the programmes coherently and efficiently, National Agencies are required to follow some common guidelines, with the necessary flexibility to adapt to their domestic context. The Resource Centres supporting the implementation of the programmes are also key players in promoting and rolling out this strategy, in particular as regards to gather knowledge and to conceive and run capacity-building activities for National Agency staff and programmes' beneficiaries.
Likewise, the Commission European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) plays an equally important role for the programmes' strands that are managed centrally.
In Partner Countries, EU Delegations and – where they exist - the National Erasmus+ Offices (NEOs) are also key in bringing the programme closer to the target groups addressed by this strategy.
National Agencies, Resource Centres and EACEA should raise awareness on various options and support mechanisms for projects aiming to foster inclusion and diversity. People with fewer opportunities should be reached out to in their respective personal environments, through the organisations that work with them and by tailoring the approach to their specific information needs.

In addition, all structures implementing the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes are invited to think about accessibility, inclusion and diversity in their own structures and activities. This includes paying attention to have accessible event locations, provide sign language interpretation and/or captioning at events, have accessible websites and materials, consider diversity in their recruitment, as well as in their pool of experts and evaluators.

In rolling out this strategy and raising awareness about it, all the actors involved commit themselves to keep regular contacts and consult organisations and experts operating in relevant fields.

### a) Information and awareness raising

National Agencies play an important role in the outreach and information activities in their country. They should adapt their information strategy according to specific target groups according to their national context. They are encouraged to communicate publicly about their national inclusion and diversity action plans and ensure the highest transparency standards in granting inclusion and diversity projects.

National Agencies also need to develop suitable and accessible information material, use different outreach and information channels and should proactively target and contact organisations active in fields relevant for inclusion and diversity. They should develop and provide information material in accessible languages, including sign language, and appropriate formats, collect and make use of good practice examples and offer networking possibilities for stakeholders.

### b) Supportive approach

National Agencies need to provide systematic, equitable and tailor-made support to the organisers of inclusion and diversity projects at all stages of the project cycle. This is particularly important for newcomers to the programmes and for applicants involving people with fewer opportunities in order to remove the barriers to their full participation.

National Agencies can provide this supportive approach themselves or implement systems of multipliers, coaches, project visits, consultancy via phone, social media or email, etc.

Their tasks include the definition of levels of additional support, based on their domestic context and according to a transparent set of criteria. National Agencies need to dedicate sufficient human and financial resources to roll out this approach in an effective and continuous way.

### c) Strategic action

National Agencies must develop a national Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Inclusion and Diversity action plan based on the local reality in the country, but always consistent with the strategy at a European level. National Agencies can focus on strategic priorities (e.g. support for groups facing one or more of the exclusion factors), but they are not allowed to exclude any of the other target groups if they would apply.

The Agencies' work programmes need to list the actions that contribute to their national action plan and to the strategy at European level.

They need to communicate publicly about their national inclusion and diversity action plans and ensure the highest transparency standards in granting projects aiming to foster inclusion and diversity.

### d) Inclusion Officers

Each National Agency needs to appoint at least one Inclusion and Diversity Officer who coordinates inclusion and diversity related actions in the National Agency. This is the contact person for other National Agencies, the Commission and the Resource Centres on the topic.

In addition, all the staff of National Agencies need to know their national and the EU strategy and implement them across all actions of the programmes.

In this respect, Inclusion Officers should help to mainstream inclusion and diversity across their National Agency and share their expertise and learning on inclusion and diversity with colleagues. They should also trigger this mainstream into projects and help to map the target groups who may be not successfully reached out through this strategy.

### e) Training and networking for organisations, National Agency staff and expert evaluators

National Agencies and the Resource Centres need to organise training, networking and showcasing moments for organisations active in fields relevant for inclusion and diversity at both national and supra-national levels. The dialogue between organisers of projects aiming to foster inclusion and diversity and representatives of the programmes is beneficial for all involved.

Besides other national instruments, a coordinated use of Training and Cooperation Activities (TCA) in Erasmus+ and Networking activities (NET) in the European Solidarity Corps are important tools for capacity building and networking.

At the same time, dedicated training by relevant professionals is needed for National Agency staff and experts involved in assessing projects, in order to build capacities in the National Agency network to better evaluate and manage projects aiming to foster inclusion and diversity. Special attention should go to fully exploiting the potential of projects aiming to foster inclusion and diversity and to upscale successful projects.

National Agencies are invited to include people with fewer opportunities in their pool of evaluators and evaluation committees with a view to building on their expertise and share it with other evaluators, to raising awareness and to ensuring a better evaluation of projects. In order to better identify the potential, follow and provide guidance to projects aiming to foster inclusion and diversity, dedicated guidelines and specific training opportunities are provided for National Agency staff and expert evaluators.

### f) Monitoring and reporting

National Agencies need to provide the Commission, when and in the form requested, information about a number of indicators to track the progress made in the implementation of the strategy.

Agencies need to ensure that the data stored at national level in the IT tools is as reliable as possible. They also need to make sure that the projects promoted as best practices in the area of inclusion and diversity are of good quality.

### g) Synergies with other programmes

National Agencies need to support beneficiaries to find the most appropriate action (project format) for their inclusion and diversity project within the programmes, or to find other/additional funding opportunities. Other programmes, such as the European Social Fund+, Horizon Europe, Digital Europe, Creative Europe or the European Economic Area funding schemes are relevant examples.

Agencies need to promote the different project formats in the programmes to beneficiaries so that they create a pathway through the different opportunities for the people with fewer opportunities that they are working with.

Good practices regarding synergies with other programmes should be documented and disseminated in order to multiply their use and to unleash their full potential.

# 8. Inspiration from successful experiences and good practices

The European Commission identified a number of experiences and good practices from previous programmes, which are shared through online platforms. The following resources provide access to practices, materials and documentation on the topic of inclusion:

- **Erasmus+ Project Results** platform – access to all funded Erasmus+ projects searchable by topic, year, country, etc. with the possibility to identify good practice projects on inclusion and their results
- **SALTO Inclusion & Diversity –** training, publications or resources for international youth work with participants with fewer opportunities
- **Strategic Partnership on Inclusion –** consortium of National Agencies who developed a strategic approach in the field of youth to reach out and involve target groups in the different countries
- **EPALE –** open community in adult learning across Europe with a thematic section on learner support (i.e. barriers, social inclusion, disabilities)
- **School education Gateway –** Europe's online platform for school education which includes a Toolkit on promoting inclusive education
- **European Solidarity Corps project results database –** provides access to all funded European Solidarity Corps projects
- **Eurodesk –** European network of information providers about different kinds of learning mobility for young people and those who work with them. Eurodesk has an 'opportunity finder' and feeds the **European Youth Portal**

In addition, the structures implementing the programmes and the organisations receiving funding should actively present inspirational examples and good practices of Inclusion and Diversity in Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps projects. These dissemination activities can be carried out through different channels, such as for example in online form, in print, with peer-to-peer information or with the help of former participants acting as ambassadors and multipliers.