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<https://inclusion.iscte-iul.pt>

Online Inventory of Promising Practices

– inputs from the surveys with higher education institutions –

Overview of the Survey with Inclusion Offices

While the purpose of this survey was to collect promising practices on the inclusion of students with disabilities and/or caring responsibilities in Erasmus+ mobility directly from HE practitioners working in Inclusion Offices, the data reveals a scarcity of such practices, which is particularly aggravated for students with caring responsibilities.

For instance, in Finland respondents noted that good practices are missing or simply left this section of the survey empty. In Lithuania, no specific practices were mentioned (specific guidelines, programs or other documents). Institutions are mostly unaware of any specific measures for incoming students with disability and especially with caring responsibilities. In Portugal some respondents highlighted the existence of some programs for supporting students with caring responsibilities, albeit they did not clearly specify the nature of those programs. For students with disabilities, respondents highlighted that institutions offer financial support through Erasmus+, including help applying for supplementary grants, and continuous support from Student Support Offices throughout the mobility process. In Turkey, some successful practices were mentioned at the level of collaboration with International Offices, and regarding successful experiences with visually impaired students. On the other hand, for students with caring responsibilities, there were very limited or no specific initiatives, with most institutions having no experience supporting international students with caring responsibilities.

The paucity of specific mobility support initiatives tailored to these two student populations suggests a significant implementation gap between general inclusion principles and operationalised support mechanisms. Where dedicated support exists, it typically focuses on disability-related accommodations, with an

emphasis on isolated provisions rather than comprehensive support ecosystems. Most notably, even institutions with established disability support frameworks frequently reported limited experience with international students with disabilities in mobility programs, suggesting potential barriers to participation that precede the mobility experience itself.

Overview of the Survey with International Offices

The survey administered to international offices across higher education institutions in Finland, Lithuania, Portugal, and Turkey yielded more responses than the survey for inclusion offices illuminating institutional approaches to supporting students with disabilities and those with caring responsibilities in international mobility contexts.

The findings reveal pronounced asymmetries in institutional recognition and support structures between the two focal student populations. While a majority of institutions (57.8%) reported dedicated support mechanisms for students with disabilities, only a small minority (11.4%) reported equivalent provisions for students with caring responsibilities. For students with disabilities, respondents identified relatively established measures, with services like counselling, accessible classrooms, and academic adjustments widely available. Conversely, no service for students with caring responsibilities reached comparable levels of provision, with remote learning and flexible scheduling emerging as the most common offerings, albeit in just a few institutions. Particularly striking was the minimal availability of childcare facilities, despite their fundamental importance for this student population.

Regarding international mobility specifically, the data evidences a significant implementation gap between general inclusion principles and actual support mechanisms available. Results indicate that, even existing disability support frameworks frequently represent extensions of domestic provisions rather than specialised mobility-oriented initiatives. Success stories predominantly described individual accommodations rather than systemic approaches, highlighting the prevalence of reactive rather than proactive inclusion strategies.

The survey further revealed limited student participation in programme design, with only 23.3% of institutions involving students with disabilities and a mere 10.3%

engaging students with caring responsibilities in mobility planning processes. Collectively, the survey findings indicate not merely implementation gaps but potentially deeper conceptual limitations in how institutions frame and respond to diverse student needs within international mobility contexts. A limited number of institutions provided examples of services, initiatives and success stories.

Online Inventory of Promising Practices

While both survey respondents ended up revealing more barriers and challenges, rather than concrete examples of solutions, a few promising practices and success stories were highlighted by some respondents and are presented below. While the majority tend to be related to students with disabilities, many may be relevant for both groups and a few are specifically directed at students with caring responsibilities:

1. An individualised approach to every incoming student with disability or caring responsibilities

This is an essential practice for ensuring the inclusion of students with disabilities and caring responsibilities in mobility programs, by ensuring that every student is known and supported based on his/her particular needs. This includes support for individualising the study process and promoting their learning, as well as the provision of psychological support. One institution provided specific implementation details of this approach:

Personalised online correspondence or meetings with both incoming and outgoing candidates with disabilities to plan/design their mobility.

A representative from another institution described a similar measure of individualised approach:

Each time a candidate with disabilities is nominated to carry out an incoming mobility in our university, our international relations office is contacted by the partner institution to notify us of their specific needs and set together the conditions for their integration.

Vytautas Magnus University in Lithuania seeks to implement such an **individualised approach** for students with disability. For more information see: <https://www.vdu.lt/en/university-and-disability/>

2. Specific financial support mechanisms

Institutions that provide targeted financial assistance for students with disabilities or caring responsibilities help address the additional costs these students often face before and during mobility. This includes support in applying for supplementary grants through Erasmus+ and other dedicated funding streams. Some institutions articulated specific financial mechanism, as for instance:

In Erasmus KA171 applications, students with fewer opportunities (especially students with physical disabilities) have the opportunity to receive additional budget support. We prioritise selecting students with fewer/limited opportunities from among students coming from partner countries within the scope of Erasmus.

Besides Erasmus+, one institution mentioned also available support at national level, even though in some cases national support may be dedicated exclusively to local students, hence being unavailable for international students:

Targeted payments from the Agency for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: students with a 45% or less working capacity level can receive payouts for special needs (€134.88) and study expenses (€176.00). State Studies Foundation Social Scholarship: eligible students with disabilities can receive €357.50/month for their studies.

Additional Erasmus+ specific financial mechanisms were described by multiple institutions, with one noting that:

Through Erasmus+, students with disabilities can apply for additional funding to cover costs related to their specific needs.

In case of need for a support person for students who are on mobility, the Erasmus+ program provides **additional funding**. The Nova University in Lisbon provides more information on this topic:

<https://www.ulisboa.pt/en/info/participants-special-needs>

To find out about more situations in which **additional financial support** applies, you can access the Erasmus+ General Programme Guide:

https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2024-11/erasmus-programme-guide-2025_en.pdf

Higher education institutions that include students and/or staff with fewer opportunities among Erasmus+ projects participants may also request **additional support** from the national agency **to cover the additional costs** of their participation in mobility activities. For more information see:

https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/pt-pt/programme-guide/part-b/key-action-1/mobility-projects-for-higher-education-students-and-staff#footnote22_kjc62hb

3. Dedicated support for finding accommodation

Portuguese institutions mentioned the “Aconchego” Program that focuses on supporting students in finding suitable accommodation. This is particularly important in the context of housing shortages in many countries, and even more relevant for students with disabilities or caring responsibilities who may have specific housing requirements.

“Aconchego” is an intergenerational dialogue and solidarity programme that promotes the **accommodation of higher education students in the homes of senior citizens** residing in the historic centre of Porto. This is a particularly relevant programme to promote interaction and mutual support across generations, especially in a context of a very acute affordable housing crisis.

For more information see: <https://bidce.org/en/experience/637>

4. Existence of clear protocols, enhanced collaboration and dedicated experts for supporting students with special needs

Successful support for students with disabilities in mobility programs requires clear articulation between the Erasmus Office and the Inclusion Office/Disability Support Unit. An example are institutions where the necessary steps to follow are clear: once students are referred by the Erasmus Office as having a disability, the Inclusion Office/Disability Support Unit provides support, through expert staff who follow established protocols for different forms of disability. Some institutions described specific protocols that they have in place:

We have an internal chain of communications, how to deal with an incoming student who marks (in the application) that he/she has a certain disability.

International office works closely with the division that provides guidelines and support to persons with disabilities. Individual consultations prior the mobility take place with participant and his/her coordinators, academic affairs centre is also involved by scheduling easier accessible auditoriums to course units where mobility participants with disabilities are enrolled.

Other institutions provide specific instructions directing students with disabilities to specialised service email addresses where they can request individual arrangements for studies. A Disability Affairs Coordinator was also mentioned as a key contact who:

Can be contacted and can clarify the disability and suggest possible solutions regarding various areas.

Exchange of information and continuous collaboration between different services is equally important:

After the student was registered, we informed the academic coordinator in the department she was affiliated with about the issue. Then, the academic coordinator contacted the professors whose

classes the student followed and ensured that the student could use her devices in her classes and exams.

The Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Inclusion and Diversity Strategy, developed in partnership with National Agencies and other stakeholders, aims to reach and support young people with fewer opportunities by creating a **transparent framework to facilitate projects focused on inclusion and diversity**. The strategy is translated into the 22 EU languages: <https://www.salto-youth.net/rc/inclusion/inclusionstrategy/aboutid/>

The University of Turku, in Finland, has an appointed specialist, a **Disability Coordinator**, who has the responsibility to develop an accessible university. The Disability Coordinator provides counselling services for students and staff members with disabilities and assistance to resolve problems, including making recommendations such as extra time for examinations. For more information see: <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/eche/integration-and-equal-access-for-students-within-the-erasmus-programme>

5. Dedicated Disability Support Units with comprehensive service provision

Several universities have established well-structured disability support units that provide integrated services including academic accommodations, physical accessibility arrangements, and psychological support. These units serve as central coordination points for all disability-related services and work in close collaboration with other university departments. Some institutions specifically mentioned having, for international students, the *same accessibility arrangements and well-being services as for local students*.

6. Inclusion Officer in Erasmus Office

Creating a specialised role of "Inclusion Officer" within the Erasmus Office establishes a direct link between mobility programs and accessibility needs. This dedicated position helps ensure that inclusion is considered in different aspects of mobility planning, and that collaboration with other relevant university departments is promoted.

In some cases, even if such a figure does not exist, specific staff arrangements that prioritise inclusion can be made. One institution detailed a case where:

The international office prioritised this case, enabling our coordinator to focus on negotiations and arrangements for the student's mobility. Additional assistance was provided to manage the coordinator's other responsibilities, ensuring her efforts could be fully directed toward facilitating a smooth and inclusive mobility experience for the participant.

While not establishing permanent positions, this practice illustrates the strategic allocation of dedicated personnel resources to support complex disability accommodations during mobility.

At ISCTE-IUL, in Portugal, there is a **Student Counselling Office that coordinates with the International Relations Office** to provide continued support throughout the mobility process. For more information see: <https://iscte-iul.pt/conteudos/estudantes/acao-social/saude-outros-apoios/906/gabinete-de-aconselhamento-aluno-sasga>

7. Support for additional medical needs

Considering students with disabilities may have additional and often very specific medical needs, collaboration between higher education Inclusion Offices and International Offices, as well as local health providers are fundamental. One institution provided an example of such a collaboration established to support an incoming student with Crohn's disease in accessing public hospital services, which would have been difficult for the student without support from the HE institution, considering the lack of knowledge in the health sector on the rights and needs of international students. One account illustrates this:

We are interested in the individual needs of students with disabilities. Once we know what those needs are, we can work to provide them. For example, a student with a rare condition who needed to visit medical clinics to support her treatment during her visit.

The **Finnish Student Health Service (FSHS)** was mentioned by Finnish institutions as a partner in providing **health services** to students, though it was noted that these services are not always available to exchange students. For more information see: <https://www.yths.fi/en/frontpage/>

8. Early identification systems through collaborations between sending and host International Offices

Developing systems for early identification of student needs before their arrival allows for proactive rather than reactive support. This involves structured communication channels between sending and receiving institutions to share necessary information about accessibility requirements. Additionally, early communication with students before the semester begins allows for the organization of support services tailored to individual needs. One institution explained this systematic approach:

In each nomination period, we ask our partner institutions and students to report any disabilities they may have. This year, one of our partners submitted a disability report stating that a student had hearing and writing disabilities. This disability report included a list of devices that the student had to use in classes and exams. First, we contacted the institution and the student to ask if they had these devices. The student had all of the devices.

This practice demonstrates formalised procedures for obtaining disability-related information at the nomination stage to enable proactive planning.

This institutional practice of active collaborations involves multiple stakeholders and it can have a very important role in the success of the mobility experience. As observed by another institution:

When this communication is well implemented, the mobility of the student with disabilities takes place without any problem.

9. Local transportation support services

Providing dedicated transportation services for students with mobility impairments (e.g., scheduled upon request), addresses a critical barrier to city and campus navigation. This practice is particularly important for international students who are unfamiliar with the city and the campus. One example:

We did have a student with a wheelchair, so he was provided with a room in the dormitory which is done for these kind of disabilities. Also, he had his lectures in the classrooms where the student could feel comfortable. One more thing, we provided him with a car when he arrived (we took him from the airport and when he was leaving too).

This comprehensive approach included not only airport transfers but ongoing transportation support throughout the mobility period, demonstrating a holistic transportation accessibility practice. Another institution noted the importance of municipal collaboration when it comes to:

Making sure that university access, pedestrian crossings and public transport are accessible.

10. Student involvement in program development

Structured mechanisms for incorporating student perspectives into mobility programme planning are key. One institution described organising "focus group discussions where special needs students participated," while another institution explained how they organise:

A separate meeting with students with disabilities, where other students with disabilities share their student mobility experience. We take notes on what barriers they face and try to adjust accordingly.

Another institution noted that students "are included in working groups" for mobility program development, while other institutions highlighted that they involved students with disabilities in planning Erasmus activities through their Student Support Office.