

SiEM

Social Inclusion &
Engagement in Mobility

For more inclusive & engaging Erasmus+ mobilities

Technical recommendations to adapt the
Erasmus+ documents involved in Erasmus+
student mobilities



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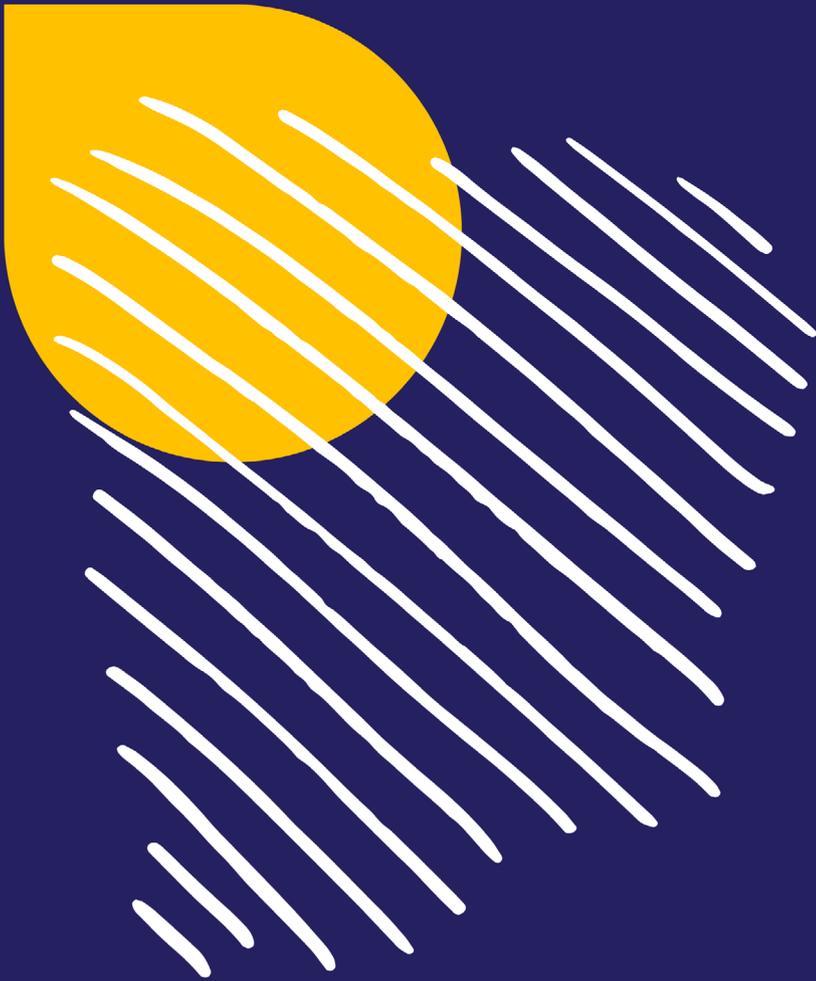


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General Introduction

The year 2022 marks the 35th anniversary of Erasmus+, the EU's programme to support education, training, youth and sport. Over the years, the programme has achieved great success: millions of individuals, 2 million¹ between 2014 and 2018 alone, participated in Erasmus and reported many benefits, such as improved intercultural competencies and soft skills, and higher employability compared to non-mobile peers (European Commission, 2019). As such, Erasmus+ is an important driver for social mobility and is one of the main tools that the European Commission can use to foster inclusive education and equality. However, participation in the programme itself is currently hindered by several barriers, which impacts students, especially from underrepresented groups. For instance, the 2019 Erasmus+ Higher Education study found that financial issues, in addition to work commitments in the home country and lack of adequate information, have an adverse effect on students' decision to undertake a mobility period abroad (European Commission, 2019)². The challenges related to inclusive participation in mobility opportunities were also highlighted in the mid-term review

of the previous Erasmus+ programme 2014-2020, leading to inclusion becoming one of the horizontal priorities of the new Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027.

Along the same line, the recent SIEM research report that analysed responses from more than 12 000 students (Allinson & Gabriels, 2021)³, highlighted that students from underrepresented groups face multiple challenges that hinder their participation in the programme, including practical, institutional, environmental, and attitudinal barriers.

Removing barriers and achieving equal access to education and training is a key priority of the EU: it is listed as one of the Sustainable Development Goals in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and it is the first of the twenty principles of the European Pillar of Social rights. To take concrete action toward achieving these objectives, the European Commission identified quality education and inclusion as two of the six priority dimensions in

1 Including both students and staff

2 European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, (2019). *Erasmus+ higher education impact study : final report*, Publications Office. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/162060>

3 Allinson K., Gabriels W.,(2021). Maybe it will be different abroad; student and staff perspectives on diversity and inclusion in student exchanges. SIEM Research Report, siem-project.eu.

its **vision of the European Education Area (EEA)**. With respect to mobility, the vision directly addresses current obstacles to participation and identifies several challenges to be addressed, including financial barriers, accessibility challenges, recognition issues, or lack of support. In the subsequent **Resolution on a Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training**, the EU Council highlighted the role of mobility in fostering inclusive education and equality and stressed the need to remove any barriers that hinder participation in the programme.

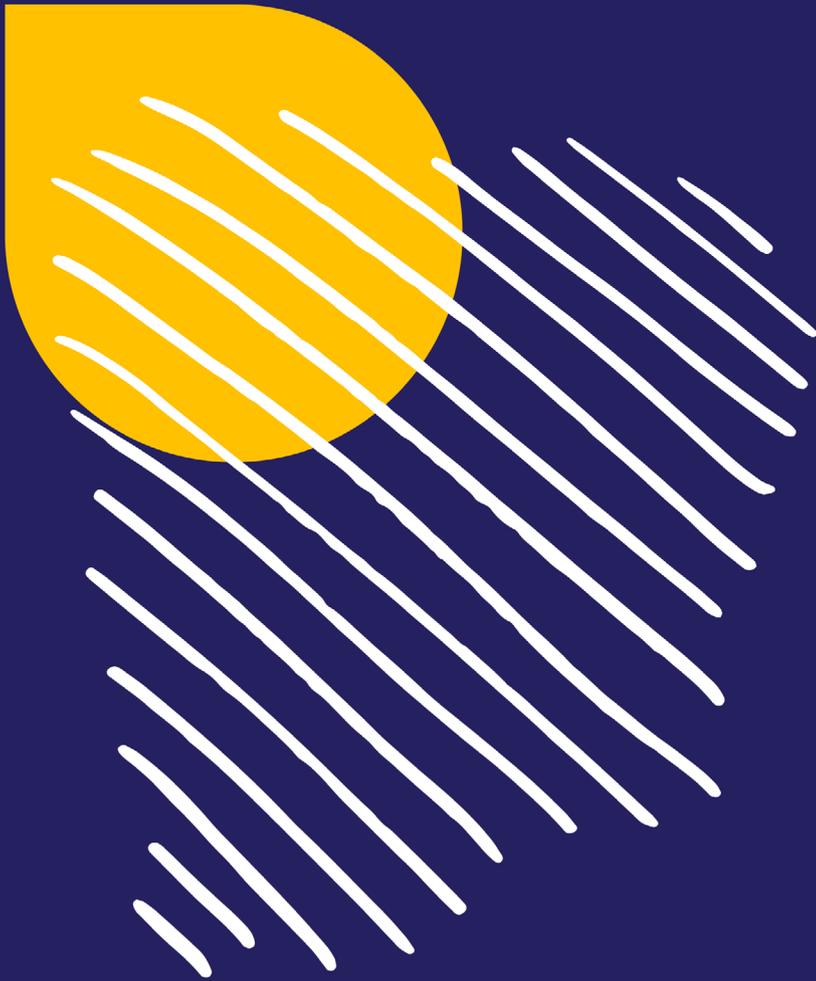
Against this policy framework, the **Regulation for the Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027**, which identifies the objectives and key aspects of the programme, mandated the adoption of support measures, which include financial contributions and the creation of an inclusion strategy. The inclusion measures to be implemented in the Programme have been outlined in two main documents: the **Implementation guidelines - Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Inclusion and Diversity Strategy**, and the **Commission Implementing Decision - framework of inclusion measures of Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps 2021-27**. These documents outline the main barriers to participation in the Programme, and describe a series of inclusion measures for the

implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Programme.

While the guidelines and the framework of inclusion measures describe general principles and mechanisms to widen participation in learning mobility, we believe that a higher impact can be achieved by embedding concrete changes in the Erasmus+ documentation guiding the organisation of the Programme and its impact assessment. Starting from the experience and results of “Social Inclusion and Engagement in Mobility” (SIEM), an Erasmus+ KA3 project⁴ which aimed to assess and improve the accessibility of the Erasmus+ programme for mobility. We provide a set of technical recommendations to streamline inclusion practices and make them an integral part of the Erasmus+. These guidelines are in line with the policy framework of the European Education Area, the Inclusion and Diversity strategy of the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programme, and the Framework of Inclusion Measured. They aim to remove existing barriers that prevent students from participating in mobility and to improve the experience of all students, focusing more specifically on those coming from fewer opportunities backgrounds.

The following recommendations, which

⁴ Project partners include: Erasmus Student Network, Universities UK International, the European University Foundation, YES Forum, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, University of Vigo, Masaryk University, University of Latvia, ESN Spain and ESN France)



Introduction to the recommendations

build on the results of the SIEM research report (Allinson & Gabriels, 2021), propose a set of concrete changes to the documents involved in the organisation of Erasmus+ mobilities, in line with the objectives of the Implementation Guidelines of the Inclusion and Diversity Strategy and the Framework of Inclusion Measures.

The recommendations focus on “mobility projects supported by internal policy funds” (KA 131), but most of them are equally relevant for mobilities with partner countries “mobility projects supported by external policy funds” (KA 171).

The authors and the SIEM consortium are aware that the implementation of all these recommendations will be challenging and only doable in a gradual way. However, technical changes are necessary to translate the overarching inclusion priority and the measures outlined in the strategic documents created by the Commission into concrete changes.

The organisation of Erasmus+ mobilities in Higher Education involves three main actors that these recommendations address:

- **The European Commission:**
The body responsible for the creation of the policies, the management of

the programme and the coordination of the work of the National Agencies. Therefore, all the changes proposed in this document require approval from the European Commission. More specifically, the recommendations address the Higher Education Unit (DG EAC - B1) and the Erasmus+ Coordination Units of DG EAC (DG EAC - B4).

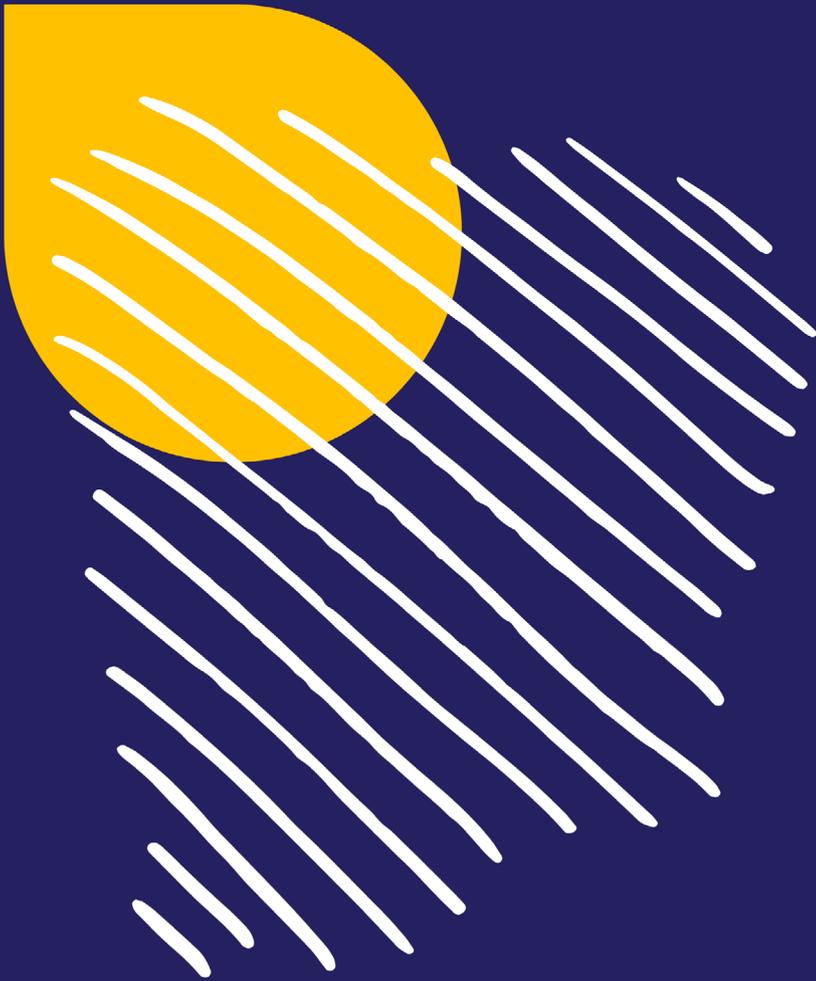
- **Erasmus+ National Agencies:**
Erasmus+ mobilities in Higher Education fall under the category of decentralised actions, and are therefore managed by the National Agencies. National Agencies are responsible for the evaluation of the proposals, distribution of funds, monitoring of the implementation by beneficiaries and the representation of the programme at the national level. Following the Erasmus+ regulation and the Inclusion and Diversity Strategy. National Agencies have a key role in the fields of inclusion and engagement and should guide the development of new support measures for beneficiaries.
- **Higher Education Institutions:**
Student mobilities are managed by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) that have been awarded an Erasmus Charter for Higher Education. HEIs are the beneficiaries and grant holders of the

mobility projects and the direct point of contact with the students.

Document categories:

In order to structure the analysis and proposals related to different dimensions of the Erasmus+:

- **Guidance and implementation:** Documents that create the framework for the organisation of the mobilities and Erasmus+ projects overall. Here, we have included the Erasmus+ programme guide and the national inclusion action plans.
- **Monitoring and evaluation:** In this section, we have included the documents that are used to either monitor or evaluate the mobility projects or the experience of participants.
- **Student documents:** These are the documents which students interact with directly, either to gather information or to define the conditions of their mobilities.



Guidance and implementation

Erasmus+ Programme Guide

The Erasmus+ Programme Guide is essential for understanding Erasmus+. It provides participating organisations and individuals with a comprehensive list of opportunities supported by the programme. It also contains information on eligibility and award criteria, as well as the funding rules for each Erasmus+ opportunity. This guiding document precedes the Calls for Proposals and is adopted on an annual basis. Each year the Programme Guide is designed in line with the Erasmus+ Annual Work Plan. Moreover, rules are reviewed by the European Commission, taking into account the feedback received by the National Agencies and other relevant stakeholders. The Erasmus+ Programme guide also defines the scholarship system for students and trainees (Pages 65-69, Erasmus+ programme Guide 2022 Version 1), indicating the different grant categories and the existing top-ups.

In view of this, considerable adaptations should be made in the Programme Guide to ensure wider participation of students from

underrepresented groups/disadvantaged backgrounds.

Recommendation 1:
The European Commission and the National Agencies should modify the current scholarship system, including a higher baseline grant, indexing the grants to inflation and considering top-ups for more expensive cities.

Findings from the SIEM research report show that the majority of students from fewer opportunities backgrounds do not receive enough financial support to cover their living expenses during mobility. The Erasmus+ grant system is explained in the Erasmus+ programme guide, but the Erasmus+ regulation clearly states in article 16 that this can be changed at the European and even national level. The Erasmus Student Network has created an Erasmus+ grant simulator that can be used by students to find more information about their baseline grants.

Inflationary pressures will make the

programme more exclusive unless Erasmus+ scholarships are indexed annually to inflation rises. This can be done by adapting the baseline grant rates in the Erasmus+ programme guide, which the European Commission publishes every autumn, and then implemented by the National Agencies.

The new top-up system is an important step to improve the financial conditions of students from fewer opportunities backgrounds, but this should be accompanied by an increase in the higher baseline grants, which remain too low in many cases. Differences between cities remain too stark, which can also cause further segregation of students depending on the mobility destinations since all grants for a country are the same, even when prices can be more than double.

**Recommendation 2:
The European Commission and National Agencies should consider the overall student share with fewer opportunities in the total allocation of Erasmus+ mobilities to Higher Education Institutions and accordingly grant extra funds to HEIs with more students from fewer opportunities backgrounds.**

The application system for KA131 grants in Higher Education could be adapted so the overall fewer opportunities student population of the Higher Education

Institution is taken into account and forms part of the award criteria. Higher Education Institutions could submit information about the characteristics of their student population at the time of submission, and this could be considered by the National Agency at the evaluation stage.

Students enrolled in Higher Education Institutions with higher fewer opportunities population tend to have lower rates of participation in mobility, as demonstrated by [research from the Joint Research Centre](#)⁵. Since the number of previous mobilities is considered as part of the criteria that National Agencies use to allocate funds, the trend normally persists over time, and Higher Education Institutions with larger mobility numbers continue to internationalise further while other Higher Education Institutions stagnate. This also relates to the “environmental” and “attitudinal” barriers described in the SIEM research report, which explain why environments in which student mobility is perceived as normal can help students to make the decision to go abroad.

5 European Commission (2021), Science for Policy Briefs, Studying abroad- benefits and unequal uptake, https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/publication/studying-abroad-benefits-unequal-uptake_en

Recommendation 3:
The European Commission should adapt the application process for KA131/171 mobilities to allow HEIs to apply for extra organisational and inclusion support for initiatives related to the implementation of ECHE commitments in the fields of inclusion and engagement.

The current unit costs system for organisational and inclusion support does not offer HEIs enough incentives to implement innovative practices related to the implementation of ECHE commitments, such as the ones linked to inclusion and engagement. ESN proposes a revision of the system, introducing a system with baseline support for all Higher Education Institutions. This new system could also be complemented with extra funds if Higher Education Institutions include their proposal for concrete initiatives in the application stage. This system would not bring additional bureaucracy while allowing HEIs to be innovative and develop new measures if their capacity permits them.

In practice, Higher Education institutions could apply for extra funding for outreach, support, and engagement measures directly through the KA131 application, and those would go through a qualitative review. They could be awarded in the form of lump-sum grants, and HEIs would report on them through the final report. This extra funding could pay for communication campaigns,

specific training or better support for student and alumni organisations. This measure would provide practical support to the objective of “encourage and supporting community participation”, part of the Inclusion and Diversity strategy.

Recommendation 4:
The European Commission should include specific measures to support incoming students with fewer opportunities in the application for mobility projects supported by external policy funds (KA171).

Unlike intra-European mobilities supported by internal policy funds, the “KA171” mobility projects require a qualitative evaluation. This qualitative application process should include a specific section on the inclusion measures that the Higher Education institutions active in the project plan to implement, in aspects such as outreach, and support on the selection of participants, pre-departure preparation or integration into the local community. More targeted attention to these topics in the application process can help to develop and gather best practices at the national level, which can then be shared and discussed with other Higher Education Institutions.

**Recommendation 5:
The European Commission should
Include an annexe on the programme
guide or support documents on the
different possibilities for synergies
between EU programmes, as well
as national instruments, to support
access to mobility, and increase the
overall guidance on the issue.**

The importance of synergies between EU programmes is highlighted in Article 4. 2 (B) of the Erasmus+ regulations. Worth mentioning that in the last few years of the previous programme, there was considerable progress in aspects such as the synergies with the European Social Fund+⁶.

In 2022, Germany transferred funds⁷ from the ESF+ to its Erasmus+ budget allocation, which helped to increase the amount of

Erasmus+ grants for Higher Education students. Given action is one of the most impactful inclusion measures that can be taken considering SIEM research findings that point to low Erasmus+ scholarships as one of the main barriers to mobility.

Unfortunately, there is a lack of guidance provided by the European Commission on how these synergies can be operationalised. The current state of affairs makes it difficult for civil society, Higher Education Institutions and even National and regional authorities that do not have experience in the matter, to understand how the process can be established, and what are steps the various actors would need to follow. It is also important to collect and share information on those practices that are already being implemented in the different Member States.

6 <https://ec.europa.eu/european-social-fund-plus/en/publications/beyond-esf-partnership-other-eu-funds-and-programmes>

7 <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/document/amendment-of-the-erasmus-2022-annual-work-programme-c2022-1319>



National Inclusion Action Plans

The Erasmus+ 2021-2027 regulation⁸ includes in its Article 15 a reference to the creation of an inclusion action plan by each Member State, as part of the broader inclusion and diversity strategy:

Article 15

Inclusion strategy

The Commission shall, by 29 November 2021, develop a framework of inclusion measures to increase participation rates among people with fewer opportunities, as well as guidance for the implementation of such measures. That guidance shall be updated as necessary over the duration of the Programme. Based on the framework of inclusion measures, and with particular attention to the specific Programme access challenges within the national contexts, inclusion action plans shall be developed and shall form an integral part of the national agencies' work programmes.

The Commission shall monitor the implementation of those inclusion action plans on a regular basis.

This action plan should be based on the specific needs of the country but always connected to the goals set in the Inclusion and Diversity Strategy developed by the European Union. In this perspective, the National Agencies should focus on specific target audiences based on the country's specific needs, which should be supported by national data, both specific on the participation in Erasmus+ and general data on the student and youth population. These plans should be publicly communicated and transparent, fostering as much stakeholder involvement as possible.

To support the implementation of the strategy the National Agencies are responsible for identifying at least one Inclusion and Diversity Officer. It is important to empower this figure and to assign a strategic dimension that goes beyond the mere technical part of the selection of the top-up grants, but also

8 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/817/>

includes aspects related to capacity building and communication.

Following the efforts done by the whole Erasmus+ community in ensuring that the Erasmus + Programme 2021-2027 emphasises the importance of inclusive mobility for all, it is necessary that the actions taken by the National Agencies, in their strategies, reflect the needs of all beneficiaries.

Recommendation 6:

The National Agencies should set up consultative stakeholders committees with representatives from students and other related stakeholders working with their main target groups to evaluate the implementation of the inclusion action plans.

With the view to bringing the stakeholder's perspective to the national strategies, we propose a reinforcement of the monitoring and evaluation of the national action plans by gathering a group of relevant stakeholders that can provide feedback on the implementation of the plans. Representatives from student and alumni organisations should be part of this group, together with representatives from different educational sectors, policymakers and various underrepresented groups. The creation of these committees can allow for a better understanding of the challenges

that students face during their mobility experiences, and contribute to the design of targeted outreach measures. The committees can also have a role in sectorial priorities, such as the monitoring of the inclusion priority within the context of the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education.

Recommendation 7:

Ensure the transparency of the evaluation process and criteria for beneficial selection, making it public to all interested parties.

As stated in the [Inclusion and Diversity Strategy](#), in order to be able to ensure quality and quantity when it comes to inclusion and diversity, the National Agencies should keep statistics on the number of young people with fewer opportunities that participated in the several opportunities that Erasmus+ provides. Additionally, the statistics on inclusion and diversity projects must be as reliable as possible, with the support of proper IT tools, a fair evaluation and a reflection on the impact of the projects on young people with fewer opportunities.

We believe that this data should be reflected in the national action plans, ensuring the plan's transparency, better dissemination and promotion of international comparison. By sharing the key findings on the participation of young people with fewer opportunities in Erasmus+ and the criteria chosen to

select these participants, the National Agencies are creating a document that can be consulted for cross-sectoral cooperation, data collection, analysis of the national priorities and to create a basis for stakeholder consultation support.

**Recommendation 8:
National Agencies and Higher Education Institutions should create explicit definitions of the groups considered as participants with fewer opportunities to facilitate transparent access to information, with guidance from the European Commission.**

Each National Agency should define its strategy according to the country's specifications, this means that each country has their own group priorities and definitions. For a clear understanding of who can benefit from the support measures, it's necessary to create explicit parameters to define which groups can access support measures available for participants from fewer opportunities backgrounds. Furthermore, considering that the national strategies follow the Inclusion and Diversity Strategy set by the European Union, the Commission must be available to provide guidance to the National Agencies when they are clarifying their group specifications.

**Recommendation 9:
Reinforce communication to create more opportunities for the students with fewer opportunities, building on the role of Erasmus Alumni, ambassadors and networks.**

Considering the findings in the SIEM report, 94% of the respondents consider information about available funding useful. In this perspective, more awareness must be created by National Agencies and Higher Education Institutions through clear and easy-to-read communication materials on the new inclusion measures to keep possible beneficiaries informed. Ideally, all the information on available grants, including those at the regional level should be centralised on a webpage that is easily accessible to all students, such as the one created by [Erasmus Student Network Spain](https://www.esn-spain.org/ayudas-cofinanciacion)⁹.

The Mobility Scoreboard 2019¹⁰ shows that many Erasmus+ programme countries do not implement a comprehensive information and guidance strategy on outward mobility, and that multipliers are not always involved in the existing

9 <https://www.esn-spain.org/ayudas-cofinanciacion>

10 European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2020. Mobility Scoreboard: Higher Education Background Report 2018/19. Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. https://eracon.info/assets/files/2020/mobilityscoreboard_2018_19.pdf

Interinstitutional agreement

The interinstitutional agreement¹² is the base for successful collaboration among Higher Education Institutions in Mobility projects, and a pre-requisite to initiate these mobilities. The information provided in the agreement can be key in the communication with students: in the SIEM research report, 86% of respondents indicated that they would like to have help choosing a University at the application stage. Easy to access information from the sending organisation can make this process smoother and simpler to navigate for students. As per the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education and the Erasmus Student Charter, the division of responsibilities between sending and hosting organisations is not completely clear, with many commitments involving both HEIs involved in mobility projects. Therefore, the interinstitutional agreement should serve as a tool to clearly divide responsibilities.

The SIEM research report and data from the ESN Survey 2021¹³ show how issues with recognition and the perception that non-mobile students have about recognition and grading processes remain problematic barriers to mobility.

Recommendation 11:
The interinstitutional agreement should include a clear division of responsibilities between Higher Education Institutions in terms of guidance, support and assistance to students.

Many of the commitments included in the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education and the rights enshrined in the Erasmus Student Charter involve both the sending and receiving of Higher Education Institutions. Both institutions need to play a role in providing information on these issues, sometimes in an introductory way that can

¹² https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2021-09/digital_bilateral_agreement_intra-european_mobility.pdf

¹³ Preliminary findings can be found in this report: https://esn.org/sites/default/files/news/final_and_midterm_evaluation_erasmus.pdf

help the student access further information from the hosting institution. Since aspects such as information on grading and recognition, accommodation and stress and anxiety are among the biggest problems reported by students, pre-departure guidance can help to make a difference.

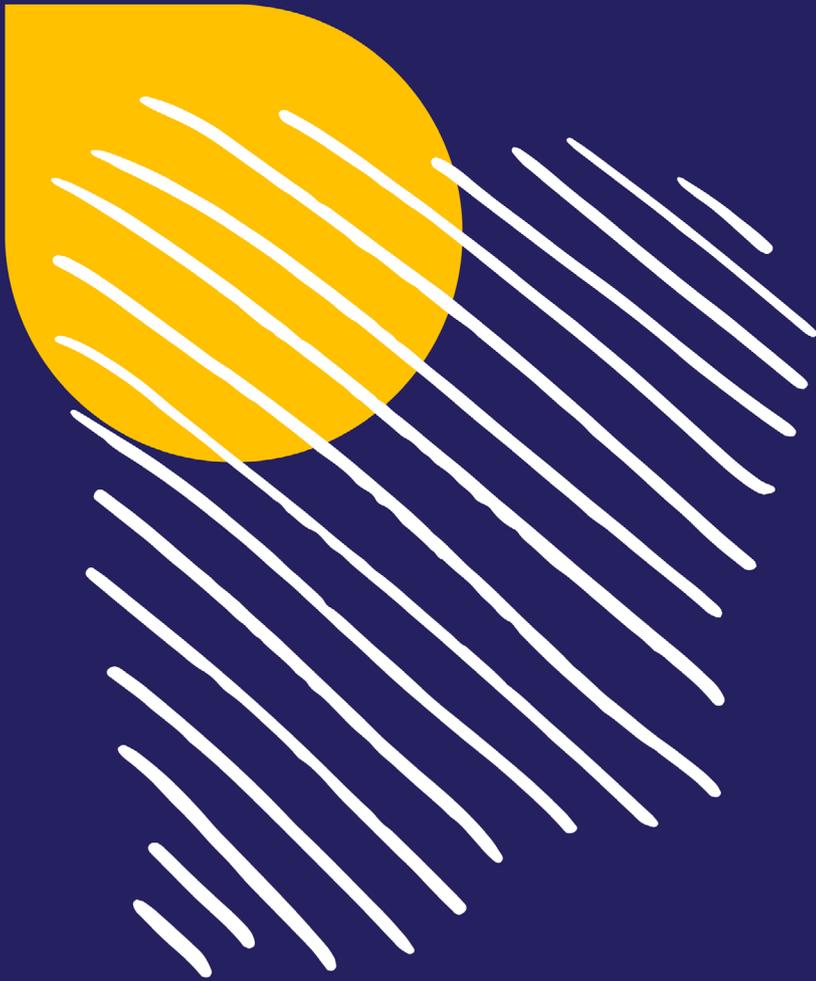
Recommendation 12:
The interinstitutional agreement should include a more comprehensive definition of inclusion and engagement support measures beyond special needs.

The current interinstitutional agreement model only includes a reference to students with special needs, and general services to support outgoing and incoming students from fewer opportunities backgrounds are not considered. Including this information can help the sending institutions in offering guidance to their students when they are thinking about their possible mobility destinations.

Recommendation 13:
The interinstitutional agreement should incorporate more specific information on grading and recognition.

The SIEM research report shows how entry barriers related to recognition and grading pose a tremendous challenge for both mobile and non-mobile students with fewer opportunities, who are afraid of having

to extend their degrees or downgrade their academic performance if they go on mobility. At the time of the applications, students should be offered comprehensive information about the gradings systems of the potential hosting organisation. To facilitate this process, more information should be included in the interinstitutional agreement.



Monitoring and evaluation

The monitoring and evaluation processes of Erasmus+ mobilities are fundamental to ensure quality and overcome the main issues faced by students with fewer opportunities. The current system of monitoring and evaluation has different components and, in the case of Erasmus+ mobilities between programme countries, has the particularity of not being connected to a qualitative project application. Instead, the main framework to define the quality of the activities organised as part of the mobility project is the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education, the quality framework for Erasmus+ mobilities in Higher Education. Institutions apply for this document once every programme cycle and their application document should be considered for the evaluation of their mobility projects.

Monitoring framework of the ECHE

The Erasmus Charter for Higher Education is a pre-requisite for accessing Erasmus+ mobilities in Higher Education. All Higher Education Institutions located in an Erasmus+ programme country, that want to take part in Erasmus+, need to apply for an ECHE directly to the European Commission, once per every programme cycle.

The ECHE working group, an informal body set up by the European Commission that brings together Erasmus+ National Agencies, student representatives and stakeholders, has created a new monitoring

framework for the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education, composed by the new ECHE Monitoring guide and the monitoring grids. This monitoring framework is extremely important since intra-European mobility projects are not subjected to a qualitative evaluation process, and there are limited ways to evaluate the quality of the implementation of ECHE.

Inclusion has been designated as one of the pressure points, and many aspects of the sections related to student support and the core mobility principles are also quite

connected with participation in mobility. Principles related to recognition or equal treatment play a key role in making mobility more inclusive, as shown by the findings of the SIEM research report.

The monitoring guide defines general guidelines on how to conduct the monitoring process

**Recommendation 14:
National Agencies should involve student representatives and stakeholders representing fewer opportunities groups in the monitoring process of the ECHE at the national level.**

The monitoring process is key to supporting Higher Education Institutions in the implementation of ECHE commitments. In order to give the process a capacity-building dimension. Involving student and alumni representatives and stakeholders that work with the groups that the inclusion strategy seeks to address will improve the qualitative assessment of the implementation of ECHE commitments. Students and stakeholders can be part of a stakeholder group that analyses the general strategy for ECHE monitoring in the country, and then when site visits are organised they can be part of the evaluation panel. Practices involving students already exist in countries such as Slovenia, and can easily be implemented around Europe. Besides improving the quality of the assessment

by providing a first-hand perspective, this will also increase awareness about the commitment to inclusion and stakeholder engagement of the Erasmus+ programme.

**Recommendation 15:
The European Commission and National Agencies should develop complementary materials to support the implementation of the ECHE annotated guidelines, gathering and showcasing success stories in the implementation of ECHE commitments related to inclusion and engagement.**

The new Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027 has brought a number of novelties, especially in the field of inclusion, with many Higher Education Institutions approaching the topic of inclusive mobility for the first time. The ECHE annotated guidelines offer a comprehensive introduction to how ECHE commitments can be implemented, but bridging the gap between theory and practice can be challenging. There is a need to develop materials and trainings based on existing data, such as the SIEM report, Erasmus+ internal data and Eurostudent findings, among others, in which possible solutions to overcome barriers that students face to access mobility opportunities are discussed. Funding allocated for TCAs and other related opportunities should increase.

Good practices in Erasmus+ project

implementation are regularly collected by Erasmus+ National Agencies and the European Commission, but information on success stories in ECHE implementation is scarce. National Agencies should boost the organisation of thematic meetings on inclusion with a broad perspective, in which aspects such as recognition or ways to improve financial support or administrative procedures are also addressed. Thanks to the emergence of online tools, the organisation of these thematic meetings at a transnational level are also more feasible now.

Recommendation 16:
The European Commission should set up a permanent structure, focusing on KA1 Higher Education mobilities, ECHE implementation and inclusion, involving National Agencies, students, stakeholders and experts to foster exchange and mutual learning on ECHE monitoring processes around Europe.

The work with stakeholders at the European level in the “Mobility for all” and ECHE working groups organised by the European Commission in the last few years proved to be successful and productive. Unfortunately, the Commission has not relaunched the working group on mobility for all since the beginning of the new programming period. Considering the relevance that inclusion will have in the

new monitoring framework, there is a need for a structured space for discussion and exchange of best practices between all the actors involved in making mobility more inclusive. Spaces for the National Agencies to exchange impressions, compare strategies and get feedback from students and stakeholders are fundamental to improving the implementation of inclusion measures.

The working group could meet 2-3 times a year and meetings could take place online to save costs if needed. It is recommended to involve the different Units in DG EAC involved in the general inclusion measures for the programme.

Project reporting: KA 131/KA171 Final beneficiary report

After the end of the mobility project, beneficiary Higher Education Institutions need to submit a report¹⁴. The reporting and evaluation of mobility projects in Higher Education are particularly important due to the lack of qualitative evaluation at the application stage. The “past performance” in previous grants is among the elements included in the award criteria for mobility projects support by internal policy funds (Erasmus+ Programme Guide 2022, Page 61¹⁵), and therefore good results in the evaluation of projects can lead to receiving more mobility projects. However, the information on how this process is carried out remains opaque.

Overall, it is important to highlight the importance of certain aspects which might not seem directly related to inclusion, but

which are already included in the project reporting template, can have. This is the case for recognition and scholarships, among others.

Recommendation 17:
Include specific sections on inclusion measures for outgoing and incoming students in the project reporting templates that Higher Education Institutions have to submit.

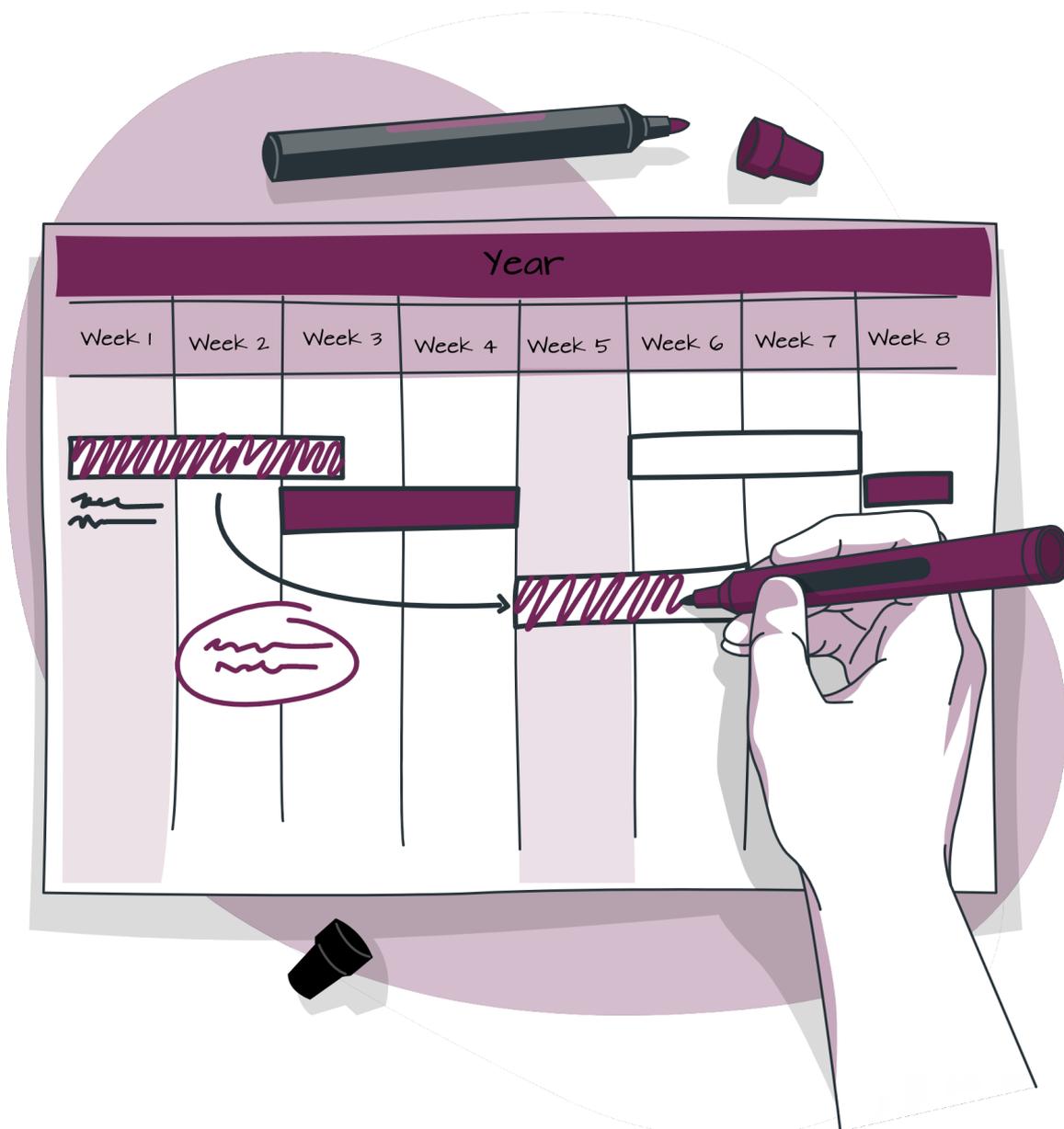
A new specific section should be included in the project reporting template of mobility projects in Higher Education so Higher Education Institutions can share the different initiatives they have undertaken to make mobility more inclusive for incoming and outgoing students. This section can be used to compare the commitments acquired through the awarding of the

¹⁴ Project report example - Erasmus+ KA 103 from the British National Agency: <https://erasmusplus.org.uk/file/32762/20200804%20KA103%20HE%20Final%20Beneficiary%20Report%20Guidance%202019.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/erasmusplus-programme-guide>

Erasmus Charter for Higher Education with the actual initiatives that were implemented.

The evaluation of the project in terms of measures to support inclusion can lead to more support measures for Higher Education Institutions that struggle to implement them.



Data collection: participants report

Data collection is key for the overall improvement of the Erasmus+ programme, but it is especially important to make mobility more inclusive and remove barriers to participation from fewer opportunities backgrounds. Through the beneficiary module/mobility tool, National Agencies and the European Commission collect live data on the implementation of mobility projects by Higher Education Institutions. Every year, the European Commission publishes an Erasmus+ Annual Report, in which data collected from National Agencies, beneficiaries and final participants is shared, focusing mainly on the achievements of the programme. However, these reports are not normally used to showcase aspects that need improvement.

The main source of data from participants is the “Erasmus+ participant report”¹⁶, a survey that all the students and trainees need to fill out by the end of their mobilities.

Recommendation 18:
The European Commission and National Agencies should make the results of the report publicly available at the institutional, national and European levels to increase transparency and support the improvement of the programme.

A considerable amount of relevant data is already gathered through the participant's report, but this information is not used publicly. First, students should be made aware of evaluations done by students in key aspects such as recognition or satisfaction with academic and social life, since this can be an important factor in the selection of their mobility destinations. Second, national data gathered by National Agencies can provide an extremely useful picture of the comparisons between Higher Education Institutions, which can foster the exchange of best practices and capacity building. Some National Agencies, such as the Finnish NA, already publish part of this information. Finally,

¹⁶ <https://erasmusapp.eu/after-mobility/ fill-in-your-erasmus+-participant-report>

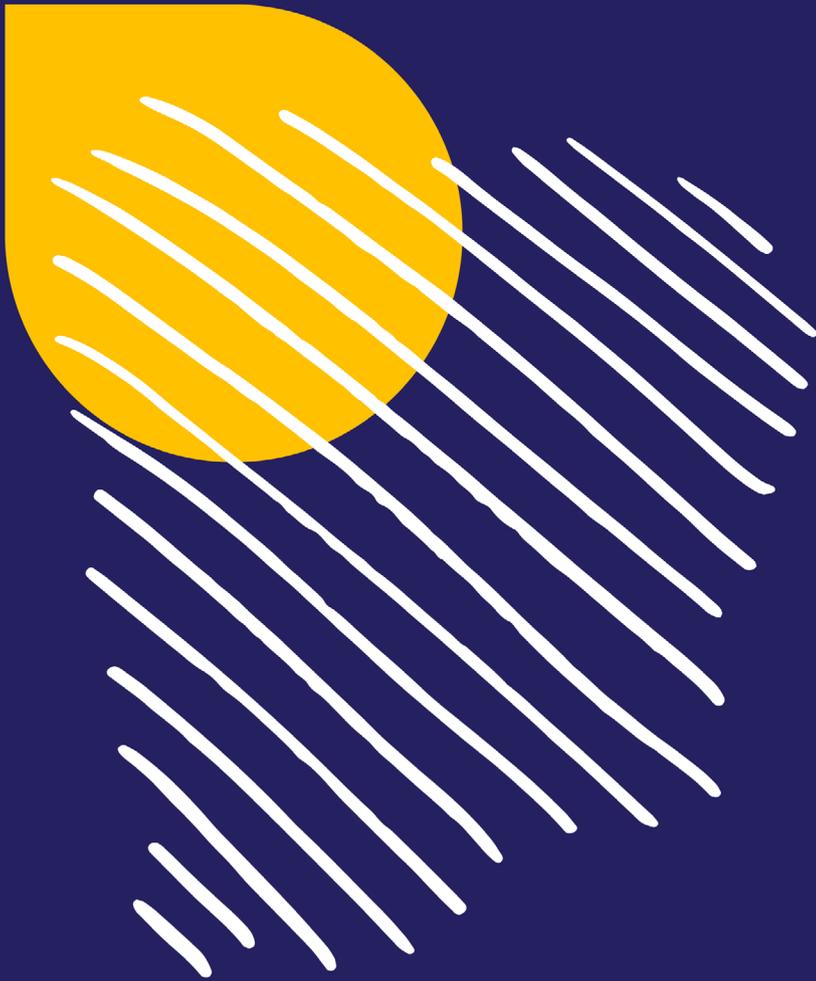
at the national and European levels, the data can help researchers, students and stakeholder organisations to analyse the implementation of the programme and make proposals to improve it.

In that regard, an important practical step would be to include part of the evaluation of the participant's report in the Erasmus+ Annual report that the European Commission publishes every year.

Recommendation 19:
The European Commission should incorporate more qualitative sections in the participants' report, such as open questions related to the problems and challenges faced by students, in the participant's report, provided to students at the end of their mobilities.

The current structure of the participant's report does not provide students with enough space to report the challenges they have faced in their mobilities in a qualitative way. Understanding these challenges in-depth is key to proposing measures at the different levels that can support overcoming them

Prospective and actual Erasmus students interact with a number of administrative and informative documents as part of the process of preparing for their Erasmus+ mobilities. These documents can a very important role in making their experience more inclusive and engaging. The proposed



Student Documents

recommendations address both the actual content of the documents and the way in which they are used and communicated to students.

Bureaucracy was identified as a practical barrier to mobility in the SIEM research report, especially through the focus groups in which both mobile and non-mobile students from fewer opportunities backgrounds could share their experiences and perceptions.

Erasmus Student Charter.

The Erasmus Student Charter outlines the rights and responsibilities of Erasmus+ students before, during and after their mobilities. In order to encourage students to go abroad and to ensure they have quality experiences, this document should be widely disseminated and

Erasmus Student Charter

clear procedures to ensure the respect of the rights described in the Charter should also be considered.

Recommendation 20: The European Commission and National Agencies should establish a clear connection between the rights outlined in the Erasmus Student Charter and the commitments described in the ECHE, amending the Charter if needed:

The awarding of an ECHE should also imply a commitment to all the rights described in the Erasmus Student Charter, as well as

the fair enforcement of the obligations for Erasmus students. All the rights included in the Erasmus Student Charter should therefore be mentioned the Erasmus Student Charter.

Recommendation 21: National Agencies and Higher Education Institutions should reinforce the promotion of the Erasmus Student Charter among the student population, using it as a framework to introduce students to

the Erasmus+ programme:

Awareness about the Erasmus Charter remains limited among the student population, both mobile and non-mobile. Explaining to students their rights and obligations before they start their mobility journeys can help to foster civic engagement and solve many of the doubts that they have during the application process while increasing positive scrutiny on the way that mobilities are conducted. It is recommended to also incorporate questions on the dissemination of the charter in the participant's report, the final project reporting and the ECHE site visits.

**Recommendation 22:
The European Commission, National Agencies and Higher Education Institutions should implement systems to allow students to report complaints and gather relevant qualitative information to support the improvement of the programme:**

Using the Erasmus+ App as the main tool to report situations in which students feel their rights were not respected can be a very effective way of increasing the use of the app while allowing for a streamlined system in which data can be safely stored and analysed. Students could be instructed about this reporting system during the pre-departure process and reminded during the welcome weeks, giving them options to share the information with different actors during the process of reporting the claim (National Agency, sending and

hosting institution, student organisations). This general online method can be complemented by other offline systems that help students to feel more comfortable. As recommended by the SIEM research report, encouraging students to discuss their concerns openly, both with institutions and with their peers, is fundamental to creating an open atmosphere of trust and feedback that helps to improve the programme.

Before leaving for their mobilities, students need to sign a grant agreement in which the conditions of their Erasmus+ scholarship are described. Despite the crucial importance of the document, SIEM data shows that students struggle to fully grasp the content of the grant agreement. Unlike

Grant Agreement

other Erasmus+ documents, a template version of the grant agreement is not available on the European Commission's Erasmus+ webpage¹⁷. However, template versions from National Agencies and Higher Education Institutions can be found online.

According to the results of the SIEM research report, 94% of students found information on available funding useful. This data point highlights the importance of clear information on the funding conditions for students, including the amount, the timing to receive the grants and the different funding sources that are contributing to the total amount the student receives. The current phrasing of the grant agreement is confusing and does not provide legal certainty, since two possibilities are contemplated: Article 4¹⁸ "Payment arrangements" says the following:

4.1 Within 30 days following the signature of the agreement by both parties, **and no later than the start date of the mobility**

period or upon receipt of confirmation of arrival by the beneficiary (whichever comes first), a pre-financing payment shall be made to the participant representing 70% of the amount specified in Article 3.

The letter of the article can easily lead to confusion but interpreted together with Article 15 of the Erasmus+ regulation and the content of the Erasmus Student Charter, it is clear that students should be entitled to **receiving their grant before their mobility starts.**

Recommendation 23:
The European Commission and National Agencies should modify the grant agreement, establishing pre-departure payment of the whole grant amount as the general rule. Therefore, all students can receive their scholarships from the sending Higher Education Institutions before the start of their mobilities.

Based on the findings of the SIEM research report, advancing initial costs is seen as the biggest challenge for mobile students.

¹⁷ <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/resources-and-tools/documents-and-guidelines> (Checked on the 29/09/2022)

¹⁸ Example from Wageningen University, The Netherlands: <https://www.wur.nl/en/show/Grant-Agreement-for-Study-2021-2022.htm>

Data from the ESN Survey 2021¹⁹ shows that almost a third of students report receiving their grants later than one month after the start of their mobilities, with around one-third reporting receiving the grant before the start and 40% within one month.

Differences between countries of origin are stark: in Spain, more than half report receiving their grant later than one month, followed by France and Italy. However, the size of the country and the number of mobilities is not the key determining factor: in Germany, only 16% of outgoing student report receiving their grants later than one month. This points to the importance

of national and institutional policymaking to ensure that all students receive their grants on time. A change in the content of the grant agreement, a legally binding document, is a key step to offering clear assurances to students about the timing in which they will receive their grants.

19 Preliminary findings of the ESN Survey 2021 related to grant payments can be found here: https://esn.org/sites/default/files/news/final_and_midterm_evaluation_erasmus.pdf



Learning Agreement

The [European Commission webpage](#)²⁰ explains the purpose of the learning agreement in the following terms: **The purpose of the Learning Agreement is to provide a transparent and efficient preparation of the exchange to make sure that students receive recognition for the activities successfully completed abroad. It is also added later in the definition that The Learning Agreement should include **all the learning outcomes** the student is expected to acquire during the exchange.**

The SIEM research report and an abundance of previous research have shed light on the role that learning mobility opportunities have in the development of key competences that go beyond academic learning. Findings from the SIEM research report show that impact of these experiences in aspects related to “global competence”²¹ seem to be even higher

among students from fewer opportunities backgrounds. However, the current formal recognition tools within Higher Education mobilities are not fit for purpose to properly capture learning experiences that happen beyond the classroom. The [SocialErasmus+ project](#)²² analysed how mobility opportunities could be adapted to make the most out of this dimension of the mobility experience.

In that regard, the Inclusion and Diversity strategy includes a couple of very important paragraphs related to the support to learning processes of students from fewer opportunities backgrounds: **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**

²⁰ <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/resources-and-tools/mobility-and-learning-agreements/learning-agreements>

²¹ <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/innovation/global-competence/>

²² <https://socialerasmus.org/>

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.

The inclusion and diversity strategy also urges organisations to put special attention to the reflection during the mobility experience and documentation of the developed competences after or towards the end of the project.

Finally, in the section “**e) Encourage and support community participation**”, the strategy includes a reflection on the societal role of the programme fostering inclusion:

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.

The objectives of the Inclusion and Diversity strategy are quite clear and very much in line with the existing literature on the impact of mobility. The best way to progress towards these objectives in the field of Higher Education mobilities is the adaptation of the Learning Agreement, the Erasmus+ Higher Education student document par excellence, which could avoid more bureaucracy while reinvigorating the learning experience of students.

ESN Survey data shows that less than the number of students engaging with their local communities is still considerably low and that integration is still a challenge for many students. It is therefore important to think about transformative solutions that can make a difference in how mobilities are organised around Europe.

Recommendation 24:
The European Commission, National Agencies and Higher Education Institutions should revamp the structure and implementation of the Learning Agreement, moving to a new model that allows for better recognition of informal and non-formal learning outcomes and building on existing tools, such as the Youthpass²³.

Integrating informal and non-formal learning in the key Erasmus+ recognition

document can be a transformative step to embed the participation of students in these opportunities in most mobility experiences. In order to achieve the objectives of the Inclusion and Diversity strategy, comprehensive modifications are needed. In that regard, different changes could be made to the learning agreement structure to support this process:

- Service learning initiatives and/or community engagement initiatives, in which students get ECTS recognised for their participation in projects engaging with local communities, are considered, in line with the ideas of establishing “living labs” and fostering challenge-based learning described in the European Strategy for Universities. When possible, these credits could be considered for the acquisition of the diploma, and otherwise they can be stored as extra ECTS.
- Even if not all the learning outcomes can be recognised through ECTS, the learning agreement should also be used as a guide for self-reflection on the mobility experience, accompanied by the Erasmus+ coordinators from the sending and hosting institutions. Just like in the Youthpass, guidance should be provided to foster the reflection of the students and the recognition of their learning experiences.

