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*Plenary sitting*

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# REPORT

on the implementation of inclusion measures within Erasmus+ 2014-2020  
(2021/2009(INI))

Committee on Culture and Education

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## EXPLANATORY STATEMENT - SUMMARY OF FACTS AND FINDINGS

### 1. Introduction

The implementation report on “Inclusion Measures within the Erasmus+ Programme 2014-2020” has the objective of assessing and evaluating the implementation of inclusion measures within the Erasmus+ programme for the period 2014-2020, with a view to identifying good practices and to help address challenges in the current Erasmus+ programme edition 2021-2027.

The Erasmus+ programme 2014-2020 was a successor to the Lifelong Learning programme (2007-2013), encompassing separate programmes under one umbrella programme, namely:

- the Lifelong Learning programme:
  - Erasmus for higher education,
  - Leonardo da Vinci for vocational education and training,
  - Comenius for school education,
  - Grundtvig for adult learning,
  - Jean Monnet for promoting European integration;
- Five international cooperation programmes: Erasmus Mundus, Tempus, Alfa, Edulink, and bilateral cooperation programmes in the field of higher education (with Canada, the United States, Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea);
- The Youth in Action programme.

In 2014, the Erasmus+ Youth Inclusion and Diversity Strategy (IDS) was introduced with the aim of increasing the number and quality of inclusion and diversity projects, supporting projects involving participants, including young people, with fewer opportunities compared to their peers.

The Rapporteur has gathered information and drafted this implementation report following intensive consultations with stakeholders and national agencies (NAs), and based on the following written sources:

- A European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS) study published in September 2021 titled “Inclusion measures within the Erasmus+ programme 2014-2020”.
- Two surveys:
  - One survey sent out to 42 NAs from the participating countries to the Erasmus+ programme during the 2014-2020 programme. 26 completed surveys were returned from 17 participating countries. Most of the NAs that took part in this survey cover school education, vocational education and training, higher education, adult education and youth. A few were dedicated specifically to youth, while a few others covered all of the other fields except youth. One of the responding Irish NAs only covers Higher Education.

- One survey sent out to various stakeholders from participating countries in the Erasmus+ programme during the 2014-2020 programme. 10 completed surveys were returned. Some covered a very broad remit, while others focused on specific categories of learners with fewer opportunities.

In addition to the stakeholder survey, a meeting of Shadow Rapporteurs with stakeholders was organised in February 2022, where stakeholders from local associations, pan-European organisations and NAs discussed the implementation of inclusion measures in the Erasmus+ programmes.

This implementation report will address the role of NAs in supporting the implementation of inclusion measures, along with the additional support provided by SALTO-YOUTH (Support, Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities for Youth) resource centres, specifically the SALTO inclusion and diversity resource centre, and key stakeholders working with individuals coming from disadvantaged backgrounds or with special needs. Based on the EPRS study, the responses from the surveys and the Shadows' meeting organised with stakeholders, the first section of this report will discuss the following points:

- The definition of learners with fewer opportunities and special needs;
- The outreach strategy implemented by NAs and stakeholders, along with the outreach support provided by the Commission and SALTO;
- Successes, shortcomings and identified obstacles to the implementation of inclusion measures;
- The role of inclusion officers.

## **2. Definition of learners with fewer opportunities and those with special needs**

### **2.1. A broad definition**

Both the study and the surveys used the same definition of participants with fewer opportunities and with special needs, based on the 'Erasmus+ Inclusion and Diversity Strategy' implemented by the European Commission in 2014, with the following categories:

- Disability (i.e. participants with special needs): young people with mental (intellectual, cognitive, learning), physical, sensory or other disabilities etc.
- Health problems: young people with chronic health problems, severe illnesses or psychiatric conditions etc.
- Educational difficulties: young people with learning difficulties, early school-leavers, lower qualified persons, young people with poor school performance etc.
- Cultural differences: immigrants, refugees or descendants from immigrant or refugee families, young people belonging to a national or ethnic minority, young people with linguistic adaptation and cultural inclusion difficulties etc.
- Economic obstacles: young people with a low standard of living, low income, dependence on the social welfare system, young people in long-term unemployment or poverty, young people who are homeless, in debt or with financial problems etc.

- Social obstacles: young people facing discrimination because of gender, age, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, disability, etc., young people with limited social skills or anti-social or high-risk behaviours, young people in a precarious situation, (ex-) offenders, (ex-)drug or alcohol abusers, young and/or single parents, orphans etc.
- Geographical obstacles: young people from remote or rural areas, young people living on small islands or in peripheral regions, young people from urban problem zones, young people from less serviced areas (limited public transport, poor facilities) etc.

The only difference from the study was that the surveys made use of these categories to identify all learners, and not only young learners.

The study reveals that most of the NAs used the categories mentioned above, a conclusion supported by the results of the survey sent to NAs in January 2022. The broad definition and interpretation concerning the group of learners with special needs or fewer opportunities is desired by most NAs. The stakeholders were broadly similar in their responses to the survey.

## **2.2. Additional considerations regarding learners with fewer opportunities**

The EP study considers additional characteristics of disadvantaged learners, namely those lacking digital skills (44% of the European population in 2020, aged 16-74), those who left schools early (9.9% of the European population in 2020, aged 18-24) and those with low-skills who prefer short-term goals.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, the study requested that further attention be paid to older people, to participants with mental disabilities and to unemployed people who are ill.

## **2.3. Most and least represented groups of learners with fewer opportunities**

The 2022 survey revealed that the responding NAs reached out the most to participants with disabilities, with educational difficulties and economic obstacles, while reaching out the least to participants with geographical obstacles, health problems and social obstacles. Additionally, most NAs indicated that they worked the most with participants with disabilities and economic obstacles, and the least with participants with geographical obstacles. Stakeholders indicated that they also worked most with participants who had economic obstacles, but social obstacles were also a major part of their work. Those with health obstacles featured the least in responses.

## **2.4. Issue of identification**

Several NAs raised the issue of identification. They noted a number of unrecorded cases of participants with fewer opportunities who might not have been identified as such by the beneficiaries in their reports. Likewise, some participants may not identify themselves as having fewer opportunities, or those with fewer opportunities may not believe that Erasmus+ is for them, hinting that some groups pre exclude themselves from the programme *ex ante*.

## **3. Reaching out to learners with fewer opportunities and special needs**

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<sup>1</sup> See [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/sdg\\_04\\_70/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/sdg_04_70/default/table?lang=en) and [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/sdg\\_04\\_10/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/sdg_04_10/default/table?lang=en).

### **3.1. Outreach**

NAs mostly cooperate with organisations, local associations and structures active in fields relevant to the inclusion of people with fewer opportunities in order to target potential participants with fewer opportunities. Engaging with these organisations and local associations positively impacts the ability of NAs to ensure the Erasmus+ programme is known to everyone. Further outreach methods include social media content, websites, face-to-face meetings, events, testimonials, role models, the Eurodesk platform and the E-twinning ambassadors. It should, however, be noted that resources and publications containing information about support for people with fewer opportunities in relevant languages or formats are not commonly used. Organising targeted events for specific groups (with tailored support to attend such events), focus groups and meetings with project coordinators are also used as outreach strategies.

NAs created a variety of information materials to promote the Erasmus+ programmes to learners with fewer opportunities and special needs. These materials include leaflets, videos, Social Media content, testimonial stories from projects with young people with fewer opportunities, diverse publications for different target groups on different programme aspects and funding possibilities, newsletters, booklet, articles, webinars, learning materials, workshop materials, etc.

Stakeholders engage heavily with second and third level establishments. For instance, working with community centres was a popular response, and individual stakeholders cited collaboration with civil society organisations and youth groups. They also cited word of mouth as useful in identifying individuals. Working with unemployment centres, on the other hand, was mentioned less frequently than other options.

Stakeholders heavily emphasised the importance of face-to-face meetings, coaching and workshops. They also relied heavily on targeted events and testimonials. Visits and advice centres were a popular choice by a number of stakeholders. Similarly, to NAs, the use of resources such as literature was not as popular as other options. Some stakeholders also mentioned offering tailor-made pilot testing for courses.

### **3.2. Communication support by Commission and SALTO**

The SALTO YOUTH inclusion and diversity resource centre provides several types of support to NAs, such as inclusion trainings, training and youth-work tools, inclusion information and project opportunities, practical publications and bringing stakeholders together to facilitate inclusion projects.

The Commission and SALTO resource centre also supported NAs in their outreach activities in a variety of forms, including leaflets, videos, a ‘cookbook’ with ‘inclusion recipes’, created by the SALTO resource centres, podcasts, guidelines, Erasmus+ guides or targeted publications. One national agency welcomed translated resources, which they found useful to them. However, another noted that they were not aware of many materials available.

Additional support from the Commission and SALTO for outreach activities included manuals and guides, forums between NAs and seminars. It seems that while training for outreach activity was offered, most NAs did not participate. However, three NAs mentioned TCA training for inclusion strategies.

One advertised tool by the SALTO resource centre is the SALTO toolbox, offered to NAs as a way to share useful training tools and to help them design training and youth work tools in support of inclusion projects. However, the NAs contributed very little to this toolbox.

It should be pointed out that the SALTO inclusion and diversity resource centre, and therefore the communication they created to support NAs, was only designed for the youth action part of the programme. Several surveyed NAs indicated that they were looking forward to a SALTO inclusion and diversity resource centre encompassing all fields and all ages.

### **3.3. NAs collaboration with stakeholders**

Eighty percent of the respondents of the survey sent to the national agency replied that they had worked with local associations and other civil society bodies during the 2014-2020 period. Among 21 respondents, 10 had set up a strategy with local associations to reach out to people with fewer opportunities. Eighty percent of the respondents also had reached out themselves to local associations, while sixty-five percent said that local associations had reached out to them.

NGOs from target groups, secondary school contacts and other NAs dealing with the same target groups were the main stakeholders with which the NAs work, according to the results of the 2022 survey. The youth section of political parties, along with sports organisations and employment offices were the least selected options. The NAs added further stakeholders that were not suggested, such as:

- Tertiary education institutions through their Erasmus+ offices;
- Special schools;
- Expert organisations, e.g. on volunteering for persons with disabilities or in the context of refugee work (in the framework of two NA cooperation projects);
- Umbrella organisations for social youth work;
- Local, regional and national authorities responsible for school education;
- International relations officers and study counsellors at HEIs;
- A support centre for students with special needs.

### **3.4. Stakeholders' collaboration with NAs**

Corroborating the perspectives of the NAs, 80% of the stakeholders responding to the survey said that they had been in contact with the NAs. However, a majority gave negative responses when asked whether they had received support from the national agency to promote Erasmus+: 5 out of 10 said no, while 4 out of 10 said yes, with one giving no answer.

In terms of those who did receive support, they generally received more knowledge sharing and expertise. Two stakeholders received funding/training. None chose the extra staff option. This was one of the criticisms mentioned by stakeholders in other sections and therefore could be seen as an avenue for improvement.

While there is clear evidence of outreach efforts, the EPRS study included in their recommendations the development of an instrument to monitor the success of the target reach

of learners with special needs and fewer opportunities.

#### **4. Results: Successes, shortcomings and identified obstacles;**

##### **4.1 Number of participants with fewer opportunities or with special needs.**

As mentioned previously, the number of participants with fewer opportunities or with special needs are not known, as they have not been recorded. As a result, when asked about specific data, the NAs who responded to the survey sent in February 2022 noted that their responses were an approximation. Nevertheless, it is clear that the percentage of participants does vary from one country to another, ranging from 1% to about 40%.

Stakeholders gave a wide variety of answers ranging from 1200+ participants directed towards the programme and 1300+ participating directly in the programme from their organisation down to 50 directed and 35 participating. This wide disparity reflects the size and capacity of stakeholders, but also demonstrates that the programme could cater for these varying numbers.

In terms of successes, when asked the extent to which participating in Erasmus+ had helped a learner with fewer opportunities enhance their learning opportunities, all of the stakeholders gave positive responses ranging from moderately to very much. This along with the number of participants from the stakeholder organisations again emphasises the positive effect of the programme

##### **4.2. Implemented actions: successes and shortcomings**

During 2014-2020, NAs developed strategies to improve the inclusion of individuals with fewer opportunities. NAs were positive in their perception of the success of implemented actions. This perception, but also examples of actions, does prove that NAs have implemented successful inclusion actions during the 2014-2020 period. Nevertheless, NAs mention that insufficient human and financial resources may hinder the success of implementing actions. They also highlighted the need for better cooperation between the Commission and NAs to improve inclusion in all Erasmus+ actions, and for establishing ongoing exchanges between the Commission, NAs and stakeholders from relevant fields/experts on the inclusiveness of the programme.

It is also worth noting that NAs do not only develop outreach strategies for the inclusion of individuals with fewer opportunities in the Erasmus+ programme, but they also work towards enhancing the number of inclusive projects funded by Erasmus+. Indeed, under the Erasmus+ programme 2014-2020, 11,045 funded projects had an inclusion component.<sup>2</sup>

The EPRS study analysed factors that could contribute to successfully improving learning possibilities for people with fewer opportunities. These factors included the surrounding environment, the identification of prior learning competences, the presence of a coach offering personal guidance throughout the project, self-identified learning targets and the

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<sup>2</sup> See [https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects_en).



ability to transfer acquired competences to their own contexts upon their return.

#### **4.3. Obstacles for the participation of learners with fewer opportunities and those with special needs:**

The EPRS study identified a number of barriers, which have prevented the participation of some learners with fewer opportunities and those with special needs. They include language, financial, psychological and administrative obstacles, but unfamiliarity with the programme was also an issue.

Administrative barriers are a recurring theme mentioned by NAs and stakeholders alike, more specifically this refers to difficulties with IT-tools and during the application process. These add an additional layer of burdens in the case of people with fewer opportunities who would like to participate. This obstacle can be overcome by simplifying the processes and the platforms, or by establishing easy access to a support system for participants and association.

Stakeholders felt that the major shortcoming when it came to attracting more learners with fewer opportunities was a lack of staff. Over 80% of respondents of the 2022 survey cited this. They also felt that lack of funding and the administrative burden were critical factors. All these factors are interlinked and need to be considered closely.

### **5. Work of inclusion officers**

#### **5.1. Role, missions and workload, hindrances**

Most NAs have appointed an inclusion officer, or a team involved in inclusion matters, in order to supervise the national agency's inclusion and diversity efforts.

The 2022 survey sent to NAs was therefore primarily addressed to inclusion officers, or inclusion staff members. Out of 26 respondents, 22 indicated they were inclusion officers. Other respondents included one TCA coordinator, one Youth Mobility Expert, one team leader and one AD interim horizontal European priorities officer.

The inclusion officer manages a variety of tasks, including the promotion of inclusion measures within the Erasmus+ programme and identifying target groups. When asked about which missions the inclusion officers oversee, the NAs chose the following options most frequently:

- Maintaining awareness of inclusion as a priority in the national agency;
- Training session for organisations;
- Collecting data for the European Commission;
- Networking with inclusion officers from other NAs.

The number of inclusion officers per NAs varied across participating countries, but ranged from none to 5 during the Erasmus+ programme 2014-2020. According to NAs, there were not enough inclusion officers for the workload. Additionally, inclusion officers often covered other roles, including, but not just: project officers, programme administrator, monitoring staff. NAs also remarked that inclusion tasks were often distributed among the management team.

The lack of time to implement inclusion actions either due to the lack of staff or the number of procedures required was often cited as one of the main issues. Often, staff working on inclusion and diversity matters were also managing other tasks, which were deemed more pressing, leaving little time left to work on developing inclusion actions. NAs recommended that at least one person should be fully dedicated to implement inclusion measures.

## **5.2. Support from Commission and SALTO**

The SALTO youth inclusion and diversity resource centre offered the opportunity for inclusion officers to join training sessions, seminars or colleague support groups. The latter seemed to have been one of the most sought-after types of support by inclusion officers. These were generally organised as working days of peer support dedicated to a particular inclusion issue, with the aim of reflecting together on common challenges and of coming up with common solutions. As for the training sessions, they could be specific to one area, such as training for outreach activities, for implementing inclusion actions, for supporting project leaders or for developing national strategies.

Training was offered in a variety of forms, including workshops, forums, conferences and seminars.

However, training only covered the youth field, thus limiting the number of NAs and inclusion staff that could participate.

## **6. Conclusion**

Overall, it can be argued that while inclusion matters gained importance overall in the Erasmus+ programme 2014-2020, and were tackled in a more comprehensive and targeted way than in the predecessor programmes, considerable challenges and shortcomings continued to persist. This corroborates the need for lessons to be learned *for* and more attention being paid *to* inclusion measures and actions in the new Erasmus+ programme generation 2021-2027, in the legal basis of which furthering ‘inclusion’ is clearly identified as one of the programme’s key objectives.

## MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

### on the implementation of inclusion measures within Erasmus+ 2014-2020 (2021/2009(INI))

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to Articles 6, 10, 165 and 166 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 establishing ‘Erasmus+’: the Union programme for education, training, youth and sport and repealing Decisions No 1719/2006/EC, No 1720/2006/EC and No 1298/2008/EC<sup>1</sup>,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2021/817 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 establishing Erasmus+: the Union Programme for education and training, youth and sport and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013<sup>2</sup>,
- having regard to the Commission report of 31 January 2018 entitled ‘Mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme (2014-2020)’ (COM(2018)0050),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 14 November 2017 entitled ‘Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture – The European Commission’s contribution to the Leaders’ meeting in Gothenburg, 17 November 2017’ (COM(2017)0673),
- having regard to the Interinstitutional Proclamation on the European Pillar of Social Rights<sup>3</sup>,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 12 November 2020 entitled ‘Union of Equality: LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025’ (COM(2020)0698), which builds on the Council conclusions of 16 June 2016 on LGBTI equality,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 18 September 2020 entitled ‘A Union of equality: EU anti-racism action plan 2020-2025’ (COM(2020)0565), which seeks to update Council Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000 implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin<sup>4</sup> (the Racial Equality Directive),
- having regard to its resolution of 15 September 2020 on effective measures to ‘green’ Erasmus+, Creative Europe and the European Solidarity Corps<sup>5</sup>,

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<sup>1</sup> OJ L 347, 20.2.2013, p. 50.

<sup>2</sup> OJ L 189, 28.5.2021, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> OJ C 428, 13.12.2017, p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> OJ L 180, 19.7.2000, p. 22.

<sup>5</sup> OJ C 385, 22.9.2021, p. 2.

- having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure, as well as Article 1(1)(e) of, and Annex 3 to, the decision of the Conference of Presidents of 12 December 2002 on the procedure for granting authorisation to draw up own-initiative reports,
  - having regard to the opinion of the Committee on Petitions,
  - having regard to the report of the Committee on Culture and Education (A9-0158/2022),
- A. whereas mobility is a hugely important part of digital and in-person learning; whereas providing equal and inclusive opportunities for all is, and must continue to be, inherent to the fundamental values of the European Union, and whereas people from all backgrounds and walks of life must be able to benefit fully and equally from Erasmus+; highlights that Erasmus+ benefits not only its participants but entire communities and societies and fulfils the ambitions of UN Sustainable Development Goal 4; notes that this leads to more democratic, stronger and more cohesive and resilient societies;
  - B. whereas the Erasmus+ 2014-2020 Regulation puts emphasis on promoting social inclusion and on the participation of people with special needs or with fewer opportunities, as defined in the ‘Erasmus+ Inclusion and Diversity Strategy’, encompassing persons with disabilities, health problems, educational difficulties, cultural differences, and economical, geographical and social obstacles; underlines that the current Erasmus+ programme (2021-2027) also goes hand in hand with the green and digital transitions;
  - C. whereas the COVID-19 pandemic had a severe impact on the education sector as a whole, further exacerbating existing inequalities in access to education and highlighting the need to maintain inclusion measures in Erasmus+ and to make any necessary improvements;
  - D. whereas no harmonised and mandatory inclusion strategy was established at European level for the Erasmus+ programme for 2014-2020, a shortcoming that limited the impact of inclusion measures within the programme;
  - E. whereas physical mobility enables immersion in and optimum interaction with other cultures, and whereas virtual exchanges and learning are a valuable complement to physical mobility, but do not provide the same quality of experience and benefits;
  - F. whereas the pandemic accelerated the digital transition and highlighted the importance of having good digital skills; underlines the fact that Erasmus+ can contribute significantly to digital upskilling and reskilling;
  - G. whereas the experience of mobility offered by Erasmus+ can be transformative for participants, and can positively influence their communication skills, self-confidence, openness, critical thinking, personal and professional development, employability, well-being and understanding of the benefits of a united Europe by providing inclusive learning opportunities that enrich their lives and allow them to experience Europe’s linguistic and cultural heritage while gaining lifelong knowledge;
  - H. whereas the mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme 2014-2020 published by the Commission in 2018 underlined the necessity of reaching more people with fewer

opportunities and smaller organisations in all regions;

1. Notes with satisfaction the overall positive perception of how inclusion measures have developed over the Erasmus+ 2014-2020 programming period;
2. Highlights that Erasmus+ should support stakeholders' and programme participants' internationalisation plans that contribute to the removal of the physical, psychological, social, socio-economic, linguistic, digital and other barriers to learning mobility and European projects, offering clear and detailed information and qualitative support for participants from under-represented groups and those with specific needs;
3. Stresses the crucial need for tailored funding and grants such as pre-financing, top-up grants, upfront payments and lump sums to increase the participation of people with fewer opportunities or from disadvantaged backgrounds, as financial barriers continue to constitute one of the biggest obstacles in Erasmus+; stresses the need, in this regard, to apply flexible rules to provide a sufficient financial amount to cover their needs, especially their living costs;
4. Calls on the Commission to further develop Erasmus+ financing tools and establish synergies with other programmes;
5. Stresses that the amount of money disbursed through mobility grants is still insufficient in some cases, and can constitute a reason for social exclusion for those students and families who cannot afford mobility; calls for an increase in the 2023 budget for the full implementation of inclusion measures in Erasmus + and the European Solidarity Corps;
6. Urges the Commission to ensure that existing digital tools are working properly and to their full extent, and to tackle without delay the serious persistent issues related to Erasmus+ IT tools, which are significantly hindering not only the participation of smaller organisations, people with fewer opportunities, older participants and staff helping with the administrative paperwork, but also the participation of all kinds of beneficiaries; calls on the Commission to make the process for the newly introduced IT tools easier and accessible for all groups and to test them on a sufficiently large scale before their implementation;
7. Notes that administrative barriers prevent many potential learners from taking part in the programme; urges the Commission to reduce bureaucracy and simplify the procedures to access funding with a view to streamlining the process and making it easier to understand and more accessible; underlines that the administrative burden constitutes a barrier to access for all and most affects those with fewer opportunities or with special needs; stresses the importance of providing application procedures in all European languages;
8. Praises the role of teachers, youth and social workers, civil society organisations, associations and educational staff as the driving forces behind participating institutions in raising awareness of the programme, by informing and supporting future learners and identifying people with fewer opportunities; notes that without them, most participants, especially those with fewer opportunities, would not be able to take part; calls on the Commission, the Member States and national agencies to value and acknowledge their often voluntary work, to support them by facilitating their own mobility and to provide

them with adequate funding and support, while accompanying participants with fewer opportunities and offering them specific training adapted to their needs; notes the importance of updating various tools that they use in identifying possible participants and to better customise the Erasmus+ experience in order to address the needs of every individual participant;

9. Stresses the importance of providing appropriate training and support to educators on effectively navigating the challenges and opportunities and to foster the exchange of good practices in the field;
10. Encourages the Member States and national agencies to facilitate more educational seminars for Erasmus+ staff to carry out projects, develop inclusive methods and explore new ways to reach future beneficiaries of the programme;
11. Stresses the need for the Commission, the Member States and the national agencies to provide better support for grassroots organisations in all areas, including community-led and smaller organisations, particularly in the outermost regions, islands and remote, mountainous, rural and less accessible areas, and to ensure that resources and projects are distributed fairly in each Member State;
12. Stresses the importance of providing adequate financial and material support to staff, in addition to further training and additional expertise, so that they can engage with participants, their families and beneficiaries, improving access and boosting the success and impact of the projects, while ensuring that mobility and projects run smoothly; notes that national agencies in the Member States can provide significant help by identifying the needs of organisations and institutions in this matter and providing the necessary support;
13. Notes the positive effect of short-term mobility of schoolchildren in overcoming mental and psycho-social barriers, and asks the Commission and national agencies to foster mobility projects aimed at children and teenagers;
14. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to organise targeted information campaigns, both online and offline, to increase awareness and outreach among citizens on the benefits of Erasmus+ through cooperation with media and social media outlets in public learning facilities such as libraries, schools and universities;
15. Asks all national agencies to appoint dedicated inclusion and diversity officers in order to reach out directly to learners with special needs and/or fewer opportunities; calls, in this regard, on those organisations that were selected to implement Erasmus+ actions to designate dedicated contact persons for people with fewer opportunities, and recalls that information on support services for people with special needs must be clear, up-to-date, complete and easy to access;
16. Calls on the Commission to improve guidelines for national policies that will enable better participation of learners facing health problems, cultural differences and economic, geographical and social obstacles, and to scrutinise and report on their implementation;
17. Supports all EU initiatives aimed at facilitating student mobility, such as the Erasmus+

mobile application, ‘paperless Erasmus’ and the European Student Card; calls on the Commission to explore the possibility of linking Erasmus+ more closely with other programmes and to foster cross-sectoral cooperation, including Interrail, in order to foster greater inclusion and equality that will improve access to better and greener mobility options, particularly for those with fewer opportunities; calls on the Commission to also make the DiscoverEU initiative more inclusive, allowing more people to participate;

18. Stresses that special focus should be given to linguistic competences, especially for participants with fewer opportunities; calls, therefore, for targeted and group-specific support for language learning in preparation for mobility and insists that this support should not be limited to online courses;
19. Recognises the important role of Support, Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities (SALTO) Inclusion & Diversity for the implementation of inclusion measures for the Erasmus+ Youth strand, and notes that the extension of inclusion strategies to the Education & Training strand in the current programming period will have to be followed closely, as the target groups are different; stresses the need for national agencies to work more closely with employment agencies and other adult education stakeholders to facilitate the integration of adult learners into the Erasmus+ 2021-2027 programme;
20. Regrets the lack of reliable data – both quantitative and qualitative – on the participation of people with fewer opportunities in the Erasmus+ programme, as such data could be used to identify at which groups inclusion measures should be targeted; underlines the need to develop evaluation schemes to produce clear statistics and appropriately assess further problematic issues in order to create a management and steering tool for inclusion measures, using methods which fully respect privacy and data protection regulations and do not add undue administrative burdens for organisations and participants; reaffirms the need for more capacity-building for staff with regard to indicators and monitoring systems for inclusion;
21. Stresses the importance of funding more EU-wide research and studies on inclusion in the current programming period in order to assess the impact of the measures undertaken by national agencies and stakeholders in engaging organisations and people with fewer opportunities; highlights the importance of keeping records and statistics that should serve as a basis for consultations on future programmes;
22. Asks for the specific needs of persons with disabilities to be taken into account in order to facilitate their participation in the programme by offering them hybrid mobility by way of preparation for the mobility period, giving them the opportunity to be accompanied, and providing them with suitable and accessible accommodation and specialised support services based on their needs; stresses the need to collect their feedback after the period of mobility in order to improve the participation of future beneficiaries; underlines the need for specific support, guidance and tools allowing persons with disabilities to register and participate in the Erasmus+ programme; recalls that accompanying persons should also have access to funds and grants in order to participate in the mobility programme;



23. Stresses the importance of the Erasmus+ programme in promoting the values of tolerance and diversity; calls on the Commission to establish synergies between the EU anti-racism action plan and Erasmus+ in order to address specific needs and combat racism in all its forms;
24. Welcomes the development of Erasmus+ projects related to and focused on improving gender equality and the inclusion of women in all sectors of education, especially in science, technology, engineering, the arts and mathematics (STEAM), and calls on the Commission and the Member States to continue to give visibility to gender equality in their policies and actions;
25. Welcomes the projects that promote and raise awareness of sexual diversity and encourage respect for LGBTIQ+ people, and calls on the Commission to create genuine links between the EU LGBTIQ Equality Strategy and the Erasmus+ programme;
26. Highlights the need for targeted solutions and a needs-based approach to learning-related mobility opportunities for people from marginalised groups in order to enhance their participation in the programme and ensure that they get adequate support, bearing in mind that financial and institutional barriers remain one of the biggest obstacles to their participation;
27. Requests that the Commission and the Member States ensure that all the relevant information regarding Erasmus+ is accessible to persons with disabilities, in particular through adapted and barrier-free online tools in all European languages; recalls that planning and evaluation processes should be barrier-free; welcomes the establishment of ‘Erasmus Days’ and stresses the importance of the role of former Erasmus+ participants and alumni networks in promoting the programme widely and serving as a potential one-stop shop for all future learners;
28. Asks the Member States to evaluate their existing policies and adopt targeted programmes and actions for learners with fewer opportunities and special needs, from all age groups and all backgrounds, in order to increase participation in Erasmus+, especially in terms of mobility, and to foster exchanges of good practices in this field; notes the key role of national agencies and voluntary organisations in facilitating this process;
29. Underlines the positive impact of the Erasmus+ programme in third countries as a factor in the European integration process and in strengthening the visibility of the EU; stresses the need for better partnerships and increased inclusivity of Erasmus+ projects in associated countries and other eligible countries, notably in the Western Balkans and the Eastern and Southern Neighbourhoods; calls on the Commission to facilitate international consultation – both digital and in-person – between national agencies in the Member States and participating countries with a view to exchanging good practices; notes that this will further strengthen their cooperation and allow them to implement new solutions, ideas and lessons learnt on the ground that will increase the number of participants in the Erasmus+ programme;
30. Stresses the need to give more flexibility to the Erasmus+ programme in the event of a crisis, as witnessed since the beginning of the war in Ukraine; welcomes the measures announced by the Commission allowing Ukrainian students and education staff affected



by the war to continue with their education and professional activities in Ukraine and any of the Member States; calls for Ukrainian students to be given more assistance and for additional support to be provided to sustain Ukraine's higher education institutions and academic community;

31. Regrets the decision of the Government of the United Kingdom not to take part in Erasmus+ for the current programming period in the wake of its exit from the European Union, which constitutes a loss of opportunities for young people in both the EU and the UK;
32. Stresses the importance of fostering mobility for vocational education and training (VET) students in order to reach young people from all backgrounds, and notes with satisfaction the increased opportunities for their long-term mobility created during the 2014-2020 programming period;
33. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to use the European Year of Youth and related events to effectively promote the opportunities offered by the Erasmus+ programme, particularly for those with fewer opportunities and those from disadvantaged backgrounds, with a view to ensuring that the European Year of Youth has an effective impact, especially for the living conditions, education opportunities and democratic participation of young people; regrets the fact that the budget allocated to the European Year of Youth is insufficient to meet the needs of the initiative;
34. Recalls the paramount importance of ensuring automatic recognition of qualifications and learning periods in the context of the European Education Area as a complementary tool to make inclusion measures within Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps fully effective;
35. Welcomes the Commission's recent adoption of the 2021-2027 framework of measures aimed at increasing diversity and inclusion in the current Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes, and calls on the Commission to closely monitor the future national implementation of this framework and to keep Parliament informed on an annual basis; highlights that the full implementation of a dedicated framework of inclusion measures can serve as a useful experience and reference for other EU programmes that have a direct impact on citizens' lives such as Creative Europe and the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme;
36. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.

## OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON PETITIONS

for the Committee on Culture and Education

on the implementation of inclusion measures within Erasmus+ 2014-2020  
(2021/2009(INI))

Rapporteur for opinion: Jordi Cañas

### SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Petitions calls on the Committee on Culture and Education, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution:

1. Underlines the need to ensure that inclusion, diversity, equal opportunity and accessibility are at the core of the implementation of Erasmus+, one of the EU's most successful programmes; highlights that offering equal opportunities to all is and must continue to be inherent to the EU's fundamental values; highlights the need to further specify and broaden the definition and interpretation of 'learners with special needs and/or fewer opportunities'<sup>1</sup> across Member States to include older people, among others; stresses the difficulties in accessing and monitoring reliable data on the profiles of the programme's beneficiaries; believes, therefore, that an instrument should be developed to monitor whether and how participants from vulnerable and disadvantaged groups are being reached by the programme, so as to leave no one behind<sup>2</sup>;
2. Points out that some petitions submitted to Parliament raise the issue of the administrative obstacles that Erasmus+ students face on their arrival to their host countries<sup>3</sup>; highlights that Erasmus+ should support stakeholders' and programme participants' internationalisation plans that remove physical, psychological, social, socioeconomic, linguistic and other types of barriers to learning mobility and that offer clear and detailed information and qualitative support, including improved mentorship, for participants from underrepresented groups and/or with specific needs before, during and after a period abroad; supports EU initiatives aimed at facilitating student mobility, such as the Erasmus + mobile application, 'paperless Erasmus' and the European Student Card, which make managing administrative processes more flexible and enable each student to benefit from the same services; stresses the importance of the role of former Erasmus+ participants and alumni networks in promoting the programme among the wider public;

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<sup>1</sup> Term used in Article 23(2) of Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 on Erasmus+.

<sup>2</sup> European Commission, Erasmus+ inclusion and diversity strategy in the field of youth, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> As seen from petition 1106/2018.

3. Draws attention to the under-resourcing and understaffing of Erasmus+ national agencies and the insufficient efforts to remove administrative barriers to mobility under the 2014-2020 programme; underlines that national agencies have a crucial role in ensuring that projects are as inclusive and diverse as possible; believes, therefore, that all national agencies should organise targeted information campaigns and appoint an inclusion and diversity officer to reach out to learners with special needs and/or fewer opportunities in order to increase their access to information and their awareness of the opportunities in place and how to access them, as well as to provide these learners with advice regarding possible difficulties they may experience during their Erasmus+ programme, such as delayed reimbursements<sup>4</sup> or any obstacles caused by external or unexpected factors such as the COVID-19 crisis<sup>5</sup>; stresses that a supportive approach to beneficiaries with special needs and/or fewer opportunities is key to removing barriers that prevent their full participation in the programme;
4. Believes that Erasmus+ should encourage stakeholders to share their expertise at an institutional level, learn from and connect with each other, build administrative capacity and create innovative educational tools that foster diversity and the integration of participants with special needs and/or fewer opportunities; welcomes, in this sense, specific efforts to support cooperation between different stakeholders and to develop and implement inclusive policies that seek to integrate people into education who have had fewer opportunities as a result of economic, social, cultural, health, disability or geographic factors; stresses the driving role of teachers and institutions in raising awareness of the programme and informing and supporting future learners;
5. Regrets that the COVID-19 pandemic has had several negative effects<sup>6</sup> on education and the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme; underlines, in this context, that, despite the 2014-2020 programme's evaluation as more coherent, effective and aligned with emerging needs, it is still necessary to make the current programme more inclusive with the ability to reach out to more vulnerable and disadvantaged people and further facilitate the participation of smaller organisations; calls, therefore, on the Commission to continue its work on making the Erasmus+ programme more inclusive in its geographical deployment and targeted financial support;
6. Believes that the risk of stigmatisation in the participants' country of residence may discourage them from self-identifying as disadvantaged, which may hamper their mobility, the collection of reliable data by authorities and the monitoring of their participation in Erasmus+<sup>7</sup>; calls for EU-wide recognition of disability status and encourages host institutions to guarantee Erasmus+ participants the same reasonable accommodations and facilities as home institutions; considers that the specific needs of people with disabilities must be taken into account in order to facilitate their participation in the programme by providing them with suitable and accessible accommodation and specialised support services based on their needs prior to departure

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<sup>4</sup> As seen from Petition 2466/13.

<sup>5</sup> As seen from Petition 0125/21.

<sup>6</sup> Di Pietro, G. et al., *The likely impact of COVID-19 on education: Reflections based on the existing literature and recent international datasets*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Bunescu, L., Davies, H. and Gaebel, M., *ERASMUS+ International Credit Mobility – a study of the mobility of disadvantaged students from Partner Countries*, Support and Promotion for Higher Education Reform Experts (SPHERE), January 2020.

and during their period abroad;

7. Reminds Member States of the Bologna Process principles and the principles and guidelines to strengthen the social dimension of higher education in the European Higher Education Area, both of which call on them to draft national strategies and plans to enhance inclusion;
8. Underlines the importance of and looks forward to an integrated and coherent approach to inclusion within the different EU programmes for youth and education, including the European Solidarity Corps and the European Social Fund Plus; welcomes the Commission's proposal for 2022 to be the European Year of Youth and considers the proposal an opportunity to develop this integrated approach; calls on the Commission to look closely at the possibility of combining the Erasmus+ and Interrail programmes<sup>8</sup>, and thus support students, especially in higher education, in order to foster more equality and inclusion, taking the beneficiaries' current income into account; calls on the Commission to develop connections between the Erasmus+ programme and relevant international policies that concern learners with special needs and/or fewer opportunities; highlights that possible alignments can be sought with the Sustainable Development Goals and UNESCO's priorities and policies;
9. Stresses that national policymaking regarding learners with special needs and/or fewer opportunities should be further stimulated; calls on the Member States to support Erasmus+ projects to attract participants with disabilities and learners from vulnerable and disadvantaged groups to their countries; calls on the Member States to promote and showcase individual mobility projects and the experiences of people with disabilities;
10. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to increase their efforts through Erasmus+ to support women's access to and advancement in mathematics, information and natural sciences and technology;
11. Welcomes the establishment of 'Erasmus Days', which make it possible to communicate better with a broader public, connect people who are leaving for the same destination, share experiences informally and thus, enhance the benefits of mobility; believes that, in order to make the programme more inclusive, it is necessary to provide appropriate and accessible information, and to use a wide range of communication methods, such as social networks or local events, in partnership with local structures and specialised organisations; calls on the Commission and the Member States to ensure that all relevant information regarding Erasmus+ is accessible to people with disabilities; calls on the Commission and the Member States to enhance the visibility of participants with special needs and/or fewer opportunities so as to promote diversity and inclusion;
12. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to properly address the lack of familiarity with the Erasmus+ programme, information barriers, obstacles to the application process, accommodation problems, adequate support services abroad and the challenges relating to the portability of grants faced by people with disabilities and their caregivers, as well as by other participants from vulnerable and disadvantaged groups; calls on the Commission and the Member States to monitor whether learners

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<sup>8</sup> As called for in Petition 0681/2021.

from these groups are being reached;

13. Welcomes, in this regard, the Commission's recent adoption of the 2021-2027 framework of measures, which aims to increase diversity and inclusion in the current Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes; calls on the Commission to closely monitor the future national implementations of this framework.

## INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

<b>Date adopted</b>	27.1.2022
<b>Result of final vote</b>	+: 28 -: 5 0: 1
<b>Members present for the final vote</b>	Alex Agius Saliba, Andris Ameriks, Marc Angel, Margrete Auken, Alexander Bernhuber, Markus Buchheit, Ryszard Czarnecki, Tamás Deutsch, Francesca Donato, Eleonora Evi, Agnès Evren, Gheorghe Falcă, Emmanouil Fragkos, Malte Gallée, Gianna Gancia, Alexis Georgoulis, Peter Jahr, Radan Kanev, Stelios Kympouropoulos, Cristina Maestre Martín De Almagro, Dolors Montserrat, Ulrike Müller, Emil Radev, Sira Rego, Alfred Sant, Massimiliano Smeriglio, Yana Toom, Loránt Vincze, Michal Wiezik, Tatjana Ždanoka, Kosma Złotowski
<b>Substitutes present for the final vote</b>	Demetris Papadakis, Ramona Strugariu, Marie-Pierre Vedrenne

## FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

28	+
NI	Francesca Donato
PPE	Alexander Bernhuber, Agnès Evren, Gheorghe Falcă, Peter Jahr, Radan Kanev, Stelios Kypourouopoulos, Dolors Montserrat, Emil Radev, Loránt Vincze
Renew	Ulrike Müller, Ramona Strugariu, Yana Toom, Marie-Pierre Vedrenne, Michal Wiezik
S&D	Alex Agius Saliba, Andris Ameriks, Marc Angel, Cristina Maestre Martín De Almagro, Demetris Papadakis, Alfred Sant, Massimiliano Smeriglio
The Left	Alexis Georgoulis, Sira Rego
Verts/ALE	Margrete Auken, Eleonora Evi, Malte Gallée, Tatjana Ždanoka

5	-
ECR	Ryszard Czarnecki, Emmanouil Fragkos, Kosma Złotowski
ID	Markus Buchheit, Gianna Gancia

1	0
NI	Tamás Deutsch

Key to symbols:

+ : in favour

- : against

0 : abstention

## INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE

<b>Date adopted</b>	17.5.2022
<b>Result of final vote</b>	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: flex-end; align-items: center;"> <div style="margin-right: 10px;">+:</div> <div>26</div> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: flex-end; align-items: center;"> <div style="margin-right: 10px;">-:</div> <div>2</div> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: flex-end; align-items: center;"> <div style="margin-right: 10px;">0:</div> <div>2</div> </div>
<b>Members present for the final vote</b>	Asim Ademov, Christine Anderson, Andrea Bocskor, Ilana Cicurel, Gianantonio Da Re, Laurence Farreng, Tomasz Frankowski, Alexis Georgoulis, Catherine Griset, Sylvie Guillaume, Hannes Heide, Irena Joveva, Petra Kammerevert, Niyazi Kizilyürek, Dace Melbārde, Victor Negrescu, Peter Pollák, Diana Riba i Giner, Marcos Ros Sempere, Monica Semedo, Andrey Slabakov, Massimiliano Smeriglio, Michaela Šojdrová, Sabine Verheyen, Maria Walsh, Theodoros Zagorakis, Milan Zver
<b>Substitutes present for the final vote</b>	Elżbieta Kruk, Domènec Ruiz Devesa, Viola Von Cramon-Taubadel



## FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE

26	+
ECR	Dace Melbārde
ID	Gianantonio Da Re
NI	Andrea Bocskor
PPE	Asim Ademov, Tomasz Frankowski, Peter Pollák, Michaela Šojdrová, Sabine Verheyen, Maria Walsh, Theodoros Zagorakis, Milan Zver
Renew	Ilana Cicurel, Laurence Farreng, Irena Joveva, Monica Semedo
S&D	Sylvie Guillaume, Hannes Heide, Petra Kammerevert, Victor Negrescu, Marcos Ros Sempere, Domènec Ruiz Devesa, Massimiliano Smeriglio
The Left	Alexis Georgoulis, Niyazi Kizilyürek
Verts/ALE	Diana Riba i Giner, Viola Von Cramon-Taubadel

2	-
ECR	Elżbieta Kruk, Andrey Slabakov

2	0
ID	Christine Anderson, Catherine Griset

Key to symbols:

+ : in favour

- : against

0 : abstention