



INCLUSION EDUCATION



RESEARCH ON THE NEEDS,
CHALLENGES AND PRACTICES
OF NATIONAL AGENCIES ON
THE TOPIC OF INCLUSION
AND DIVERSITY IN THE
ERASMUS+ PROGRAMME

FINAL REPORT



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RESEARCH ON THE NEEDS, CHALLENGES AND PRACTICES OF NATIONAL AGENCIES ON THE TOPIC OF INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY IN THE ERASMUS+ PROGRAMME

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Erasmus+
Enriching lives, opening minds.



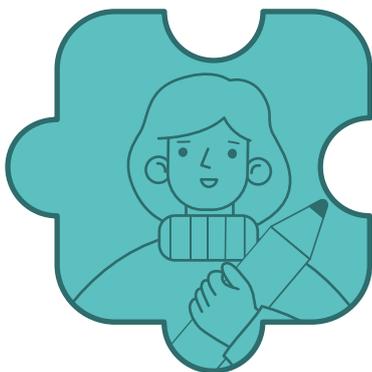


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1

Introduction and background

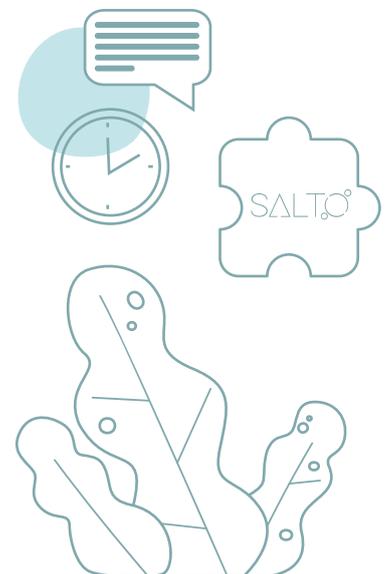
1.1 INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVE OF THE ASSIGNMENT

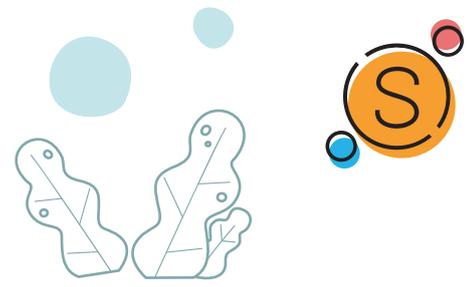
This report analyses and summarises the findings from research on the needs, challenges and practices of Erasmus+ National Agencies (NAs) in the field of education and training on the topic of inclusion and diversity in the Erasmus+ programme.

This research was commissioned by the Agency for Mobility and EU Programmes (AMEUP), which has been appointed as SALTO Resource Centre for Inclusion and Diversity (Education and Training).

The objective of this research is to provide valuable insights for the SALTO centre to help design and shape their future offer. The main task in this research assignment was thus to improve the understanding of the National Agencies' practices in dealing with inclusion and diversity in implementing the Erasmus+ programme and challenges that they – and the applicants and beneficiaries in the programme – face. The study thus seeks to shed light on the status quo of I&D practices among National Agencies for the Erasmus+ programme, to find out about their needs and interest in cooperation on the topic, as well as their expectations for possible support by the SALTO Resource Centre for Inclusion and Diversity.

The research methodology is based on an online survey among Erasmus+ National Agencies (addressing inclusion and diversity officers within the NAs), two online focus groups and additional individual interviews with National Agencies. The report concludes with recommendations for the SALTO centre on how to design and shape their offer so as to best serve the needs of National Agencies, and help them tackle some of the practical challenges that they face regarding inclusion and diversity in their daily operations in implementing the Erasmus+ programme.





1.2 BACKGROUND

The inclusion of people facing access barriers or having fewer opportunities is a key priority of the European Union's initiatives in the field of education and training. The right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning is proclaimed in the European Pillar of Social Rights as its first principle.¹

The initiative to achieve a European Education Area by 2025 seeks to establish an EU-wide area where barriers to learning are gone and everyone has better access to quality education. Inclusion and gender equality is one of the six dimensions that underpin the European Education Area.²

Furthermore, both inclusion as well as equality and non-discrimination are two of the guiding principles set out by the European Youth Strategy 2019-2027 – principles that should be applied in all policies and activities concerning young people.³ They are also firmly enshrined as part of the twelve European Youth Goals.⁴

The mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme period 2014 to 2020 found that 'despite the specific attention paid to social inclusion with varied results across sectors and to widening the participation of disadvantaged target groups, recognised by a majority of interviewees and 30% of agencies, evidence suggests that there is room for improvement'.⁵

The current programme period (2021-2027) thus builds on a common strategic approach towards inclusion and diversity as well as on a framework on inclusion measures.⁶ 'Inclusion and diversity' is one of the overarching priorities in the Erasmus+ programme, which seeks to promote equal opportunities and access, inclusion, diversity and fairness across all its actions. The programme calls for organisations to implement an inclusive approach when designing their projects and activities, making them accessible to a diverse range of participants.⁷

To achieve this, National Agencies play a pivotal role in supporting projects with a view for these to being as inclusive and diverse as possible. In this regard, the Erasmus+ Programme Guide also emphasises that SALTO Resource Centres for supporting the implementation of the programme are also key players in promoting and rolling out inclusion and diversity measures.

The mission of SALTO Resource Centres is to improve the quality and impact of the Erasmus+ programme at a systemic level through providing expertise, resource, information and training activities in specific areas for Erasmus+ National Agencies and other actors involved in education, training and youth work. Two SALTO Resource Centres work together to support the overarching priority on inclusion and diversity: one SALTO Resource Centre in the field of education and training and one in the field of youth.

1 | https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2017-11/social-summit-european-pillar-social-rights-booklet_en.pdf

2 | Communication on the European Education Area <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0625>

3 | European Youth Strategy 2019-2027; <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:C:2018:456:FULL>

4 | Youth Goals https://youth.europa.eu/strategy/european-youth-goals_en

5 | Commission Staff Working Document Mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme (2014-2020), <https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/swd-e-plus-mte.pdf>

6 | Implementation guidelines <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/document/implementation-guidelines-erasmus-and-european-solidarity-corps-inclusion-and-diversity-strategy>; Commission Implementing Decision - framework of inclusion measures of Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps 2021-27, <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/document/commission-decision-framework-inclusion-2021-27>

7 | Erasmus+ Programme Guide. Version 2 (2023), https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2023-01/ErasmusplusProgramme-Guide2023-v2_en.pdf

Their key responsibilities are as follows:

Raise the quality and impact of projects and activities of Erasmus+, focusing on the inclusion and diversity priority.

Help to optimise the implementation, monitoring and follow-up of the inclusion and diversity priority in education and training as defined in the Erasmus+ programme.

Play a key role in guiding the National Agencies on analysis and impact evaluation of projects focusing on the inclusion and diversity priority in education and training.⁸

In November 2021, the European Commission sent out the Call for expression of interest for the establishment of the new SALTO Resource Centre for Inclusion and Diversity in the field of education and training to all national agencies active in the field of education and training. In April 2022, the European Commission awarded this project to AMEUP, following the completion of the qualitative evaluation of all proposals that were submitted. The new SALTO Resource Centre⁹ started its operations in the following month.

Its mission is to build an efficient resource centre that integrates strategic activities and partnerships, capacity building, support, tailored outreach, innovation and evidence-based research in the area of inclusion and diversity into a framework for improving the quality and impact of the Erasmus+ programme.



⁸ | Erasmus+ Programme Guide, Version 2 (2023), pp. 22.

⁹ | <https://saltoinclusion.eu/>

1.3 METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this research followed a multi-method approach that included desk research, an online survey among all National Agencies for the Erasmus+ programme (NAs), focus groups and in-depth individual interviews with representatives of different NAs (mainly inclusion and diversity officers). Following data collection, the findings were analysed and the present report on the needs, challenges and practices of National Agencies on the topic of inclusion and diversity in the Erasmus+ programme was delivered.

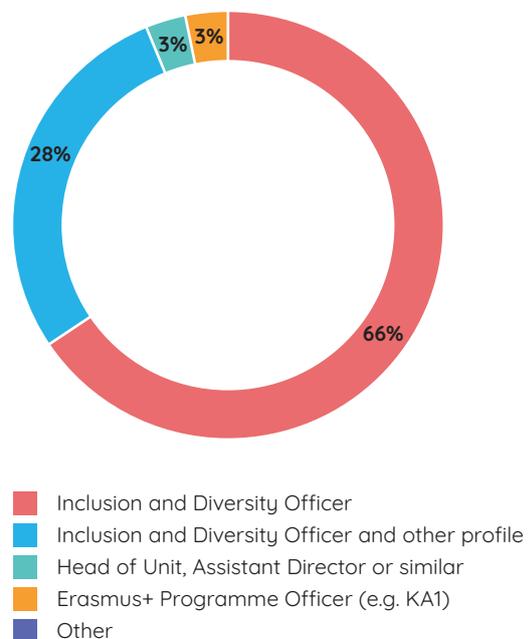


1.3.1 Survey of Erasmus+ National Agencies

The survey, carried out online through the EU Survey tool, was addressed to Erasmus+ National Agencies for education and training. It included 18 questions, as a mix of open and closed-ended questions, and took respondents around 15-20 minutes to complete.

The survey ran between 20 December 2022 and 10 February 2023 and gathered responses from 32 (out of a total of 39) NAs from 26 countries¹⁰, which corresponded to a response rate of more than 82%. More than 90% of the respondents replied in their role as inclusion and diversity officer within their NA - slightly less than a third of them indicated that they hold a composite role, e.g., as an Erasmus+ programme officer in addition to being an Inclusion and Diversity officer. In addition, a small number of respondents replied in their role as Erasmus+ programme officer.

Figure 1
Respondents' profile: I am responding to this survey in my role as...



Source: Survey, n = 32 responses from 26 countries.

¹⁰ Several countries have more than one relevant NA for the field of education and training in place (e.g., Belgium, Germany, Ireland, Italy) and thus more than one reply was received from these countries.
<https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/contacts/national-agencies>

1.3.2 Focus groups and interviews

Building on the findings and preliminary results from the online survey, two online focus groups were organised, the first on 2 February 2023 and the second on 9 February 2023. In total, 22 National Agencies were represented in the focus groups. An additional online focus group was conducted with the team of I&D officers from the Spanish National Agency in the field of education and training. The focus groups were complemented by additional interviews with selected National Agencies (Denmark, Iceland and Hungary).

The key objective of the focus groups and interviews was to dig deeper into the needs and challenges that National Agencies face in their daily practice to promote inclusion and diversity in the Erasmus+ programme, based on the findings from the online survey. The interview with the Danish NA focused on the cross-sectoral coordination of I&D officers and potential complementarities between the two SALTO centres for the education and training field and for the youth field. Hungary and Spain were not covered in the survey – these two interviews thus focused on discussing their inclusion and diversity practices, challenges and requested support activities from the new SALTO centre.



2

Findings from the research

This chapter presents the findings from the data collection, including desk research, the conducted survey among NAs, the focus groups and the additional in-depth interviews conducted.

2.1 STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS TO ADDRESS I&D WITHIN NATIONAL AGENCIES

There are significant differences in the policy context that National Agencies face across countries. Some reported that the national policy context was very supportive – while others reported that the absence of a holistic national strategy on inclusion meant that they had to start from scratch when drafting their I&D Strategy. One focus group participant described their national context as follows:

‘The concept of inclusion is not very popular [at our policy level]. We want to promote it in a way that will be attractive and that does not interfere with political events.’

(Participant of Focus Group 2)



More than 80% of the surveyed NAs (i.e., 26 out of 32) have an Inclusion and Diversity Strategy or action plan for Erasmus+ in place.¹¹ Many of the strategic documents are available on the respective websites of the NAs (for some only in the respective national language).¹² Six NAs indicated that they do not (yet) have a strategy or action plan for inclusion and diversity in place – two out of these expressed their interest in receiving support for developing their I&D strategy.

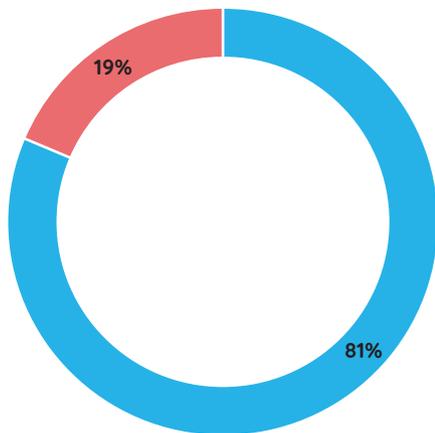
¹¹ | Many of the strategic documents have also been made available here:

<https://saltoinclusion.eu/resources/national-strategies/>.

¹² | Web links or PDF documents were received from most NAs that responded to the survey.

Figure 2

Does your National Agency have an inclusion and diversity strategy or action plan for Erasmus+ in place?



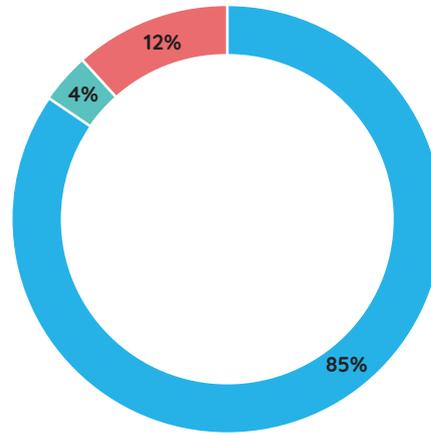
■ Yes
■ No

Source: Survey, n = 32 responses from 26 countries.

Furthermore, the respondents were asked whether the strategic plan was integrated into daily work, in case the NAs had already developed a strategy. In this regard, the majority (85%) agreed. Only one NA stated that their strategic plan could not yet be integrated into daily work. For 3 NAs, integration of the strategy into daily work is currently ongoing.

Figure 3

Is this strategy or action plan already being incorporated into daily work?



■ Yes
■ No
■ Planned or in development

Source: Survey, n = 26 responses from 23 countries.

In the focus group discussions, some NAs positively mentioned the peer support/mentorship they had received by other NAs for establishing their I&D strategies. Some also mentioned the difficulties that they faced in drafting these strategies, especially in identifying and defining beneficiaries/target groups correctly (for more detailed information on the challenges faced by NAs, see 2.4).



2.2 COORDINATION OF I&D ACTIVITIES WITHIN NATIONAL AGENCIES

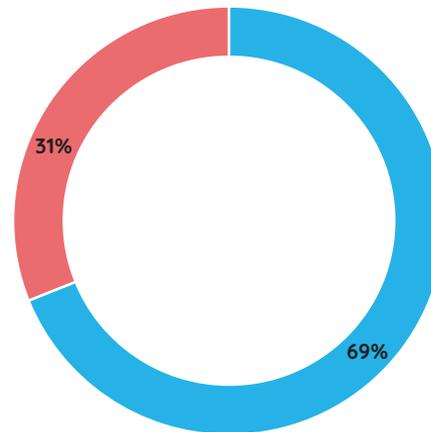
2.2.1 Inclusion and diversity officers within their NAs

More than two thirds of the NAs that responded to the survey reported that they have one appointed inclusion and diversity officer, while the remaining third of NAs have more than one appointed inclusion and diversity officer. From the focus group discussions, it emerged that in case an NA had more than one appointed officer, work among them is usually divided along the lines of educational subsectors (e.g., VET, higher education, adult education) and/or programme strands (e.g., KA1, KA2). In some cases, they are supported by experts from other departments, such as communications.

The number of appointed I&D officers per NA does not correlate with the size of the respective country or the size of the NA (in terms of headcount); instead, it seems to reflect organisational aspects.

Figure 4

Does your National Agency have an appointed inclusion and diversity officer?



- Yes, we have one appointed inclusion and Diversity Officer
- No, we have several appointed inclusion and Diversity Officer

Source: Survey. n = 32 responses from 26 countries.

The surveyed NAs were asked to describe how actions related to inclusion and diversity are coordinated within their organisation. A majority indicated that the inclusion and diversity officer is in charge of this coordination, while some NAs also installed inclusion and diversity working groups.



‘The inclusion and diversity officer is responsible for the coordination of the work on inclusion and diversity of the NA and manages the overall action plan for the NA but the activities are, in the main, carried out by the programme officers in the respective sectors.’

(Respondent no. 1, inclusion and diversity officer in a national agency)



Furthermore, inclusion and diversity officers (or working groups) deal with the implementation of the inclusion and diversity strategy, with communication, and networking. For example, one NA described that a team of six inclusion and diversity officers deals with internal communication in the agency. Some NAs have installed horizontal priorities officers that are in charge of coordinating work on these priorities¹³ in the Erasmus+ programme, as the following quote illustrates:

‘We have one thematic officer in the NA, which coordinates all actions regarding I&D, Green, Digitalisation and Participation. She is in charge of creating a network [...].’
(Respondent no. 19, inclusion and diversity officer in a national agency)



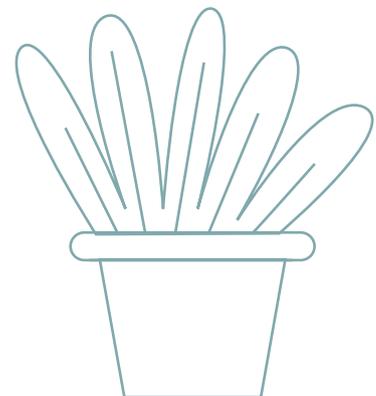
Another National Agency noted that meetings are scheduled at a fixed monthly interval, as this next quote illustrates:

‘The inclusion and diversity officer is in close contact with the programme officers and is asked for advice when special questions/problems arise. She also takes part in the monthly NA-meetings where issues related to inclusion and diversity are on the agenda regularly [...].’
(Respondent no. 23, Erasmus+ programme officer in a national agency)



The NAs also described how regularly meetings take place. In this context, it can be noted that the regularity of meetings varies greatly among the NAs – from meetings scheduled at fixed intervals to meetings scheduled on an ad-hoc basis whenever the need for exchange arises, as the following quotes illustrate.

‘[...] We meet whenever necessary, sometimes with the larger group, sometimes in smaller groups (as we realised working in smaller teams, on specific topics, is more efficient) [...].’
(Respondent no. 4, inclusion and diversity officer in a national agency)

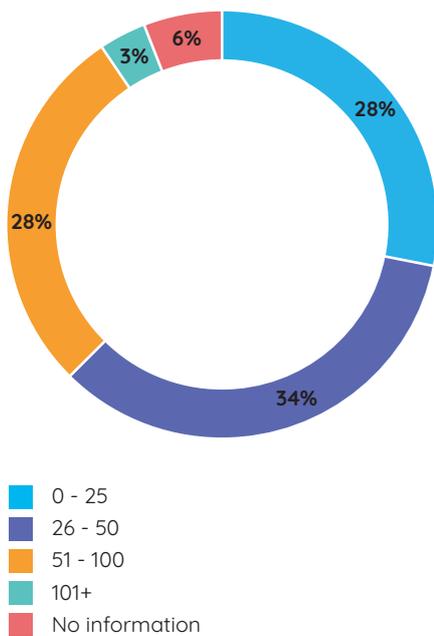


¹³ Besides inclusion and diversity, the horizontal priorities of the Erasmus+ programme are the following: digital transformation; environment and fight against climate change; participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement.
<https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-a/priorities-of-the-erasmus-programme>

2.2.2 Staff dealing with inclusion and diversity matters

In order to understand the work circumstances for I&D officers and other staff dealing with topics of inclusion and diversity, another question in the survey sought to identify the overall number of Erasmus+ NA (for education and training) staff, and of staff in charge of inclusion and diversity in particular.

Figure 5
Number of staff at Erasmus+ National Agencies (education and training)

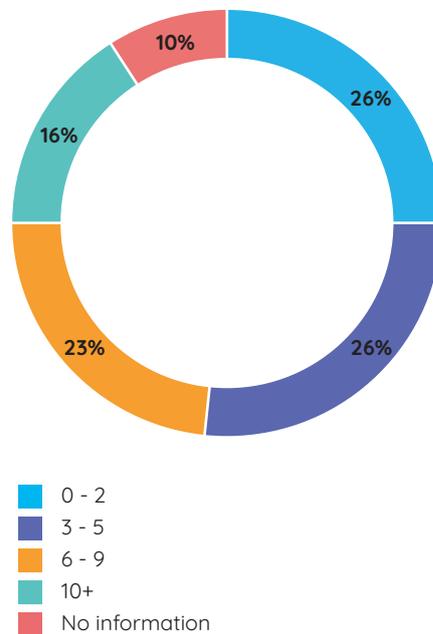


Source: Survey. n = 32 responses from 26 countries.

National agencies (for education and training) differ in terms of size (i.e., in the sense of staff numbers in full-time equivalents). As one would expect, the staff numbers correlate with the size of the respective country, i.e., large NAs with more than 50 employees are mostly found in the larger programme countries¹⁴ (e.g., France, Germany, Italy, Poland) and some medium-sized¹⁵ countries (e.g., Czechia, Netherlands, Portugal). More than 60% and thus the majority of NAs, however, count fewer than 50 staff members.

Compared to these numbers, the survey enquired how many staff members deal specifically with aspects of inclusion and diversity – the results are illustrated in Figure 6 below.

Figure 6
Number of Erasmus+ NA staff with job tasks specifically related to inclusion and diversity matters



Source: Survey. n = 32 responses from 26 countries.

¹⁴ | I.e., with a population of more than 25 million.

¹⁵ | I.e., with a population of more than 10 million and less than 25 million.

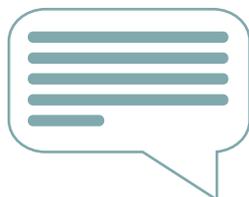
Half of the NAs indicated that fewer than five staff members have job tasks that specifically deal with aspects of inclusion and diversity. One agency indicated they currently had no one specifically in charge of these issues, suggesting that dealing with inclusion and diversity is only included as a horizontal or side task in other job profiles. Figure 6 furthermore shows that slightly less than a quarter of the NAs reported that between six and nine staff members specifically deal with inclusion and diversity matters. Five NAs have more than 10 staff members have job tasks specifically related to inclusion and diversity.

However, when interpreting these figures, a word of caution is in order, as the formulation of the question ('Approximately how many of your Erasmus+ NA staff have job tasks that are specifically related to inclusion and diversity issues?') also left some room for interpretation.

The following quotes provide an insight into how NAs have organised specific job roles related to inclusion and diversity.

'Each Erasmus+ sector has one I&D contact person who devotes some time to I&D matters besides their regular work. Their I&D-related tasks would be, for example, counselling applicants/beneficiaries regarding I&D, monitoring projects, holding presentations for beneficiaries on inclusion, taking part in online meetings/workshops/work groups focused on inclusion, and analysing beneficiaries' applications for inclusion support.'

(Respondent no. 23, Erasmus+ programme officer in a national agency)



'Six [staff members]: 1 Inclusion Officer (100% dedicated to Inclusion for 0.7 FTE) and 5 Erasmus+ programme officers (4 hours per week dedicated to inclusion)'
(Respondent no. 15, Erasmus+ programme officer in a national agency)



Certainly, the number of staff who deal with inclusion and diversity matters as part of their regular activities is significantly higher than indicated in the figure above (the survey only asked about staff specifically dealing with inclusion and diversity), as the following quote illustrates.

'Officially appointed only one, but there are about 25 programme officers responsible for consulting applicants and beneficiaries - a task that includes inclusion and diversity issues. The event management team also deals with inclusion and diversity issues regularly.'

(Respondent no. 1, inclusion and diversity officer in a national agency)



'5 persons have specifically dedicated tasks; at the same time, I&D is being respected by all programme staff and requires portions of their respective time.'

(Respondent no. 27, inclusion and diversity officer in a national agency)



2.3 I&D ACTIVITIES AND MEASURES WITHIN NATIONAL AGENCIES

This section provides insight into specific barriers to inclusion and diversity addressed by NAs through measures or activities, as well as into respondents' views related to I&D activities undertaken by their NAs.

2.3.1 Defining inclusion and diversity

NAs were asked to specify how they understand and define inclusion and diversity in Erasmus+. The majority of NAs base their I&D actions on a definition of inclusion and diversity that closely follows the definition proposed by the Erasmus+ and ESC Programme Guides.

Some use this definition **without further specification**.

We use the Inclusion and Diversity definition as a basic document. We have knowingly chosen a comprehensive approach without specific priorities or target groups for not to exclude any persons with fewer opportunities.

(Respondent no. 9, inclusion and diversity officer in a national agency)



At the same time, a number of NAs have defined **specific target groups for different educational subsectors**.

**[...] Specific target Groups by sector:
SE - children with learning/other individual needs, reintegration of emigrants' children returning from abroad.**

HE - disadvantaged groups due to economic and health reasons, students raising children.

VET - persons with limited social skills, young people growing up in resource poor environments, VET institutions from rural areas.

AE - low-skilled workers, men and women (equal participation/inclusion), seniors, former/current prisoners.

(Respondent no. 17, inclusion and diversity officer in a national agency)



'[...] we aim at supporting participants with fewer opportunities and create systems and a programme that is accessible and that is adjusted for participants and not the other way around.

The specific target groups for inclusion support in KA131/ KA171¹⁶ are: first generation students, working students, participants with children, participants with disability or chronic disease.'

(Respondent no. 21, inclusion and diversity officer in a national agency)



16 | Both KA131 and KA171 refer to mobility projects in higher education.

Some NAs have **national definitions** in place.

‘In order to address the most frequent exclusion factors [...] and in view of a cross-sectoral approach, the NA has defined 3 identical priority groups for both programmes (E+ all sectors and ESC): people facing barriers related to education and training, economic barriers and people suffering from the consequences of cultural differences. No other group will be excluded.’

(Respondent no. 11, inclusion and diversity officer in a national agency)



It’s defined in a broad sense. It may include a very large diversity of target groups. For the mobility top-up, it is defined in a more restrictive way with 9 specific award criteria for financial supplements. These criteria would be revised in 2023. Exchanging with the SALTO inclusion or one of their experts would be welcome.’

(Respondent no. 26, inclusion and diversity officer in a national agency)



Furthermore, some NAs have further restricted their target groups for the purpose of awarding the **mobility top-up**, as the following cases exemplify. Some NAs have explicitly stated that they would appreciate support on this particular aspect.

‘Generally, [our] NA accepts all barriers. However, we have some specific groups for top-ups in HE (students with low income, students with under-aged child /children (under 18 years, students from foster homes, students with limited workability, and refugees).’

(Respondent no. 21, inclusion and diversity officer in a national agency)



The top-up in higher education is aimed at three categories: Physical, mental or intellectual disabilities, Health problems and Economic barriers. All other measures in all fields are aimed at alle types of barriers.

(Respondent no. 15, inclusion and diversity officer in a national agency)



2.3.2 Barriers specifically addressed by NA measures

In its implementation guidelines¹⁷ for inclusion and diversity in the Erasmus+ programme, the European Commission refers to a list of eight main barriers which may prevent people with fewer opportunities from participating more in the (Erasmus+ and ESC) programmes as participants.

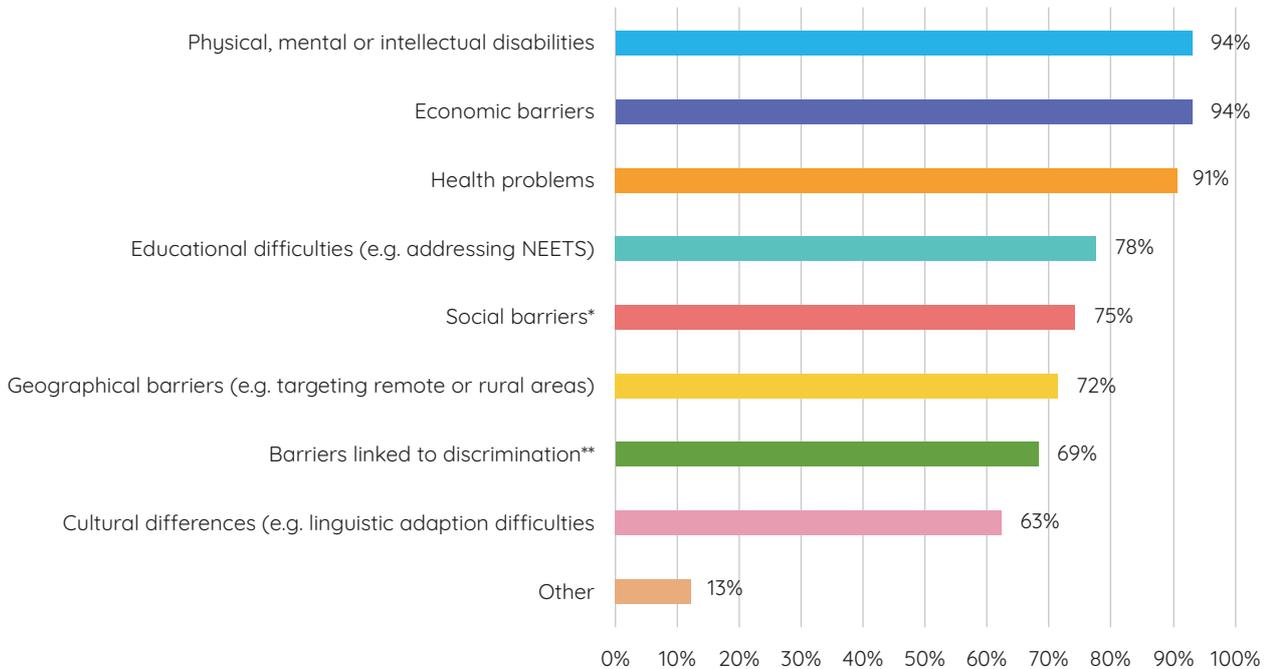
Building up on the previous question on how they define and understand inclusion and diversity, NAs were asked to specify which of these barriers their measures to promote inclusion and diversity in Erasmus+ specifically focus on. This question also seeks to highlight any differences in the scope of measures that NAs include as part of their I&D actions.



¹⁷ | <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/document/implementation-guidelines-erasmus-and-european-solidarity-corps-inclusion-and-diversity-strategy>

Figure 7

At our National Agency, measures to promote inclusion and diversity in Erasmus+ specifically focus on eliminating the following barriers¹⁸



Source: Survey. n = 32 responses from 26 countries.

As Figure 7 above illustrates, more than 60% of respondents state that all barriers listed in the Erasmus+ Implementation guidelines are addressed through activities or measures at their NA. Physical, mental or intellectual disabilities, economic barriers and health problems were most frequently cited – more than 90% of NAs specifically address them in their actions. Educational difficulties and social barriers were mentioned slightly less often, yet still by more than 75% of the NAs. Only barriers linked to discrimination and cultural differences are addressed by less than 70% of the NAs.

¹⁸ | *refer to e.g., limited social competences, anti-social or high-risk behaviours

**refer to e.g., linked to age, ethnicity, religion, gender



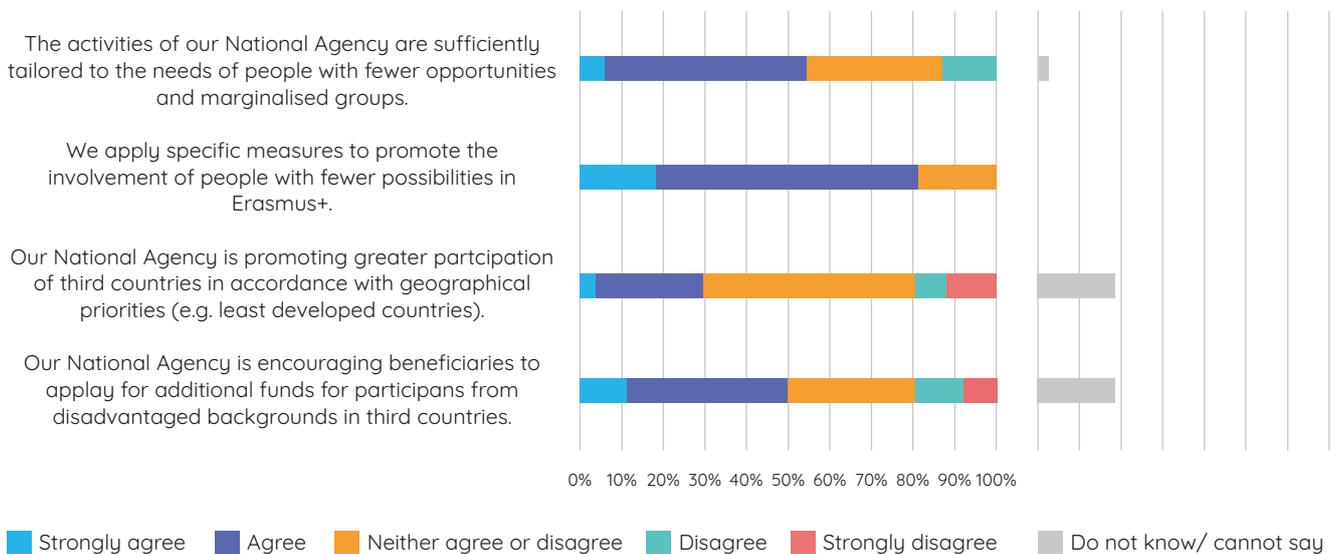
2.3.3 Insights into NA activities related to inclusion & diversity

Through a set of Likert scale questions, respondents were asked to provide their views on different NA activities related to inclusion and diversity.

Approximately half of the respondents stated that their NAs activities are sufficiently tailored to the needs of people with fewer opportunities and marginalised groups, whereas only a small share disagreed with this statement. Furthermore, a significant majority (i.e., more than 80%) stated that their NA applies specific measures to promote involvement of people with fewer opportunities in Erasmus+.

Figure 8 also illustrates that a smaller share of NAs promotes the participation of third countries in accordance with geographical priorities (e.g., with least developed countries). Slightly less than half of the surveyed NAs stated that their agencies encourage beneficiaries to apply for additional funding to allow for participation of individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds in third countries to participate in the programme. 20% of the respondents could not or did not want to make a statement on this.

Figure 8
Respondents' views on I&D activities



Source: Survey. n = 32 responses from 26 countries.

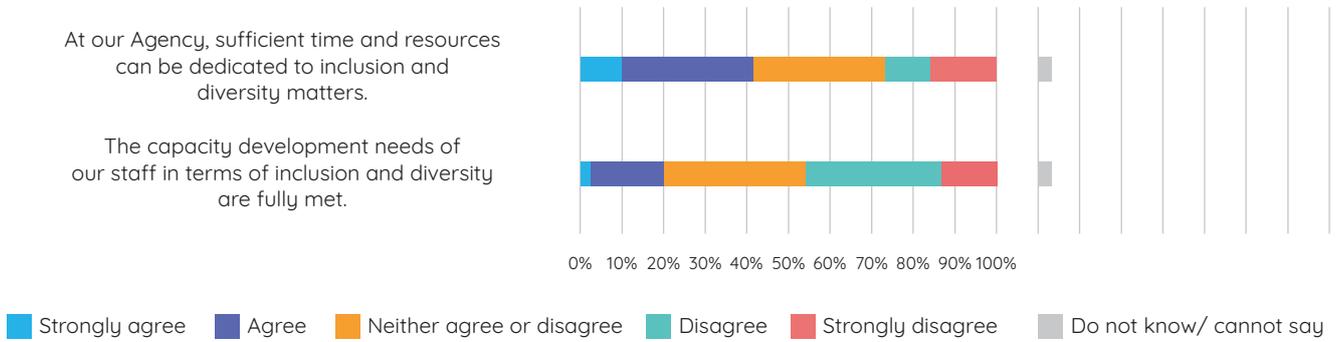
The respondents were also asked about capacity and resources dedicated to inclusion and diversity in their NA. About 40% of the respondents agreed that sufficient time and resources are invested with regard to inclusion and diversity issues. About one third neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. In the focus group discussions, a slightly more negative picture arose, with many I&D officers talking about being in charge of numerous time available for I&D matters, and a general

feeling that I&D is not a priority in the agency's work ('we need to fight a lot', as one focus group participant put it).

The capacity development of staff in NAs has not been met according to slightly less than half of the respondents. For this statement, too, there is a relatively high proportion of people who neither agree nor disagree (34%).

Figure 9

Respondents' views on capacity and resources dedicated to I&D



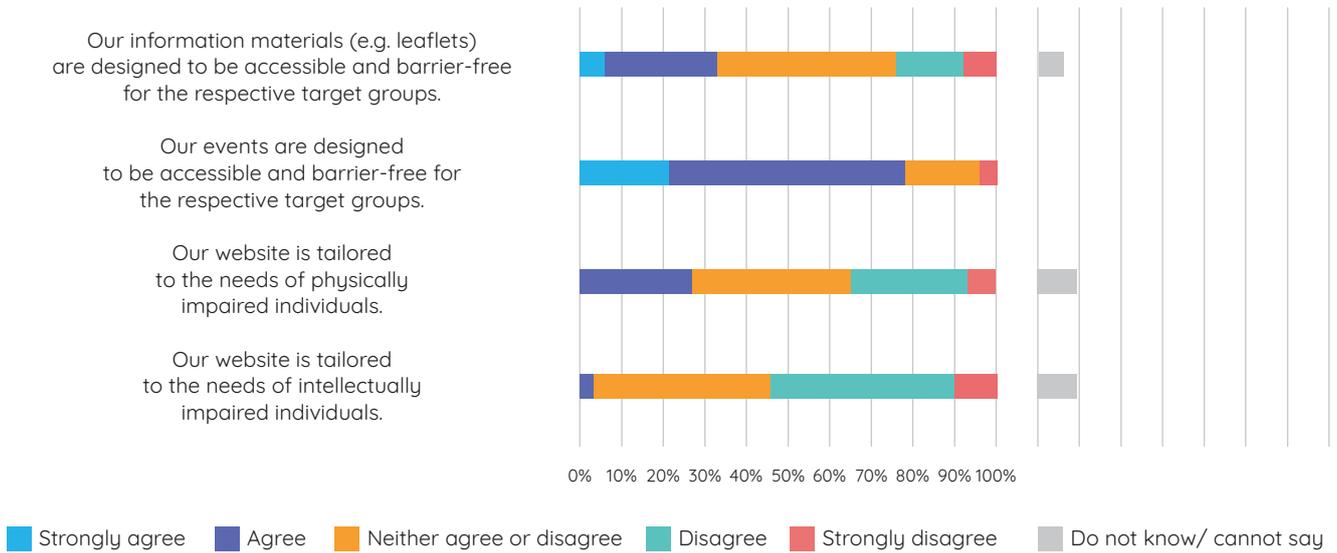
Source: Survey, n = 32 responses from 26 countries.

When asked about the accessibility of their offer, with regard to information material, it can be stated that only one third of the respondents agree that the information materials are designed to be accessible and barrier-free for the respective target groups. However, according to the majority of respondents there is agreement that the events are accessible and barrier-free for the respective target groups. As regards the websites of NAs, respondents were asked whether their website was tailored to the needs of people with physical disabilities. On the other hand, respondents were asked whether the website was tailored to the needs of intellectually impaired persons.

In this regard, it can be seen from Figure 10 that half of the respondents disagree. Only a small percentage of respondents agree that the website is tailored to the needs of intellectually impaired persons. Overall, it can be argued that respondents may only be involved to a small extent in the design of the information material, events or website, which is why some of the people involved in the survey neither agreed nor disagreed with some statements. It is notable that for both questions on the accessibility of the website, a relatively large share of respondents indicated that they cannot make a statement on this, or that they neither agree nor disagree.



Figure 10
Respondents' views on the accessibility of their offer

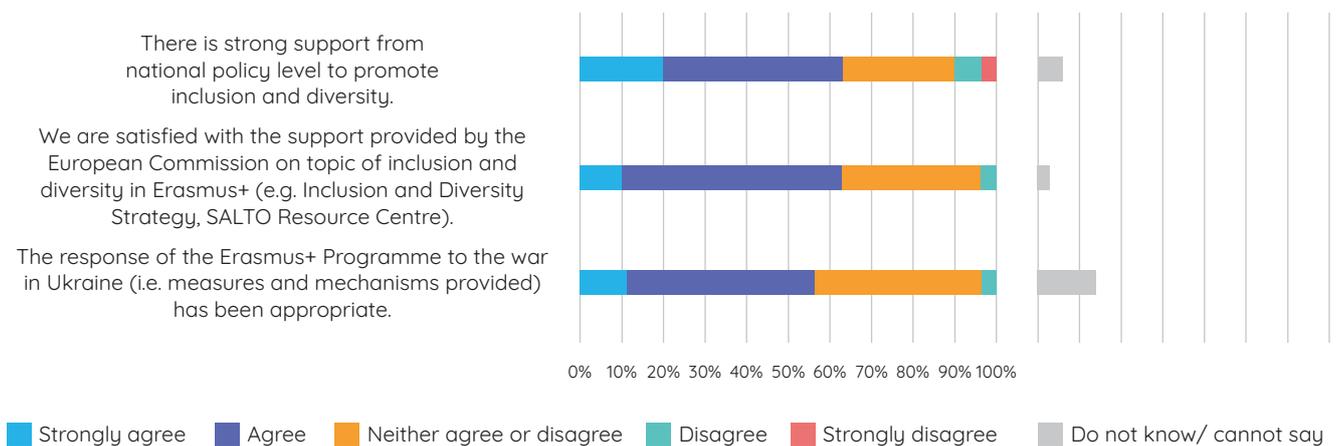


Source: Survey, n = 32 responses from 26 countries.

As the Figure 11 illustrates, the majority of respondents are generally satisfied with the support at national political level for promoting inclusion and diversity. The same applies to the question of how respondents assess the support provided by the European Commission on the topic of inclusion and diversity. In addition, almost half of the respondents agree that the response of the Erasmus+ programme to the war in Ukraine has been appropriate.



Figure 11
Respondents' view on policy support

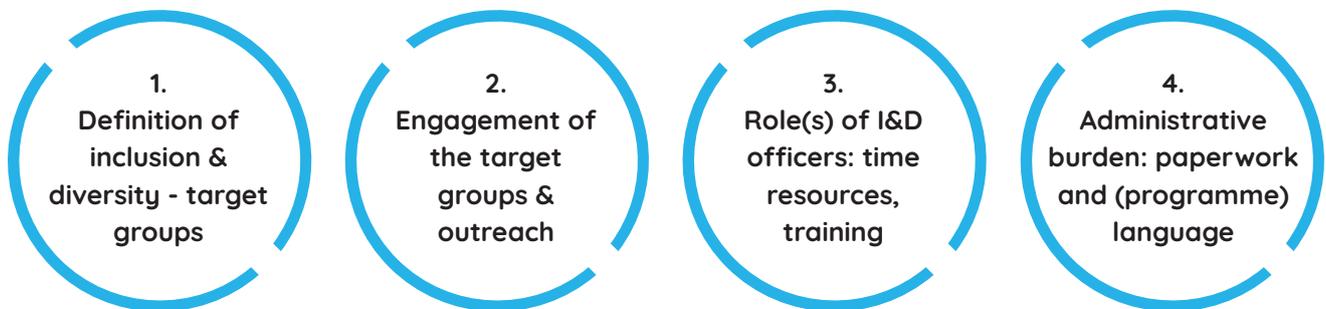


Source: Survey, n = 32 responses from 26 countries.

2.4 CHALLENGES IN DEALING WITH I&D IN THE ERASMUS+ PROGRAMME



The survey and focus groups were enquired about the biggest challenges which NAs are facing regarding inclusion and diversity in the Erasmus+ programme. These can be grouped around the following overarching topics/areas:



2.4.1 Definition of inclusion and diversity - target groups

A number of NAs mentioned the challenge to properly define inclusion and diversity, which is directly linked to defining target groups for their activities and measures. The fact that there is no common definition or understanding of 'inclusion' was also mentioned by several focus group participants - either in the context of defining a clear strategy including target groups, in the context of approaching beneficiaries, or in dealing with other stakeholders such as Ministries or education providers (see also 2.3.1 on the different definitions applied). Furthermore, some agencies miss appropriate strategies and examples for implementation.

'Sometimes we lack clear examples on how the inclusion support can be used, and it would be useful to have more of these examples so that we can promote these opportunities better. When it comes to the implementation of projects, the beneficiaries sometimes have difficulties with providing evidence on having participants with fewer opportunities'
(Respondent no 28, inclusion and diversity officer in a national agency).



Some NAs referred to the lack of holistic inclusion strategy at national level, which meant that they had to develop their inclusion and diversity strategy from scratch, and which makes the adoption of an inclusive approach more challenging overall.

‘There is no national holistic inclusion strategy, so the NA in order to fulfil the horizontal priority of Inclusion and Diversity of the Programme had to set main goals and prepare an action plan on its own’

(Respondent no 17, inclusion and diversity officer in a national agency).



‘If the rest of the system does not have an inclusive approach, it will be difficult to get the target group into the Erasmus+ programme.’

(Participant of Focus Group 2)



2.4.2 Engagement of the target groups & outreach

The challenge mentioned most often refers to reaching and engaging the respective target groups, especially getting newcomers on board, i.e., applicants and beneficiaries that so far have not been involved in the Erasmus+ programme.

Apart from making them aware of the opportunities for inclusion and diversity in the Erasmus+ programme (promotion activities, outreach, increased visibility), newcomers tend to also need different and more active support with their application than more experienced organisations.

Various NAs specifically mentioned difficulties in engaging actors from certain educational subsectors, although these are very different across countries: in some, the HE sector is the ‘easiest’ to reach while in others it is the most difficult, for example. At the same time, this opens space for possible exchange of best practices among NAs, however.

Challenges regarding the target group (beneficiaries/applicants) also relate to insufficient financial resources available within the programmes, for example for learner mobility or to finance other projects dealing with inclusion and diversity. Two focus group and interview participants, for example, referred to the difficulty of selecting the best projects to finance with the limited resources available. On the other hand, lack of financial resources on the part of the beneficiaries was also mentioned: projects are generally based on co-funding, which makes it difficult for certain organisations or individuals to participate.

Another issue relates to the **identification of (potential) beneficiaries**. For example, according to the NAs, not all respondents with fewer opportunities can be identified. In this context, it was also mentioned that there was a lack of a comprehensible, clear design, for example for an inclusive project. In addition, time resources were again cited as challenges. With regard to the identification of the target group, **fear of stigmatisation** is an issue:

‘Some beneficiaries tell us [that] people prefer to fly [u]nder the radar so they’re not “singled out” - even if this means they let chances of financial aids pass’.

(Survey respondent no 12, inclusion and diversity officer in a national agency)



2.4.3 Role(s) of I&D officers: time resources, training

I&D officers often hold several different roles and functions within their NAs. This poses a challenge regarding the management of I&D related activities, which often are just one of many assigned tasks and responsibilities. One challenge referred to very often is related to the lack of time resources of I&D officers and lack of NA staff in general, which makes it difficult for the NAs to carry out all the different tasks assigned to them.

Many I&D officers furthermore do not have a specific background related to inclusion and diversity. As a result, they often feel that they lack the specific I&D competences needed for this role and expressed a wish for training opportunities. Many I&D officers do not have a background in this area, and others only in certain aspects (e.g., disabilities).

In addition, many of them feel that they also lack the competences needed to train their staff on I&D matters. This aspect, already quite prominent in the survey results, was emphasised even more in the focus group discussions. However, NAs find it important to offer training not just to I&D officers, but to all NA staff in general, in order to foster a holistic approach to inclusion and diversity. Such trainings, or related training material to work with internally, were therefore mentioned as a potential area of support for the future.

2.4.4 Administrative burden: paperwork and (programme) language

Several NAs lamented the bureaucracy of the programme administration, including its structure and the programme language. Terminology and context of the programme are often unclear to beneficiaries, and even more so to newcomers. Also, forms to fill in are not always target-group specific: the ‘DiscoverEU’ Inclusion reports, for example, were deemed too complex to complete for the target group.

The application process is also fraught with complications, especially for marginalised groups. ‘Easy to read language’ is not being used yet in official documents, which requires many NA to undertake additional translation work of the Programme documents.

This is further complicated by a lack of time of potential applicants (e.g., agencies dealing with people with fewer opportunities, who would be eligible for funding) – they often do not have the time to write applications or the additional administrative burden that comes with Erasmus+ projects (e.g., through reporting duties).

2.4.5 Further challenges mentioned

Other challenges relate to the lack of networking opportunities, both nationally and internationally. In this case, some guidance or an overview of stakeholders (mapping) was mentioned as potentially helpful for some NAs.

One NA also stressed that there would be a need to ‘train external evaluators’ to see projects from an inclusion/diversity perspective when reviewing them.

Another NA mentioned that the (non-central) geographic location of their country sometimes posed a challenge, and location aspects should also be thought of when talking about inclusion and diversity.



2.5 TOPICS AND FORMATS OF INTEREST

Through an open question in the survey, as well as through participation in one of the focus groups, respondents were given the opportunity to describe which issues related to inclusion and diversity the SALTO Inclusion and Diversity Resource Centre should address as a top priority. In this regard, most NAs were interested in sharing experiences and learning from good practices. Many of the topics suggested mirrored the challenges presented in 2.4.

2.5.1 Topics and areas of interest

Specific topics and areas of interest mentioned in particular included:

- Training opportunities for I&D officers (and NA staff)
- Sharing of good NA practice
- Network building (agencies and sub-networks)
- Use of ‘easy’ language (e.g., with regard to programme documents)
- NA support for ‘first-time applicants’/reaching specific beneficiaries (‘getting newcomers engaged’)
- Bringing I&D more into the spotlight (e.g., I&D success stories)
- Evaluating the effectiveness of inclusive tools
- Mapping organisations working with people with fewer opportunities (e.g., at European level)

Practically all NAs consulted expressed their interest in training opportunities for I&D officers (and on specific topics also for a wider audience within their NA staff).

Many NAs expressed the wish to discuss specific topics with other NAs, for example on the question of how much money they set aside/allocate specifically for I&D projects in KA1, or which documents they require from certain beneficiaries, how to define the target groups for the mobility top-up, or how to best support newcomers in the application process.

NAs are eager to learn more about how inclusion and diversity issues should be brought more into the spotlight (‘we need more I&D stories’) – in the focus groups, a possible best-practices blog, or a specific part of the SALTO website were suggested in this respect. Another topic some I&D officers would find helpful would be ‘relevant news’ – e.g., filtered information via newsletters.

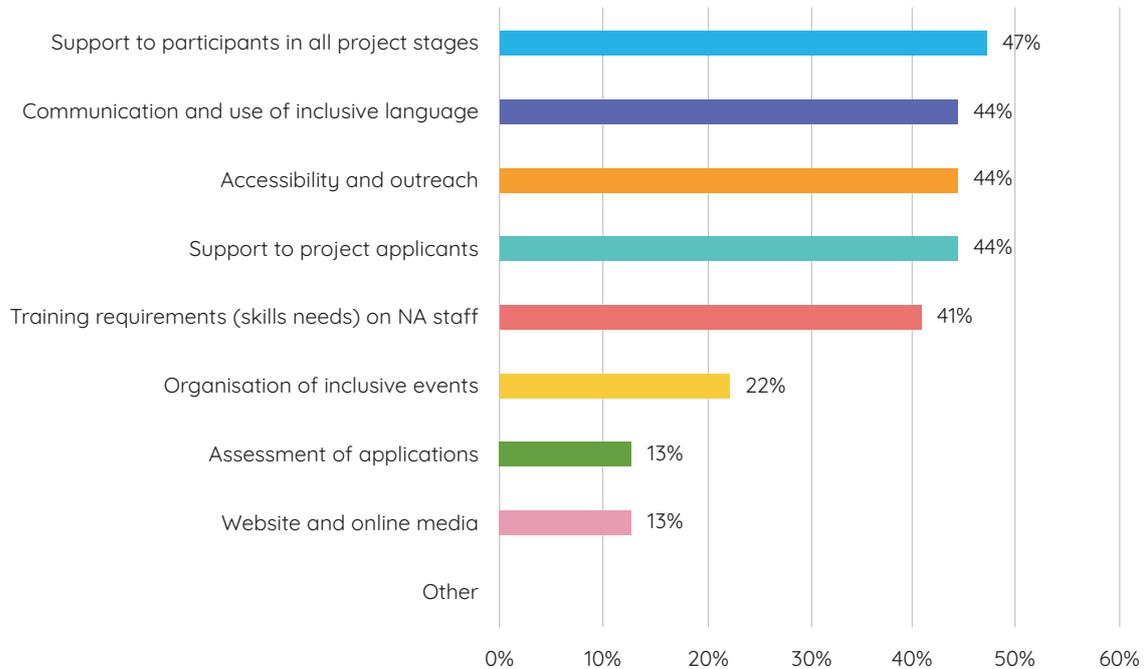
A mapping of organisations working with people with fewer opportunities (e.g., at European level) was also requested.

In the survey, respondents were asked to rate which topics related to inclusion and diversity they consider most relevant for their agency.



Figure 12

Which of the following topics related to inclusion and diversity in Erasmus+ would be most relevant for your Agency?



Source: Survey. n = 32 responses from 26 countries. Respondents could select up to three options.

Figure 12 shows that more than 40% of all respondents consider the following topics to be most relevant: Support to participants in all project stages, Communication and use of inclusive language, Accessibility and outreach, Support to project applicants, and Training requirements (skills needs) of NA staff.

Finally, the survey asked what expectations or wishes the NAs had with regard to the promotion of inclusion and diversity Erasmus+ in the programme. In this context, cooperation and networking with other NAs was mentioned in particular, a finding that was also mirrored in the focus group discussions.

‘We look forward to a new way of cooperating at European level. Frequent inclusion officer meetings for exchange and peer learning would be most welcome.’

(Respondent no. 27, Head of a national agency)



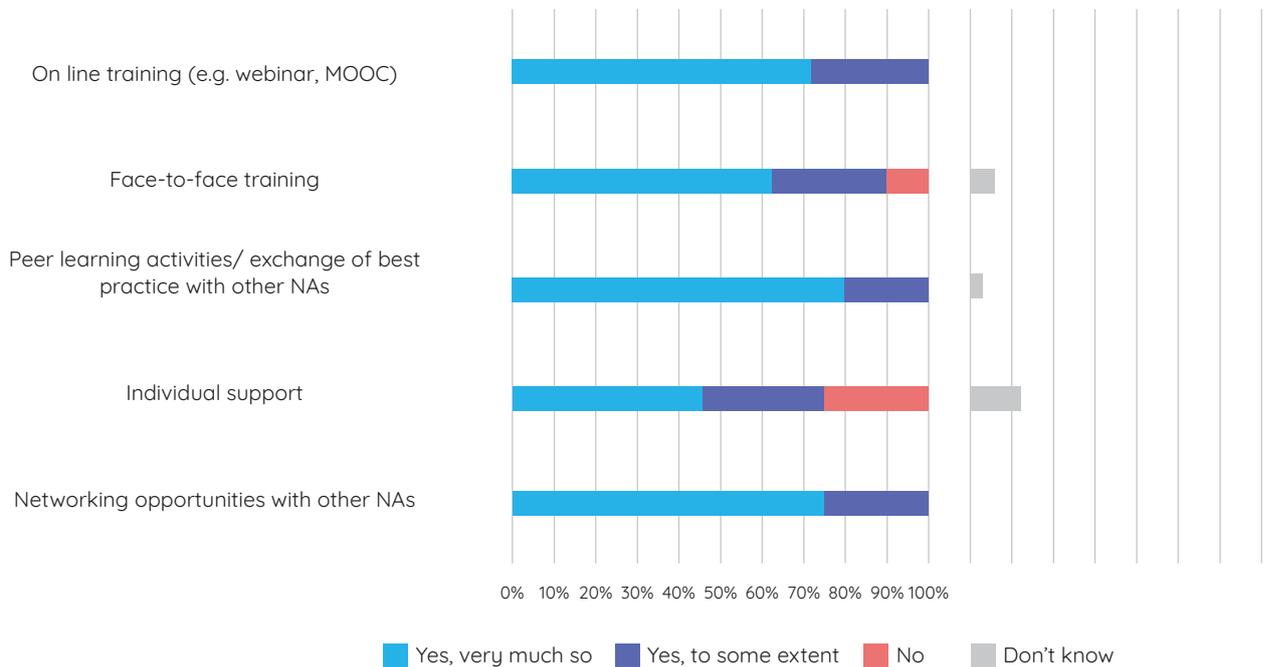


2.5.2 Formats of interest

In terms of the formats preferred, as can be seen from Figure 13, there is a strong interest in online training (e.g., in form of a webinar), peer learning activities and networking opportunities with other NAs. There is also strong support for face-to-face trainings. Respondents were least interested in individual support, although still quite a large proportion of respondents agreed. This category shows a comparatively high proportion of respondents (13%) who made no statement or neither agreed nor disagreed.

Figure 13

Would you be interested to take part in any of the following activities related to inclusion and diversity in Erasmus+?



Source: Survey, n = 32 responses from 26 countries.

In the focus groups, participants underlined the importance of a mix of activities, with online formats taking place more frequently (e.g., monthly), combined with in person meetings on a regular but less frequent basis (e.g., once or twice per year).

2.5.3 Examples of good practice from NAs

Survey respondents and focus group participants were asked if they would like to share any good practice currently implemented at their NA related to inclusion and diversity. The responses clearly show that several NAs feel that they do not (yet) have relevant practices they would like to share as good examples with others. However, many still did, as the examples below show.

Examples related to I&D work within NAs

- **‘Inclusion Scan’ for Erasmus+ Mobilities**
- **Micro-workshop on inclusive mindset** (short webinar with interactive self-reflective questions inviting people to think inclusively and adopt an inclusive mindset)
- Having one appointed **I&D officer in each programme area** (e.g., SE, VET, HE, AE)
- Signed **memorandum of cooperation with NA** with neighbouring country for joint activities on the inclusion priority (e.g., through a joint conference)
- Annual **external monitoring** and report of I&D achievements in E+ and ESC at national level
- **Staff training in the format of a living library**
- Cooperation with **other national organisations** in the field of education (e.g., National Pedagogical Institute and others)

Examples related to outreach and engaging the target group

- Developing and piloting a **specific approach for engaging specific target groups** in three stages – creating a longer, more engaging process: 1. Online meeting 2. Online or offline training 3. Follow-up and continuous support.
- **E-Book in an easy-to-read format** to help beneficiaries organise inclusive mobilities.
- Conducting a **mentorship programme** for schools and youth organisations that have not previously participated in the Programme
- **A pool of 12 I&D ambassadors** who hold promotional and informational events, counsel and advise beneficiaries, individual applicants, or schools which take part in the programme. There is one big event annually, which serves as an exchange platform or meeting point for applicants where they can learn from each other.
- Hosting an **annual thematic event** for beneficiaries that centres around inclusion and diversity. This event not only provides valuable learning opportunities but also serves as a platform for networking and capacity building.
- Two **inspirational videos** describing a personal account of inclusion students with a mobility experience (with subtitles in English).
- Awarding an **Erasmus+ horizontal priorities Quality Award 2022**, including I&D nominations
- Biannual **meetings of a ‘users’ group’** of which all Programme Ambassadors are part of

Further examples

- **Survey among first-time applicants** tracking what caused barriers to be overcome for the submission of an application (introduced in all sectors of the Erasmus+ programme and also in the European Solidarity Corps programme)
- Integrating results of an **Erasmus+ Citizen Forum** with beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of the programme with suggestions for the future.

3

Conclusions and recommendations

Although the environment in which I&D officers operate differs across countries and NAs (e.g., how supportive the national policy context is with regard to promoting inclusion and diversity), they share many similarities in the challenges they face.

The findings from the consultation of NAs confirm that the setup of a SALTO centre of inclusion and diversity in the field of education and training is very much needed and requested. The exceptionally high response rate to the online survey and the high turnout for the online focus groups underline this.

For the SALTO Resource Centre this means that they are charged with designing a support offer that in particular addresses an expressed need for competence development in the field of inclusion and diversity as well as for networking and peer learning activities with a view to learning from each other and exchanging examples of good practice.

The group of inclusion and diversity officers within NAs represent highly suitable multipliers for this offer. Not only do they represent a highly motivated and engaged group, but findings from the consultation also suggest that they have a realistic perspective on the needs of their applicants and beneficiaries – despite many of them stating that they lack a specific education or training background in inclusion and diversity.

The challenges reported are numerous and the list of suggested possibilities for support is long – it is likely that the SALTO Resource Centre will not have the capacity to fully address them all at once. It is thus suggested that the service offer focuses on selected priorities first, and gradually expand the offer in line with the capacity available. The examples of good practice provided by NAs (see 2.5.3) on successful approaches to coordinate their internal work, on outreach to the target groups and on several other aspects, should provide a good basis for further exchange. While it is recommended to invest in building and maintaining an active network of all I&D officers through dedicated activities, this could be complemented by measures to promote also the creation of smaller sub-networks that operate on a more informal level, e.g., that focus on selected topics, sectors, or a certain geographic region.

I&D officers could be actively included in the further development on the service offer; not only do they have a 'real-time' perspective on challenges they face in their daily work, they also have very good insights into the challenge faced by the Erasmus+ programme officers as well as the challenges faced by applicants and beneficiaries more generally.

3.1 GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Overarching recommendations can be summarised as follows:

- **Provide training** for I&D officers: Many are ‘just’ programme officers with the additional assigned role of an I&D officer and do not have specific competences related to inclusion and diversity’ (‘For many, it’s just an additional hat that they are carrying.’). Many do not feel competent enough to train their NA staff on I&D matters.
- **Promote cross-sectoral activities/exchange** between youth field and education and training field – they could benefit from each other a lot (also, with regard to some aspects, youth covers the same target groups as VET and SE, whereas HE stands out in certain regards).
- **Facilitate exchange of experience among NAs** – a place to exchange with fellow I&D officers both online and offline, recurring, but with changing topics or target groups.
- **Facilitate networking:** a list of I&D officers in each field would be a good starting point (in line with GDPR requirements).
- **Create Field-specific sub-networks:** this was seen as potentially very helpful (‘We do not know who is in charge of inclusion & diversity for KA2 VET in Country XY. This information would be helpful to have.’). This would allow discussions on issues which are specific to certain programme strands or educational subsectors. For example, in some countries, school sector seems to be struggling in particular (more so than for example VET or HE).
- Clarify **what the European Commission expects from I&D officers.** Some NAs employ full-time officers, whereas other NAs assign programme officers with the additional role as I&D officer. What should be the profile/tasks to be achieved? Facilitating a debate on this might help visualise differences among NAs on who they have foreseen the role of an I&D officer.
- Actively **involve I&D officers** in the further development of the SALTO service offer.
- Regularly **evaluate the SALTO service offer.**

3.2 RECOMMENDATIONS ON TOPICS

Specific topics for the above-mentioned general activities recommended are summarised below:

- Developing a **common understanding** of different dimensions of inclusion.
- **Identification of target group(s)** – who are those with fewer opportunities? How to make sure that those that are eligible for special support can be addressed and reached? Members of the target group often do not want to ‘out’ themselves and declare themselves as having fewer opportunities, for fear of stigmatisation; this also makes them harder to reach through outreach activities.
- **Exchange on how to get newcomers on board** to participate in the E+ programme.
- **Making the Programme language easier:** the Programme language is often difficult to understand, not suitable for target groups.
- **Making the application process easier for applicants**
- Exchange on **documentation requirements** (what kind of documentation do the other NAs require from beneficiaries to prove that they are eligible for support, i.e., that it reaches people with fewer opportunities). How to strike the balance between asking too much (and thereby putting up additional obstacles) and keeping too much of an ‘open door’ that could promote misuse of funds?
- Exchange on target groups for the **mobility top-up.**
- Suggestions on how **inclusion support** could be used
- Exchange on **budget set aside for I&D in KA1** – NAs struggle in determining the amount to set aside in a ‘first come, first serve’ setting: ‘What if you have set aside money for three projects, and then the fourth comes along which would deserve additional funding, but there’s nothing left?’

3.3 RECOMMENDATIONS ON FORMATS

Specific formats suggested are summarised below:

- **Adjust the offer to ‘busy people’:** many I&D officers ‘wear several different hats’ – different formats can help to address different needs.
- **Provide room for regular exchange** (low threshold, e.g., short monthly online meetings on different topics, ‘I&D Talks’ similar to ‘Youth Talks’).
- **Online and in-person trainings** for I&D officers
- **Provision of training material** (e.g., ‘toolbox’) and guidance materials on selected topics
- **SALTO newsletter**
- Collection of **good practice** examples (projects), either through the publication of case studies, or in blogs – ‘stories’, also as an inspiration for newcomers (seems especially important for smaller agencies)





LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED

AE	Adult education
AMEUP	Agency for Mobility and EU Programmes (Croatia)
E+	Erasmus+
ESC	European Solidarity Corps
EU	European Union
FTE	Full-time equivalent
GDPR	EU General Data Protection Regulation
HE	Higher education
I&D	Inclusion and diversity
KA	Key action
NA	Erasmus+ National Agency
SALTO	Support, Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities
SE	School education
VET	Vocational education and training



EUROPEAN UNION