

Finland's National Inclusion and Diversity Strategy for Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes

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1. Introduction

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

European Commission's Inclusion and Diversity Strategy

The new Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programming period began in January 2021. One of the main priorities of this period ending in 2027 is increasing inclusion and diversity. The idea is to make participation easier for both applicant organisations and particularly for those with fewer opportunities for internationalisation. Anyone who is interested should have an opportunity to participate in the programme, regardless of the barriers they face.

The European Commission has published an [Inclusion and Diversity Strategy for the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes for 2021–2027](#). It serves as a guideline for all National Agencies in the participating countries for also including those who need more support in the programmes. The Finnish National Agency for Education, which is the National Agency for the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes in Finland, follows this strategy in its work.

In order to promote strategy implementation at national level, the European Commission published Implementation Guidelines that support the promotion of inclusion and diversity in April 2021. In these guidelines, the target groups – persons with fewer opportunities – have been defined as extensively as possible. The target groups include people who face obstacles for economic, social, cultural, geographical or health reasons, migrant background, disability or educational difficulties, or other reason that could give rise to discrimination under Article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (prohibition of discrimination).

The inclusion objectives of the new programming period must be applied in the national contexts of the participating countries. The Inclusion Strategy of Finland's National Agency and its work programme apply to the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme as a whole and cover all sectors of education (higher education and adult education, general education and vocational education and training), as well as the field of youth and European Solidarity Corps. Both documents are updated as new needs are identified and additional information is obtained.

2. Background to the National Agency's Inclusion Strategy

The Inclusion and Diversity Strategy of the Finnish National Agency for Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps has been prepared to promote inclusion in the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes. It is based on the European

Commission’s Inclusion and Diversity Strategy referred to above. The strategy has been adapted to the national context, and it is in line with the values of the Finnish National Agency for Education and the 2030 Agenda.

The Inclusion and Diversity Strategy underpins the National Agency’s actions and materials aiming to promote inclusion, various events, publications and website. This strategy, which will be kept updated, is a joint document covering all sectors (vocational and general education, adult and higher education and the field of youth). It is divided into two parts: a common inclusion strategy and sectoral work programmes.

The Finnish education system is open to everyone and covers all age groups from early childhood education and care to lifelong learning, including formal and non-formal learning. Consequently, the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes must also be accessible to everyone.

Promoting inclusion and diversity is part of everyday life at all levels of education and in youth work. Regardless of the versatility and high quality of educational opportunities as well as an inclusive structure, many challenges remain in promoting inclusion and diversity.

In its annual Work Programme, the European Commission sets targets for measures that promote inclusion. Their implementation is monitored in a Yearly Report. The targets and their achievement are monitored in all sectors of the Erasmus+ programme and European Solidarity Corps.

To lay the foundation for the work on the inclusion strategy, it was important to examine the initial situation of Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps in different sectors. On this basis, goals for promoting inclusion can be defined. The main indicator for determining the initial situation of mobility projects (Key action 1) is persons with fewer opportunities who have participated in mobility projects in different sectors reported in the Yearly Reports for 2021 and 2022. The data concerning 2023 is based on estimates of the work programme prepared in autumn 2022.

Participants with fewer opportunities in the activities of Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes in 2021–2023 (%)

Sector	2021	2022	Estimate for 2023
General education	11	9,96	10
Vocational education and training	17,46	12,05	12
Higher education*			
European mobility	-	-	5
Global mobility	-	19	19
Adult education	30	36,63	30
Youth			
Erasmus+	16,06	24,59	25
European Solidarity Corps	54	47,57	35

**In European mobility in higher education, the share of participants with fewer opportunities was not specifically asked about in calls for proposals in 2021 and 2022. This information was requested for the first time in the call for proposals 2023. As there was no call for proposals for international mobility in 2021, the figures in the Table start from the 2022 call.*

As the Table shows, the share of participants with fewer opportunities varies by sector. In the adult education sector, learner mobility has been offered as a new opportunity in Erasmus+ programming period 2021–2027. In 2021 and 2022, it was limited exclusively to learners with fewer opportunities for participating in Erasmus+. In the field of youth, promoting inclusion and diversity was already one of the priorities in previous programming periods.

There are several vocational special education institutions in Finland that are also actively involved in international activities, whereas the higher education sector and general education have previously provided fewer possibilities for

participating in international activities for people with fewer opportunities.

See the Table below for the number of projects funded in 2021–2022 in which inclusion and diversity were a priority.

Funded projects themed on inclusion and diversity in 2021–2022

Sector	2021	2022
General education	24	19
Vocational education and training	4	4
Higher education	3	2
Adult education	15	11
Youth		
Erasmus+	11	20
European Solidarity Corps	14	29

In our role as the National Agency, our aim is to promote participation in the programmes diversely and encourage newcomer organisations to get involved. This will promote the diversity of the programmes and offer more opportunities for international cooperation.

See the Table below for newcomer organisations funded under Erasmus+ in 2021 and 2022. The data concerning 2023 is based on estimates of the work programme prepared in autumn 2022.

Number of newcomer organisations in Erasmus+ in 2021–2023

Sector	2021	2022	Estimate for 2023
General education	21	82	50
Vocational education and training	8	12	6
Higher education	2	1	1
Adult education	33	25	13
Youth	16	35	20

a. National Agency's shared vision

At the end of programming period 2021–2027, we will have increased the participation of different targets groups in the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes. Our professional competence in encountering different people and groups will have increased significantly.

b. National Agency's common promise

The National Agency's work is based on equality. We actively promote inclusion and diversity in all activities of the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes. We help create a level playing field by removing barriers that different target groups may encounter when participating in Erasmus+ programmes. Our promise is based on the Finnish National Agency for Education's vision: 'Everyone can grow to their full potential'.

Our actions are in keeping with the European Commission's Inclusion and Diversity Strategy and Goal 4 of the 2030 Agenda: 'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' (National Commission on Sustainable Development).

c. Potential barriers to participation

The European Commission's Inclusion and Diversity Strategy lists barriers that may prevent participation in the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes, both as a stand-alone factor and in combination among them:

Disability

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

Health problems

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

Barriers linked to education and training systems

Individuals struggling to perform in education and training systems for various reasons, early leavers from education and training, people not in education, employment or training and low-skilled adults may face barriers. Although other factors may play a role, these educational difficulties, while they may also be linked to personal circumstances, mostly result from an educational system which creates structural limitations and/or does not fully take into account the individual's particular needs.

Individuals can also face barriers to participation when the structure of curricula makes it difficult to undertake a learning or training mobility abroad as part of their studies.

Cultural differences

While cultural differences may be perceived as barriers by people from any backgrounds, they can particularly affect people with fewer opportunities. Such differences may represent significant barriers to learning in general, all the more for people with a migrant or refugee background – especially newly-arrived migrants.

They may also create barriers for people belonging to a national or ethnic minority, sign language users, and people with linguistic adaptation and cultural inclusion difficulties. Being exposed to foreign languages and cultural differences when taking part in any kind of programme activities may put off individuals and somehow limit the benefits from their participation. Such cultural differences may even prevent potential participants from applying for support through the programmes, thereby representing an entry barrier altogether.

Social barriers

Social adjustment difficulties such as limited social competences, anti-social or high-risk behaviours, (former) offenders, (former) drug or alcohol abusers, or social marginalisation may represent a barrier.

Other social barriers can stem from family circumstances, for instance being the first in the

family to access higher education or being a parent (especially a single parent), a caregiver, a breadwinner or an orphan, or having lived or currently living in institutional care.

Economic barriers

Economic disadvantage like a low standard of living, low income, learners who need to work to support themselves, dependence on the social welfare system, in long-term unemployment, precarious situations or poverty, being homeless, in debt or with financial problems, etc., may represent a barrier.

Other difficulties may derive from the limited transferability of services (in particular support to people with fewer opportunities) that needs to be "mobile" together with the participants when going to a far place or, all the more, abroad.

Barriers linked to discrimination

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

Geographical barriers

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

3. National Agency's priorities in efforts to promote inclusion

The Finnish National Agency for the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes focuses on the following priorities in its work.

a. Common understanding of inclusion and diversity

All those advising applicants and beneficiaries and evaluating final reports are familiar with the Inclusion and Diversity Strategy of the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes and

apply it as jointly agreed. The National Agency aims to provide stronger support for organisations and people with fewer opportunities to participate in the programmes and gain international experience. Support is available throughout the project lifecycle.

In the induction training of persons assessing project applications, we ensure that they know how to account for the perspective of inclusion as a project priority, or for programme actions supportive of inclusion or the applicant's background.

Promoting inclusion is integrated into the induction training of new National Agency employees. We provide our staff with regular and versatile training in issues related to inclusion. We ensure that promoting inclusion is visible on our website both as a theme and in form of site accessibility.

b. Fairness and transparency

We comply with the Administrative Procedure Act when providing advice and assessing applications by treating all applicants equally. To reach target groups, we collaborate with local and regional actors and umbrella organisations in different fields. As an executive authority, we follow the principles of the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes for achieving inclusion.

We guarantee equal opportunities for participation to everyone in our webinars. If necessary, we provide/make arrangements for support measures to enable equal participation. We comply with the Finnish National Agency for Education's operational equality and non-discrimination plan.

When assessing applications, we apply the principle of proportionality. This means that the applicant's, participants' or target group's background is taken into account when assessing the quality of applications. Projects that reflect genuine and real inclusiveness, either in the participants' background or the selection of the project theme, are prioritised in all action types.

The assessors of the project applications have been selected through an open external application process. Application assessors follow the

assessment criteria defined in the Programme Guide.

c. Approachability

The National Agency

- accounts for applicants' diversity and encounters customers equally
- ensures that its staff members are easy to contact in project planning and implementation phases
- uses appropriate, clear and comprehensible language in communications and provision of project advice as well as terminology that minorities would like to see used concerning themselves
- produces various accessible support materials in Finnish and Swedish and translates them into other languages as necessary
- highlights diversity in its visual communication. The selected images signal that the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes are genuinely intended for all kinds of participants and organisations. The diversity of images covers diversity of gender, ethnic or cultural origin, people's appearance and the themes/activities shown in the images
- complies with the Finnish National Agency for Education's accessibility guidelines. Event registration forms address customers' special needs (accessible facilities, induction loop, sign language, etc.). The National Agency follows the principles of safer spaces at its events.

4. Support for realising inclusion

The National Agency

- plans the priorities of its training annually following work programmes drawn up for each sector. Training is also tailored to meet target groups' needs, making the programmes more accessible for different target groups. The European TCA/NET seminars and training events of the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes offer participants

opportunities to network, update their competence and familiarise themselves with education systems, civic activities and youth work in different countries

- responds to topical societal issues and themes by organising training, information and meetings between stakeholders as necessary
- informs its target groups about funding opportunities that support inclusiveness in the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes. To promote inclusion, the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes provide financial support to people with fewer opportunities for participating in international activities, a possibility of bringing a support person with them on mobility periods, a possibility of getting additional support, for instance for coaching or going on a mobility period, and an opportunity to get to know their destination in advance through preparatory visits
- highlights inclusion through project stories, videos and webinars and encourages applicants to apply for funding for projects that promote inclusion. The sectoral work programmes describe the goals and actions through which the National Agency will promote stronger inclusion in the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes in 2021–2027.

5. Monitoring and evaluation of work on inclusion

The National Agency will monitor Inclusion Strategy implementation by the following means:

- Quantitative indicators for participation in the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes by people with fewer opportunities for international activities and newcomer organisations.
- The achievement of all goals is assessed in interim and final evaluations submitted to the European Commission mid-term (2024) and at the end of the programming period (2027). The Finnish National Agency will develop a

monitoring plan to follow up the progress in attaining those goals that are not covered by the annual indicator data.

- The National Agency's inclusion working group will meet and evaluate regularly completed actions, plan future activities and make necessary changes to sectoral work programmes. The inclusion working group will also develop the work on inclusion based on feedback from and needs identified by stakeholders and beneficiaries.

6. Sectoral goals for the programming period

Erasmus+ for Adult Education

'In the adult education sector, Erasmus+ promotes the inclusion of disadvantaged learners, small adult education organisations, local organisations and communities as well as newcomer applicants in the programme. In adult education, the key is offering inclusive and equal opportunities for internationalisation to participants from all backgrounds.'

Erasmus+ for Adult Education is open to different organisations providing learning for adults in an inclusive and equal manner. Participating organisations must ensure that their staff and learners have equal opportunities to participate in various programme activities.

Erasmus+ creates opportunities for an increasing number of participants, promoting social equality. Learner mobility, which is primarily aimed at adult learners with fewer opportunities to participate in international activities, is a new action.

Erasmus+ for Vocational Education and Training

'Erasmus+ enables all actors in vocational education and training to have international experience and promotes the participation of students with fewer opportunities.'

In the vocational education and training sector, Erasmus+ aims to promote the inclusion of students and staff with fewer opportunities as well

as small and newcomer vocational education and training actors in the programme.

In vocational education and training, the key is offering inclusive and equal opportunities for internationalisation to participants from all backgrounds. Educational institutions, companies and other participating organisations must ensure that everyone has an opportunity to participate in the different actions of the programme.

Erasmus+ for Higher Education

'Erasmus+ creates opportunities for an increasing number of participants, promoting social equality and, for its part, supporting the achievement of the goals set in the national accessibility plan for higher education and policies on internationalisation in higher education institutions.'

Erasmus+ for Higher Education is open for all Finnish higher education institutions as well as their students and staff, inclusively and equally. The participating higher education institutions must ensure that all members of the higher education community have equal opportunities to participate in the different actions of the programme.

Higher education institutions commit to promoting the programme's priorities and goals when joining the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education. The National Agency monitors the implementation and progress of the priorities when evaluating final reports.

Erasmus+ for General Education

'We will increase the visibility and role of inclusion and diversity in Erasmus+ for General Education. We will strengthen the understanding of concepts related to inclusion and actively seek solutions for identifying and removing obstacles.'

The aim is to take inclusion and diversity into account at all stages of project management and project life cycle. The long-term impact aimed for is equal opportunities for mobility and participation in international activities for learners and staff.

Erasmus+ for Youth and European Solidarity Corps

'ALL young people can participate equally in the programmes.'

The Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes are open to all young people and those working with them, regardless of their gender, gender identity or sexuality, ethnic or cultural background, language, disability or illness, social background, educational background or place of residence.

Projects relevant to inclusion for the part of either their participants, target groups or themes, or projects in which the applicant is a newcomer organisation, account for 35% of funded projects.