

Strategy for the inclusion of students with fewer opportunities within the Erasmus+ programme

1. Basic Provisions

NOA University of Applied Sciences (hereinafter: NOA) strives to create a community where all students, employees and other stakeholders feel like an equal and integral part of NOA. The vision is to co-create a diverse and inclusive academic culture where every individual can contribute to success, knowledge and growth. We wish to achieve the inclusion of those who face difficulties regarding accessibility or have fewer opportunities in the field of education and training.

Our strategy is based on the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion, which strengthen our academic, intellectual and social culture. With a desire for an inclusive approach and the removal of barriers, we have formulated this strategy, which will enable appropriate mechanisms for limiting or removing these barriers within the framework of Erasmus+ mobility. Our goal is to ensure fair and equal opportunities for access to the Erasmus+ programme for all students interested in participating.

NOA will ensure that inclusion and diversity are priorities at all stages of the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme, including promotion, professional support, impartial judgment when selecting candidates, and the dissemination and use of project results for the purpose of disseminating examples of good practice. We will also enable a fair and transparent selection of participants and establish awareness-raising and information-sharing activities so that all information about the Erasmus+ programme is clearly accessible and understandable to all.

All candidates who fall into the category of persons with fewer opportunities will be informed about the possibility of additional funding or a top-up for students with fewer opportunities in the amount of €250.

2. Definition of persons with fewer opportunities

Students with fewer opportunities are defined as those who face difficulties regarding accessibility or have fewer opportunities in the field of education and training in accordance with the Inclusion and Diversity Strategy within the framework of the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes. One of the priorities of the Erasmus+ programme 2021–2027 is specifically inclusion, which we understand as efforts to increase the accessibility of the programme, for the largest and most diverse participation possible, and the promotion of equal opportunities for participants with fewer opportunities.

As a new private higher education institution that carries out part-time study, where the majority of students are regularly employed, within the Erasmus+ programme we primarily focus on this population, as it represents the largest share of persons with fewer opportunities.

2.1 Persons with fewer opportunities according to the Inclusion and Diversity Strategy within the framework of Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps

In accordance with the Inclusion and Diversity Strategy within the framework of the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes, students with fewer opportunities are defined into the following 8 (viii) target groups:

i. Special needs

Special needs include physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in connection with various barriers, may hinder an individual from fully and effectively participating in society on an equal basis with others.

ii. Health problems

Barriers may result from health problems, including severe or chronic illnesses or any other physical or mental conditions that prevent participation in programmes.

iii. Barriers linked to education and training systems

Individuals who for various reasons struggle with difficulties in education and training systems, individuals who have left education and training systems early, NEETs (individuals not in education, employment or training) and low-skilled adults may face various barriers. Although other factors may also play a significant role, educational difficulties, which may otherwise be linked to personal circumstances, are mostly a result of educational systems that create structural barriers or do not fully take into account an individual's special needs. These individuals may also encounter barriers when the structure of curricula makes it difficult to participate in learning or training abroad as part of their studies.

iv. Cultural differences

Individuals from various backgrounds may perceive cultural differences as barriers, but these negatively affect especially those with fewer opportunities. Such differences can represent major barriers to learning in general, especially for individuals with a migrant or refugee background, and especially for newly arrived migrants, members of a national or ethnic minority, sign language users, individuals with difficulties in linguistic adaptation and cultural inclusion, etc. Exposure to foreign languages and cultural differences when participating in any programme activities can deter individuals and in some way limit the benefits of their participation. Such cultural differences can even prevent potential participants from applying for support through programmes, and thus fully represent an entry barrier.

v. Social barriers

Difficulties with social adaptation, such as limited social competences, anti-social or high-risk behaviours, (former) offenders, (former) drug or alcohol users or social marginalisation, can represent a barrier. Other social barriers may stem from family circumstances, for example if an individual is the first in their family to have access to higher education or is a parent (especially a single parent), carer, foster parent or orphan, or a person who has lived or lives in institutional care.

vi. Economic barriers

Economic disadvantage can represent a barrier, such as a low standard of living, low income, and persons who must work to support themselves while studying, are dependent on the social security system, are long-term unemployed, live in precarious conditions or poverty, are homeless, in debt or have financial difficulties, etc. Other difficulties may stem from the limited portability of services (especially support for individuals with fewer opportunities), which must be "mobile" together with the participants when they travel to more remote places or even abroad.

vii. Barriers linked to discrimination

Barriers may appear due to discrimination linked to gender (gender identity, gender expression, etc.), age, ethnicity, religion, belief, sexual orientation, disability or intersectional factors (a combination of one or more mentioned discriminatory barriers).

viii. Geographical barriers

A geographical barrier may be living in remote or rural areas, on small islands or in peripheral/outmost regions, in suburbs, in areas with fewer services (limited public transport, poor infrastructure) or less developed areas in third countries, etc.

2.2 Criteria for proving the status of a person with fewer opportunities according to the Inclusion and Diversity Strategy within the framework of Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps

To prove point (i.) – Special needs: Valid status of a student with special needs.

To prove point (ii.) – Health problems: A doctor's opinion or medical certificate with a description and duration of the illness, which must not be older than three months.

To prove point (iii.) – Cultural differences: Proof that Slovenia offers the participant international protection or that they are a member of a national or ethnic minority, a sign language user, with difficulties in linguistic adaptation and cultural inclusion, or proof of permanent residence in another country.

To prove point (iv.) - Barriers linked to discrimination: Proof from a competent institution about discrimination.

To prove point (v.) - Economic barriers: A decision from the Social Work Centre (CSD) on financial social assistance.

To prove point (vi.) – Social barriers: Proof that the participant is a parent, carer, foster parent or orphan, or a person who has lived or lives in institutional care; proof from the Social Work Centre (CSD) that the participant comes from a single-parent family (up to the age of 26).

To prove point (vii.) - Barriers linked to education and training systems: Valid status of a student with special needs.

To prove point (viii.) - Geographical barriers: Proof of public transport and infrastructure, proof of specific geographical barriers in the form of a written statement.

2.3 Persons with fewer opportunities according to NOA criteria

NOA has recognised that employed students represent a group facing specific challenges and limitations that may affect their ability to participate in programmes such as Erasmus+. Aware of the need for a special approach that will suit their circumstances, NOA has determined that employed students are treated as persons with fewer opportunities according to the school's criteria. Below are described certain conditions and criteria on the basis of which this designation is used, with the aim of enabling fair access to educational opportunities for all NOA students.

i. **Time constraints:** Employed students may experience time constraints due to their regular employment, which makes participating in a mobility programme difficult. Work schedules and obligations at work can represent a challenge when coordinating with international mobility, which requires a certain time away from the workplace.

ii. **Financial constraints:** Employed students may find it harder to financially cover costs associated with international mobility. Although the Erasmus+ programme provides funds for students, additional costs such as travel, accommodation and living expenses abroad may be a greater challenge for employed students.

iii. **Limited access to education:** Employed students who have already integrated into a working environment may not have the same access to educational opportunities as students who have not yet entered employment. Mobility abroad requires time away from regular employment, which is not always possible.

iv. **Limited flexibility at work:** Employed students may face a lack of flexibility at their workplace, which can make it difficult to obtain permits for longer absences due to international mobility.

v. **Challenges in balancing professional and academic life:** Employed students may experience challenges in balancing professional and academic life, which includes potential barriers to participating in international experiences that require a certain time commitment.

2.4 Criteria for proving the status of a person with fewer opportunities according to NOA criteria

To obtain the status of a person with fewer opportunities within NOA, it is necessary to submit appropriate evidence. The criterion for proving this status includes the submission of a certificate from the employer or a printout from the Health Insurance Institute of Slovenia (ZZZS), which NOA obtains autonomously. The employer's certificate must clearly show the student's employment. Based

on the documents obtained, NOA will judge the fair and appropriate treatment of the individual as a person with fewer opportunities in accordance with determined criteria.

Ljubljana, 13 June 2024 Dean Mladenka Lukić Walther

Note: This English version of the document is for translation purposes only. In case of conflict, the Slovene version shall prevail.