

Erasmus+/European Solidarity Corps Inclusion & Diversity Strategy 2021-2027

RO NA

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1. Context

At European level, inclusion and diversity are tackled in policy documents, strategies, programme guides. They are to be found as goals set by the EU and as priorities. In relation to education, training and youth, the main European documents/strategies that we base our strategy on are:

- The European Education Area - the inclusion and gender equality goals
- The EU Youth Strategy - the inclusion-related goals
- The Erasmus+/ESC inclusion and diversity strategy, as formulated in 'The implementation guidelines'
- The EC Decision on the framework of inclusion measures of the E+ and ESC programmes 2021-2027
- The inclusion&diversity references from the E+ / ESC programme guides

At national level, policy documents, strategies and different measures stress the importance of these topics, with a special focus being placed on inclusion. The national reference points that we have are:

- The national social inclusion strategy for 2021-2027 (available here)
- The national program 'România educată' (available here)
- The Romanian Government strategy for inclusion of Roma minority (available here)

We are also paying attention to research and statistics that are connected to the field of I&D, such as Eurostat studies (for example, Children at risk of poverty or social inclusion, 2020, available here), Eurydice studies (for example, Equity in school education in Europe, available here), or studies conducted by private entities relevant at national or European level.

In this European and national policy and strategic framework, we consider it to be our responsibility to stay permanently informed, connected to these priorities and to assume an active role in inclusion and diversity.

2. Understanding of I&D

Our main understanding of inclusion is the one presented in the E+/ESC Programme guides. The intention of both E+ and ESC is to include in projects participants with fewer opportunities, that might face the following barriers:

Disabilities: 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 programme.

Barriers linked to education and training systems: Individuals struggling to perform in education and training systems for various reasons, early school-leavers, NEETs (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 -, people belonging to a national or ethnic minority, sign language users, people with linguistic adaptation and cultural inclusion difficulties, etc. 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. And such cultural differences may even prevent potential participants from applying for support through the programme, 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, age, ethnicity, religion, beliefs, sexual orientation, disability, or intersectional factors (a combination of two 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.

These barriers are very much interlinked and connected. Participants can find themselves in an exclusion situation involving several barriers at once. Having these as reference point, we will mainly address organisations/institutions that work with/reach:

- participants with socio-economical and educational barriers (where the rural area is highly important at national level)
- participants with disabilities
- participants from the Roma minority

3. Vision, mission, values

Vision: an equitable and diversity-appreciative learning environment.

Mission: implementing Erasmus+ and ESC as inclusion instruments.

Values: equity, respect, participation, solidarity, accountability.

4. Objectives

1. Increasing the number of participants with fewer opportunities in E+/ESC projects
2. Increasing the number of I&D projects
3. Raising the quality of I&D projects (also by increasing organisations' capacity)
4. Raising awareness on I&D as E+/ESC priorities
5. Creating an I&D learning environment (also by facilitating networking and sharing on I&D)

5. Model of I&D approach

Our model involves:

Research & Consultations – we believe that clear, scientific data is essential as a starting point for strategy building and for creating support measures. We also believe that, in order to evaluate and adapt interventions, one needs research and consultations. That is why we will base our decision taking into consideration data coming from research (either ordered by the NA or existing data from external studies/surveys/research in general); we believe it is essential that we hear different perspectives on inclusion, that we are aware of different realities and needs, that we receive advice and guidance from relevant stakeholders. That is why

we will constantly be in touch with inclusion realities and needs by creating consultation contexts with stakeholders, focus groups, advisory meetings.

Communication – we believe inclusion and diversity needs to be better communicated. There is a need for inclusion stories to be better and more frequently told. Inclusion and diversity need to be better seen, better translated, better understood. That is why we will invest more in showing the faces and stories of inclusion; in translating inclusion for applicants and beneficiaries via user-friendly materials; in approaching inclusion in a clear and friendly way in our events.

Networking – we believe networking is essential in order to better understand and reach new target groups and create support measures; moreover, we believe there is a general need for creating connections between the inclusion stakeholders. As NA, we need to be connected with inclusion stakeholders that have a broad image of the sector and relevant experience (from grass root to policy level), so that we can create integrated approaches together. That is why we will maintain and develop our networking contexts (Advisory Board on inclusion, creating and being present in events on the topic, creating one-to-one dialogue with inclusion actors) and create suitable contexts/frameworks, online and offline, for inclusion actors to meet, talk, share and learn together.

Support & community-building – we believe there are different realities and contexts and there is a need to approach organisations/institutions in adapted and equitable ways. That is why we will choose equity, fluidity, flexibility and openness in building our support, mixing different elements, online and offline; in addition, we believe there is a need for a practice/sharing/learning community of the active inclusion stakeholders, based on peer-learning. Our aim is to develop an inclusion&diversity mindset, learning environment and a community on inclusion.

We will build adapted support measures as a mixture of different elements:

- (thematic) trainings;
- mentoring/coaching/consultancy activities;
- learning materials;
- get-to-know-each-other/hosting/networking/community events.

6. Multi-annual action plan

6.1 Preparatory phase: research and consultations (2020-2021)

Research: What we did

At the end of 2020 the NA ordered a research study with the aim of analysing the inclusion strategy for 2016-2020. The study was centered on two general objectives:

- o Evaluating the impact of inclusion support measures from 2016-2020
- o Proposing recommendations for a future strategy.

The main findings:

Information: the websites and other communication channels that the NA has are the main source of information; focus on communication should be maintained

Training: the trainings organized by the NA are highly valued and are perceived as a very good support measure for I&D; still, not all the aspects regarding a project are enough clarified and there is a feeling that trainings should be longer; a positive aspect is that participants in NA events are more motivated to apply

Implementation: what motivates beneficiaries is the impact they have on the socio-emotional state of the final beneficiaries; the challenges for inclusion stakeholders have increased during the pandemic

The main recommendations:

- better connection between NA and potential beneficiaries in terms of information; better targeted information
- more and longer trainings, with more focus given to the selection of participants
- a mixture between maintaining the main inclusion areas and diversifying them
- increased information on the topic - more inclusion examples, larger dissemination

- better, more adapted consultancy activities and support measures: more trainings, mentorship, increased assistance in writing projects, increased financial support, support for partner finding

Consultations: What we did

We had 5 internal consultations, inside the NA. All the NA team members working directly with beneficiaries as grant officers were consulted regarding their perspectives on inclusion and gave input on possible future approaches. All the input was based on former experience and things/patterns that had been observed.

We consulted our partner networks – the school inspectors for European programmes and the members of the pool of trainers, asking for input on different elements: needs of applicants/beneficiaries; connection between NA and potential new beneficiaries; support measures.

We created an Advisory board on inclusion – a consultation body made up of 10 members representing financing bodies, umbrella&grass-root organisations, experts, all of them stakeholders with relevant experience and broad perspectives on inclusion. We had our first meeting in September 2021, which was focused on three different levels: needs of applicants/beneficiaries; connection between NA and potential new beneficiaries; support measures.

Based on the information and guidance we collected and received via research and consultations, our action plan will be developed as follows:

6.2 Action phase – I&D strategy (2022-2027): communication, networking, support & community-building

Communication. What we will do:

- create a mixture of audio-video-text-based stories (of projects and of people) reflecting I&D
- create clear and user-friendly resources on I&D on our communication channels (also a separate website section)

- organise I&D Talks – discussions and debates on the topic of inclusion (we plan to organise recurring events, live streamed on Facebook, having as guests experts, trainers, project representatives)
- write I&D articles in the NA magazine
- offer adapted and relevant I&D input in events – trainings, kick off meetings, disseminating events
- organize specific and targeted campaigns

Networking. What we will do:

- develop the inclusion Advisory Board as a consultative body
- map relevant organisations with whom to join efforts
- create & participate in networking events
- continue and establish partnerships with relevant inclusion stakeholders at local, regional and national level, in order to create joint approaches and to reach new target groups

We will also focus on creating effective synergies between the NA and relevant Romanian Ministries (Education, Research, Youth, European Funds) with the aim of creating complementary approaches between E+/ESC, ESF+ and the Resilience Fund on the topic of I&D. The same efforts will be made to create synergies between E+/ESC and EEA Grants implemented by other private bodies.

Support & Community-building. We will build adapted support measures as a mixture of different elements:

- get-to-know-each-other and hosting events – (online) events focused on learning more about potential beneficiaries, their realities and needs;
- adapted trainings – on specific E+/ESC elements (accreditation, project writing etc.) and other relevant E+/ESC topics for the target groups, such as organizational capacity, thematic E+/ESC priorities, staff learning and development (for example, training on how to work with young people with fewer opportunities)
- follow-up support measures - mentoring/coaching/consultancy activities;
- learning materials – user-friendly, as a mixture of audio-video-text
- networking/community events.

We will create these support measures by piloting & testing. We will constantly adapt our actions according to feedback and lessons learnt. We are open to bring changes, create new instruments and suitable approaches. That will also involve keeping research and consultations open on a continuous basis and consolidating on the feedback we get.

As far as community-building is concerned, we will create networking contexts for organisations to share and learn together. We aim to create an inclusion&diversity community.

Internationally, we will continue to be part of the Strategic Partnership on Inclusion and to actively be involved in I&D events through TCA/NET.

We will continue to use TCA as a strategic tool to support our objectives, and in this sense we have proposed to coordinate a Long Term TCA in the field of inclusion, focusing on newcomer organisations. Also, we decided to be involved as a partner in the LTA coordinated by DAAD, on inclusion in Higher education field.

6.3 Evaluation phases (2024 & 2027)

What we will do: We want to evaluate our strategy at mid-term and final levels. We consider having both a quantitative and a qualitative approach in our evaluation, having, similarly to our starting point (in 2020 and 2021), research and consultations/focus groups with I&D stakeholders - both beneficiaries and partners.

6.4 Internal NA measures

In order to better understand the themes of inclusion and diversity, to better create a common approach at NA level and to better support applicants and beneficiaries, we will, at NA level,

- Create an internal inclusion working group – having as a main role to bring common understanding on inclusion and diversity, to plan action and initiatives, to centralise ideas and results
- Organize internal trainings & debates on inclusion – made by external experts with relevant expertise on different inclusion and diversity topics

- Organize trainings for NA evaluators
- Invest in the capacity of our existing networks – pool of trainers and school inspectors (with relevant information and training on I&D topics)
- Create CSR measures/actions relevant for I&D

Strategy flow:

2021 – research and consultations

2022&2023 – communication / networking / support & community-building / piloting-testing

2024 – communication / networking / support & community-building / consolidating

2024 – mid-term evaluation

2025 – communication / networking / support & community-building / consolidating

2026 – communication / networking / support & community-building / valorising

2027 – communication / networking / community-building / valorising / evaluating

The elements of our strategy derive from one another and we see them as strongly connected. They can be seen, initially, as a chronological model, but our aim is to act on them and develop them simultaneously, depending on target groups and priorities.

Anticipated strategy flow: research&consultations (2021), piloting-testing (2022-2023), evaluating and consolidating (2024-2026), valorising and evaluating (2027)

7. Key indicators

Generally, the indicators for our strategy will be: number/share of participants with fewer opportunities in E+/ESC projects; number/share of projects indicating I&D as a priority; number of I&D events (get-to-know-each-other events, trainings,

networking, thematic events); I&D materials created; metrics for social media; progress reports; diversity of approaches and partnerships.

Key indicators for objective 1 – Increasing the number of participants with fewer opportunities in E+/ESC projects

- share (%) of participants with fewer opportunities taking part in activities (see table)
- number of I&D events (trainings, networking meetings etc.) we organize (estimation of 3/year)
- number of follow-up activities (mentoring/coaching/consultancy sessions) we organize (estimation of 3 integrated activities/year)

Indicator Annual targets per program (E+/ESC) and per sector (E+)

E+/HE E+/SEE+/AEE+/VET E+/Y ESC

The share (%) of participants with fewer opportunities taking part in activities

... under 2022 calls	8	30	10	45	45	40
... under 2023 calls	10	33	12	47	47	40
... under 2024 calls	12	35	14	50	50	40
... under 2025 calls	13	37	15	52	52	40
... under 2026 calls	14	38	15	53	53	40
... under 2027 calls	15	40	16	55	55	40

Key indicators for objective 2 - Increasing the number of I&D projects

- share of projects with inclusion topics in KA1 / Y (56% in 2020 to 62% in 2027)
- share of KA2 projects with inclusion as priority (from 40% in 2020 to 45% in 2027)

- number of I&D events (trainings, networking meetings etc.) we organize (estimation of 3/year)
- number of follow-up activities (mentoring/coaching/consultancy sessions) we organize (estimation of 3 integrated activities/year)

Key indicators for objective 3 - Raising the quality of I&D projects (also by increasing organisations' capacity)

- TCA/NET indicators regarding participation in I&D international events
- number of I&D events (trainings, networking meetings etc.) we organize (estimation of 3/year)
- usage/relevance for target groups/quality of I&D materials created
- diversity of created partnerships
- diversity of organisations reached

Key indicators for objective 4 - Raising awareness on I&D as E+/ESC priorities

- creation of a clear section on website dedicated to inclusion and constant input into it
- number of inclusion stories we produce (estimation of 5/year)
- number of inclusion articles in ANews – the NA's monthly magazine (estimation of 4/year)
- number of inclusion materials we produce/promote (estimation of 2-3/year in starting years of implementation)

Key indicators for objective 5 - Creating an I&D learning environment (also by facilitating networking and sharing on I&D)

- development of Advisory Board
- number of partners with whom/for whom we build support programs/measures (estimation of 2/year)
- creation and growth of inclusion community

- number of networking events in which we take part (estimation of 3/year)
- number of networking events that we create (estimation of 1/year)

The RO NA has 2 I&D officers. But the tasks related to the implementation of the I&D strategy will be shared in the NA team. The directors, the grant officers, the communication department, the research team will all be involved in different stages of the implementation. We also aim to create an internal I&D working group that will share tasks. In addition, the NA plans to work together with the partner networks in order to reach its I&D objectives.

8. Monitoring and evaluation

We will constantly monitor the implementation of the annual action plans, taking into consideration the indicators for each objective. We will focus both on the process and the results reached. We will also focus on the quality of our measures, collecting data from participants, partners and NA team members. At mid-term and final stages we intend to have a deeper evaluation, both from a quantity and a quality perspective.

9. Final remarks

There are 3 elements that will characterize our approaches:

Learning – we are open to trial and error, to adapting, to changing, to learning; we will remain flexible in our approaches, so that we find suitable support measures to reach our goals; we are confident that we will learn from beneficiaries, applicants, partners, advisory board members, inclusion stakeholders

Valorising – we will focus on valorising our experiences, sharing them in relevant contexts, making use of them where relevant

Long-term impact & Continuity - we will have the inclusion bigger picture in mind and make clear where E+/ESC can make a difference; we will focus on



continuity, on helping organisations grow, on consistency; we know inclusion takes time and we aim for the long-term impact, rather than instant success.

We choose inclusion&diversity.