

# ACA Reflection Paper

Internationalisation for all?

Wider inclusion in the internationalisation  
of higher education

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The European voice of national organisations  
for internationalisation of higher education

**ACA**  
ACADEMIC  
COOPERATION  
ASSOCIATION



As an active stakeholder organisation, bringing together national-level agencies working towards furthering the internationalisation of their higher education systems, the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA) would like to contribute through this Reflection Paper to the current debate around the growing need to increase inclusion in the internationalisation of higher education (activities) in general, and in the Erasmus 2021-2027 programme, in particular. The points raised below stem from internal reflections with and between the ACA members, conversations with inclusion experts<sup>1</sup>, with the European Commission and student organisations representatives (from the Erasmus Student Network – ESN and the European Students' Union – ESU), as well as from discussions that took place in the framework of the ACA seminar of 21 February 2019, under the same title.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While acknowledging previous efforts and policies to widen the access of specific underrepresented groups to (international) higher education, we take note – in the current (EU) political and policy context – of a more holistic and thus inclusive approach to the topic of inclusion, which aims to address a wider pool of underrepresented groups in (international) higher education (and particularly in student mobility). Specifically, this is done by addressing together a number of underrepresented groups that were previously targeted separately, such as students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, students without higher education background, students with disabilities, students from minority or migrant backgrounds, students with a refugee background, adult learners, working students, etc., to develop comprehensive, system-level policies and approaches.

In our view, further reflecting on the topic of inclusion from an internationalisation perspective is not only beneficial, but also necessary. Widening inclusion can, through the incorporation of multiple (international and domestic) perspectives and groups, foster innovation and thus further quality enhancement and excellence in higher education.

Inclusion can also, in our view, provide a necessary bridge for the (at times) polarised debate between “internationalisation abroad” (mostly understood as international student and staff mobility) and “internationalisation at home” activities. It is thus necessary to, on the one hand, explicitly address the topic of inclusion *also in internationalisation at home activities*, and on the other hand to broaden the conversation about inclusion in *internationalisation abroad* by going beyond student (and staff) mobility.

In the internationalisation at home activities, the following elements are key: integrating international and intercultural

dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum in the full awareness of the diversity of student groups and their access needs; developing complementary online formats and models (such as COIL); ensuring that incoming students (be they degree or credit-mobile) also come from diverse backgrounds and that they are supported for a proper integration on campus, avoiding ‘ghettoisation’; and that scholarship programmes at European, national and university level are supported by selection criteria that enable the participation of students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

In internationalisation abroad, the essentials are, in our view: widening participation of underrepresented groups in outgoing credit mobility; developing complementary formats (in terms of duration and delivery) to respond to the specific challenges encountered by students from the target groups; as well as addressing inclusion beyond student (and staff) mobility, to address mobility of study programmes and institutions (generally called transnational education – TNE ), as well as the forms that bridge at home and abroad elements, from virtual exchanges and blended learning, to joint study programmes at different levels, English or other foreign-language-taught study programmes at home, to summer and winter schools, etc.

From an inclusive internationalisation perspective, which strategically links the at home and abroad activities, we propose to define the underrepresented groups as widely as possible, and to include: students with disabilities, students from disadvantaged backgrounds (including students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, students without a higher education background, also referred to as first-generation in higher education students), students from minority groups, students with a migrant or refugee

<sup>1</sup>We would like to particularly thank Valérie Van Hees, Coordinator Steunpunt Inclusief Hoger Onderwijs [SIHO], and Ágnes Sarolta Fazekas, Assistant Lecturer and PhD Fellow, ELTE Eötvös Loránd University, Bárczi Gusztáv Faculty of Special Needs Education, Institute for Disability and Social Participation and Chair of the Access & Diversity Expert Community of the EAIE, for their valuable insights and contributions.

background, working students, students with family obligations etc.), and non-mobile or less-mobile students (i.e. students that may not be underrepresented in higher education in general, but that become underrepresented in internationalisation (abroad) activities, most typically – e.g. students from specific subject areas).

While terminological clarification is necessary, bearing in mind that vulnerability is not a binary concept is important, as is the fact that for these target groups that are already at a disadvantage compared to their peers, the inability to take part in internationalisation activities due to varied obstacles further increases their disadvantage, putting them in an even more vulnerable position. This is why we would like to underline that while new forms and approaches would be welcome, inclusion should be tackled also in existing formats and activities.

Action is needed from various actors at different levels. In this context, **ACA members**, in their capacity of national agencies for internationalisation (and some of them for the Erasmus+ programme) have been and are addressing widening inclusion through a **variety of means**, such as: national-level strategies, (marketing) campaigns, specific scholarship programmes and earmarked financial support, and projects in collaboration with higher education institutions in their countries, or by developing and testing different integration models.

In light of the above, we outline **9 considerations for developing further policies and actions:**

1. Build a holistic approach, based on collaboration of (higher education) stakeholders at different levels.
2. Develop a joint multi-layered strategy (European, national level and institutional).
3. Work with proper definitions and with a broad understanding of inclusion.
4. Listen to underrepresented groups and involve them in the design of measures aimed at widening inclusion in internationalisation.
5. Avoid stigmatisation of underrepresented groups as much as possible.
6. Link internationalisation abroad and internationalisation at home activities.
7. Use multiple, flexible formats and complementary approaches.
8. Adapt financial conditions to the needs of the target groups - money matters!
9. Provide tailor-made guidance and increased support services.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Executive Summary</b> . . . . .	<b>2</b>
<b>1. Why wider inclusion?</b> . . . . .	<b>5</b>
<b>2. Wider inclusion and international higher education from an ACA perspective</b> . . . . .	<b>7</b>
<b>2.1 Which internationalisation? Both abroad and at home</b> . . . . .	<b>7</b>
<b>2.2 Inclusion and ‘underrepresented groups’ from an internationalisation perspective</b> . . . . .	<b>9</b>
<b>2.3 How to achieve wider inclusion? Inspirational practices at national level</b> . . . . .	<b>10</b>
<b>3. Considerations for further action</b> . . . . .	<b>12</b>
<b>Annex – Detailed national case examples</b> . . . . .	<b>13</b>

## 1. WHY WIDER INCLUSION?

The aim of widening inclusion – alternatively referred to as inclusiveness, or inclusivity – in (higher) education is currently gaining in importance in European and EU policy circles, being increasingly addressed in new policy documents<sup>2</sup>, as well as in current programmes<sup>3</sup> and programme proposals<sup>4</sup>. Within the wider framework of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the fourth sustainable development goal (SDG4) aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all"<sup>5</sup>.

Increasing inclusion becomes an ever growing necessity in higher education, given the persistent shortcomings in significantly widening access to (higher) education for specific groups that continue to remain underrepresented. In parallel, the increasing diversity of the European population, due to rising mobility flows – of EU citizens on the one hand, and of people with a migrant or refugee background on the other<sup>6</sup> – also have an impact on European (higher) education.

In the field of (international) higher education<sup>7</sup> in the EU context, the topic of inclusion is at present addressed in the current Erasmus+ programme (2014-2020), which is presented, amongst others, as "*promoting equity and inclusion by facilitating the access to participants with disadvantaged backgrounds and fewer opportunities compared to their peers whenever disadvantage limits or prevents participation in transnational activities for reasons such as: disability [mental [...], physical, sensory or other disabilities], educational difficulties [E], economic obstacles [...], cultural differences [...], health problems [...], social obstacles [...], or geographical obstacles<sup>8</sup>[...]*". The programme sets social inclusion as one of its horizontal priorities that 'cuts across' the three Key Actions. It also includes earmarked extra funding for facilitating the mobility of students and staff with "special needs", as well as for participants from disadvantaged backgrounds (as defined at national level). And it features one specific funding line under Key Action 3 for promoting social inclusion and common values.

<sup>2</sup>For example, EU Council Conclusions (2017). Inclusion in Diversity to achieve a High Quality Education For All (2017/C 62/02). Retrieved from: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52017XG0225\(02\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52017XG0225(02)&from=EN)

Paris Declaration (2015). Declaration on Promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education. Retrieved from: [http://cache.media.education.gouv.fr/file/01\\_janvier/79/4/declaration\\_promoting\\_citizenship\\_527794.pdf](http://cache.media.education.gouv.fr/file/01_janvier/79/4/declaration_promoting_citizenship_527794.pdf)

Yerevan Communiqué (2015). Retrieved from: [http://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/2015\\_Yerevan/70/7/YerevanCommuniqueFinal\\_613707.pdf](http://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/2015_Yerevan/70/7/YerevanCommuniqueFinal_613707.pdf)

Paris Communiqué (2018). Retrieved from: [http://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/2018\\_Paris/77/1/EHEAParis2018\\_Communique\\_final\\_952771.pdf](http://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/2018_Paris/77/1/EHEAParis2018_Communique_final_952771.pdf)

<sup>3</sup>Erasmus+ Programme Guide (2019). Retrieved from: [https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents/erasmus-programme-guide-2019\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents/erasmus-programme-guide-2019_en)

<sup>4</sup>European Commission (2018). Proposal for a regulation establishing 'Erasmus': the Union programme for education, training, youth and sport and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013. COM(2018) 367 final. Retrieved from: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/budget-may2018-establishing-erasmus-regulation\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/budget-may2018-establishing-erasmus-regulation_en.pdf)

European Parliament (2018). DRAFT REPORT on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing "Erasmus": the Union programme for education, training, youth and sport and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013. Retrieved from: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//NONSGML+COMPARL+PE-625.220+01+DOC+PDF+V0//EN&language=EN>

EU Council Conclusions (2018). Proposal for a REGULATION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL establishing 'Erasmus': the Union programme education, training, youth and sport and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 - Partial general approach. Retrieved from: <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13943-2018-INIT/en/pdf>

<sup>5</sup> The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Retrieved from: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>

<sup>6</sup> European Education and Training Expert Panel (2019) Issue Paper – Inclusion and Citizenship.

<sup>7</sup> We nevertheless acknowledge the wider discussions about inclusion and targeted actions in the other education sectors, and particularly youth, as well as the work of expert organisations like the Council of Europe (2017). Learning mobility, social inclusion and non-formal education. Access, processes and outcomes. <https://pjpc-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/learning-mobility-2> also on the European Platform for Learning Mobility <https://pjpc-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/european-platform-on-learning-mobility>

<sup>8</sup> Erasmus+ Programme Guide (2019), p. 10.

Inclusion seems to be further gaining in significance in the preparation of the next generation of EU programmes in education and training. By way of example, the European Commission's proposal for the regulation establishing the Erasmus 2021-2027 programme sets the promotion of "*learning mobility of individuals, as well as cooperation, inclusion, excellence, creativity and innovation at the level of organisations and policies in the field of education and training*" (*emphasis added*) as its specific objective<sup>9</sup>. Furthermore, the European Parliament's draft resolution on the future programme proposes – amongst multiple additional references to the importance of widening inclusion – to have one full chapter dedicated to inclusion, as well as specific indicators to measure it<sup>10</sup>.

While central at the moment, it is important to acknowledge that the topic of widening participation of various underrepresented or disadvantaged groups of learners is not new in higher education, and neither are concrete actions to address this. At a policy level, already in 2007 the *London Communiqué*, endorsed by signatory countries of the Bologna Declaration, defined the concept of the "social dimension"<sup>11</sup> of this reform process and advanced it as a policy goal. This started a wave of actions that monitored countries' and higher education systems' widening participation policies

and approaches<sup>12</sup>, especially for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. And, as already underlined, in the framework of EU programmes in education and training, the inclusion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and particularly of students with disabilities, has been a constant preoccupation at both the EU and national level, although participation levels in international activities in higher education (like international student mobility) remain, in general, rather low.

In this current political and policy context, however, the novelty is a **more holistic and thus inclusive approach to the topic of inclusion**, which aims to address a wider pool of underrepresented groups in (international) higher education (and particularly in mobility), in response to the growing diversification of student populations. More specifically, this translates into bringing and addressing together – in policy documents and related programmes – a number of underrepresented groups that were previously targeted separately, such as students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, students without higher education background, students with disabilities, students from minority or migrant backgrounds, students with a refugee background, adult learners, working students, etc., to develop **comprehensive, system-level policies and approaches**.

<sup>9</sup> Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing 'Erasmus': the Union programme for education, training, youth and sport and repealing Regulation [EU] No 1288/2013

COM/2018/367 final - 2018/0191 (COD). Retrieved from: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:147de752-63eb-11e8-ab9c-01aa75ed71a1.0003.03/DOC\\_1&format=PDF](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:147de752-63eb-11e8-ab9c-01aa75ed71a1.0003.03/DOC_1&format=PDF)

<sup>10</sup> Draft European Parliament legislative resolution on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing 'Erasmus': the Union programme for education, training, youth and sport and repealing Regulation [EU] No 1288/2013 [COM(2018)0367 – C8-0233/2018 – 2018/0191(COD)]. Retrieved from: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2019-0111\\_EN.html?redirect#title1](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2019-0111_EN.html?redirect#title1)

<sup>11</sup> Specific reference from the London Communiqué: "*We share the societal aspiration that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of our populations. We reaffirm the importance of students being able to complete their studies without obstacles related to their social and economic background. We therefore continue our efforts to provide adequate student services, create more flexible learning pathways into and within higher education, and to widen participation at all levels on the basis of equal opportunity.*" Retrieved from: [http://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/2007\\_London/69/?/2007\\_London\\_Communique\\_English\\_588697.pdf](http://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/2007_London/69/?/2007_London_Communique_English_588697.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> For example, the ongoing EUROSTUDENT initiative: <http://www.eurostudent.eu/> or the Peer learning 4 the Social Dimension project; <http://www.pl4sd.eu/>

## 2. WIDER INCLUSION AND INTERNATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION FROM AN ACA PERSPECTIVE

As a stakeholder organisation active at the European and global level and representing national-level organisations that support and promote the internationalisation of their higher education systems (and many of which are also national agencies for the Erasmus+ programme), ACA would like to contribute to the current debate on inclusion in international higher education by:

- 2.1 Linking the current policy discussions at EU level to the wider developments in the field of internationalisation of higher education;
- 2.2 Reflecting on the meaning of inclusion and the articulation of (additional) target groups from an internationalisation-driven perspective; and by
- 2.3 Presenting a number of approaches by ACA members in their specific national contexts that could serve as inspiration for further European, national and institutional-level actions.

Widening inclusion can, through the incorporation of multiple (international and domestic) perspectives and groups, foster innovation and thus further quality enhancement and excellence in higher education.

### 2.1 WHICH INTERNATIONALISATION? BOTH ABROAD AND AT HOME

Tackling the topic of inclusion in the wider context of internationalisation of higher education is very relevant, as it enables addressing one of the main criticisms of international higher education (and of international student mobility) to date, namely that it is highly elitist<sup>13</sup>, further exacerbating the social selectivity already affecting equal participation in higher education. Inclusion can also, in our view, provide a necessary bridge for the (at times) polarised debate between “internationalisation abroad” (mostly understood as international student and staff mobility) and “internationalisation at home”<sup>14</sup>.

We see it thus as necessary to, on the one hand, explicitly address the topic of inclusion *also in internationalisation at home activities*, and on the other hand to broaden the conversation about inclusion in internationalisation abroad by going beyond student (and staff) mobility.

#### *Inclusion through internationalisation abroad*

International student (and staff) mobility remains for many countries and higher education institutions the most prominent form of internationalisation abroad. It is thus no wonder that in the EU framework, the Erasmus+ and predecessor programmes have particularly targeted increasing participation in this type of activity.

Widening access to and participation of underrepresented groups in student mobility remains a priority, and we acknowledge that there is great scope for improvement, in the framework of EU programmes<sup>15</sup>, as well as outside of them. Available data, while scarce, show for example that only about 0.2 % of students taking part in Erasmus+ mobilities in 2016 requested support via the “special needs” grant and that the mandatory proof of costs for this type of support remains too burdensome for the target groups.

<sup>13</sup>Knight, J. (2009) Internationalization: Unintended Consequences? *International Higher Education*, [54]. <https://doi.org/10.6017/ihe.2009.54.8412>

<sup>14</sup>Knight, J. (2006). Internationalization of higher education: new directions, new challenges. Paris: International Association of Universities (IAU).

<sup>15</sup>According to the EUROSSTUDENT VI report (p. 231), the biggest primary source of public funding for short-term study abroad are “EU study grants, which were used primarily by 30% of students who were enrolled abroad, followed by regular study grants or loans from their home country (12%), special study grants or loans from their home country for going abroad (5%), and study grants or loans from the host country (4%).”

Moreover, the share of students without higher education background<sup>16</sup> studying abroad for short-term mobility remains lower than that of students with higher education background – the difference averaging to three percentage points across the countries participating in the EUROSTUDENT VI study<sup>17</sup>. Shorter-term and more flexible mobility formats may better respond to the needs of these students that are currently underrepresented in mobility, while also serving as a ‘motivator’ and ‘taster’ for longer-term mobility. Nevertheless, this should not replace the efforts to make ‘traditional’ mobility formats more accessible for students from underrepresented groups, for whom the impact of such stays is known to be far greater than for other students. At the same time, such new formats should equally be developed while keeping in mind the wider objectives and the desired impact of mobility (on students, staff, programmes and institutions), and by ensuring that this impact is not compromised by ever shorter mobility periods.

Furthermore, we perceive a need to broaden this mobility-focused approach and address inclusion also in other types of internationalisation abroad activities, beyond the ‘standard’ student and staff mobility – like the mobility of study programmes and institutions (generally called transnational education – TNE ), as well as in forms that bridge at home and abroad elements, from virtual exchanges and blended learning, to joint study programmes at different levels, English or other foreign-language-taught study programmes at home, to summer and winter schools.

#### *Inclusion through internationalisation at home*

We would further argue that, at least in part, the narrative of internationalisation at home, understood as “*the purposeful*

*integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments*<sup>18</sup> is also one of widening inclusion, i.e. of making international experiences available also for the large majority of students that cannot ‘afford’ (for various reasons) or simply might not ‘want’ to experience internationalisation abroad. Internationalisation at home is thus, in our view, primarily driven by an inclusion agenda, of addressing part of the access inequalities of internationalisation abroad.

At the same time, approaching internationalisation at home from an inclusive perspective would mean, we would posit, not only aiming to provide an international experience to “all” students, but purposefully integrating international and intercultural dimensions in the curriculum in the full awareness of the many different (and some of them disadvantaged) groups of students at home, and of their very specific, yet equally important, access needs.

In this respect there is much untapped potential in models of virtual mobility or virtual exchange (and generally through online educational activities), as developed, for example, under the flag of “Collaborative Online International Learning” (COIL)<sup>19</sup>. While the ‘mobility’ aspect may be online (the students and staff involved do not necessarily have to travel physically), the interaction, the collaboration, the results achieved together by international teams, and the competences acquired by all involved as a result, are typically very tangible and significant. COIL-modules, if implemented well, can be powerful tools for inclusive internationalisation, since obstacles usually associated with physical mobility are not at all present in this model and high-impact internationalisation is made accessible to all<sup>20</sup>.

<sup>16</sup>Students in this category are typically grouped based on the educational attainment level of at least one of their parents. For example, the EUROSTUDENT VI report defines “students without higher education background” (previously named students from lower socio-economic backgrounds) as those students whose parents did not attend higher education (i.e. their highest educational degree is no higher than ISCED 2011 level 4 [post-secondary non-tertiary education], p. 15.

<sup>17</sup>EUROSTUDENT VI (2018). p. 225-226.

<sup>18</sup>Beelen, J., & Jones, E. (2015). Redefining Internationalization at Home. In The European Higher Education Area. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-20877-0\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-20877-0_5)

<sup>19</sup>Jon Rubin (2017) “Embedding Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) at Higher Education Institutions”, in Internationalisation of Higher Education – Developments in the European Higher Education Area, Volume 2

Hans de Wit, “COIL: Virtual mobility without commercialisation”, University World News, June 1, 2013.

<sup>20</sup>However, success is not straight forward: opportunities for miscommunication, and ultimately collaboration breakdown, are plentiful. Over the past 15 years a solid methodology has been developed, many things have been tried, tested and documented. It turns out the didactic aspects are much more complicated than the technological ones.

Inclusion in internationalisation at home also means, we would like to underline, that incoming international students (be they degree or credit-mobile) and scholars come from diverse backgrounds.

In the European context, while increasing participation in mobility has primarily focused on outgoing mobility, we would like to emphasize that widening inclusion should also target incoming students – both credit-mobile and degree-seeking ones – via measures that ensure these students also come from underrepresented groups and from less privileged backgrounds. While we acknowledge the challenges in ensuring that increasing numbers of incoming students are from underrepresented backgrounds, we encourage closer collaboration between partner HEIs and national agencies for addressing this need. The provision of scholarships, such as in the international credit mobility (ICM) in Erasmus+, needs to include students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The role of partner universities in third countries is thus key in reaching out to disadvantaged communities, while selection criteria and grant levels need to create the conditions for participation of students and staff from underrepresented and less privileged groups. In this respect, national level agencies that provide scholarships for incoming students, and many of whom are ACA members, have a key role to play as well.

Inclusion in internationalisation at home further means that incoming students and faculty need to be properly integrated in the formal and informal curriculum in their host HEIs and countries, for their own benefit, as well as for that of domestic students. Too often the growth in international student numbers is accompanied by a “ghettoisation” of the international student communities, whereby the latter have little to no structured interaction with the local students, being put in separate accommodation and studying in parallel study programmes<sup>21</sup>. More can be done in this respect as well, building on existing examples of good practice.

## 2.2 INCLUSION AND ‘UNDERREPRESENTED GROUPS’ FROM AN INTERNATIONALISATION PERSPECTIVE

Although the focus on inclusion is mounting, we acknowledge the lack of a unified definition of inclusion in higher education and the ongoing calls for clarification of what it specifically means in practice<sup>22</sup>. In our context, we understand inclusion in a broader sense, as a process aiming to guarantee equal access and participation in international education activities (at home and abroad) for all students, i.e. also for those that find themselves in vulnerable situations compared to their peers, due to specific life-related situations.

In this context, we also take note of the absence of harmonised terminology to refer to different underrepresented groups, of a coordinated approach to identify and report on these main categories, as well as a generalised lack of data that would allow for cross-country comparisons and for assessing the degree of underrepresentation in (international) higher education. Furthermore, at times several terms are being used interchangeably to refer to the same disadvantaged group, such as: students with “special needs” used interchangeably for students with “impairments”; students from “disadvantaged backgrounds” or students with “fewer/ limited opportunities” to generally refer to students from lower socio-economic, or students without higher education background (at times also referred to as first-generation into higher education students).

<sup>21</sup><https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20140827110705372>; <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/australianz/ghetto-worry-amid-foreign-student-boom-in-australia>

<sup>22</sup>The impact assessment conducted on the Erasmus+ programme 2021-2017 asks to “clarify the concept of inclusion and its implications for the Erasmus programme, and further elaborate on the potential synergies with other future Union programmes and instruments” (European Commission, 2018, p. 12).

From an **inclusive internationalisation perspective**, which strategically links the at home and abroad activities, we propose to **define the underrepresented groups as widely as possible**. These may include the following categories:

- A. Students with disabilities.
- B. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds (including students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, students without a higher education background, also referred to as first-generation in higher education students), students from minority groups, students with a migrant or refugee background, working students, students with family obligations etc.), and
- C. Non-mobile or less-mobile students, i.e. students that may not be underrepresented in higher education in general, but that become underrepresented in internationalisation (abroad) activities, most typically. For example: students in specific subject areas that tend to be less internationally oriented or highly regulated, and where students tend to less often go abroad due to inbuilt barriers (e.g. students in teacher education, students studying for the liberal professions – lawyers, notaries, engineers, architects, doctors, dentists and accountants, amongst others, etc.).

Inequality can also be induced through the different starting points for students with different nationalities. Many scholarship schemes, like Erasmus+, provide a contribution towards the costs of travelling to and living in a different country, but this will not be sufficient in most cases to cover all related costs. A few countries have portable general national scholarship schemes supporting students while

also abroad, but most don't. Students from lower-income countries, both in Europe and beyond, might struggle to take up studies in a higher-income country; they are not from a lower socio-economic background per se, but still do not have the same opportunities as their peers. This aspect should be better addressed in the Erasmus 2021-2027 programme, as well as in national and university-level scholarship schemes.

With this terminological variety and differential positioning in mind, 'labelling' the different target groups that must be addressed through inclusive policies in internationalisation can be helpful in order to understand the variety of groups and personal situations, while bearing in mind that vulnerability is not a binary concept. It covers a wide spectrum of gradation and intersectionality – e.g. not all students with disabilities have the same needs, and one and the same student can be in more than one underrepresented group at the same time ("intersectionality"), which makes categorisation and data collection difficult<sup>23</sup>, not to mention that often students from disadvantaged backgrounds refuse to (self-) identify through these labels, in order to avoid stigmatisation.

We also take note that for most of these target groups that are already at a disadvantage compared to their peers, the inability to take part in internationalisation activities due to varied obstacles further increases their disadvantage, putting them in an even more vulnerable situation. This is why we would like to underline once more that while new forms and approaches would be welcome, inclusion should be tackled also in existing forms and activities (e.g. particularly in outgoing and incoming credit mobility).

<sup>23</sup> Based on text by Valérie Van Hees.

## 2.3 HOW TO ACHIEVE WIDER INCLUSION? INSPIRATIONAL PRACTICES AT NATIONAL LEVEL

ACA member organisations, in their capacity of national-level agencies supporting the internationalisation of their higher education systems (many of them also as national agencies for the Erasmus+ programme) have a long track record in working towards increasing participation in international activities (often in international student mobility) of specific (underrepresented) groups, such as:

- students with disabilities (RANNIS, Iceland; FKA, Flemish Community of Belgium),
- students from a lower socio-economic background (FKA, Flemish Community of Belgium; OeAD, Austria),
- working students<sup>24</sup> (FKA, Flemish Community of Belgium),
- students without a higher education background (DAAD, Germany),
- students uninterested in study abroad irrespective of their personal situations (UHR, Sweden),
- students from underrepresented subject fields such as teacher training (Diku), or
- all students (EDUFI, Finland),

as further described in the case examples included in the Annex.

And they have done and continue to do so through a variety of means that include: national-level strategies, (marketing) campaigns, specific scholarship programmes and earmarked financial support, and projects in collaboration with higher education institutions in their countries, or by developing and testing different integration models.

## 3. CONSIDERATIONS FOR FURTHER ACTION

Building on the expertise of ACA member organisations in addressing wider inclusion in internationalisation through national-level actions, on the need for more inclusive internationalisation and reflecting on the current debate on a more inclusive Erasmus 2021-2027 programme, we would like to outline a number of considerations for developing further policies and actions:

1. **Build a holistic approach.** Achieving wider inclusion requires a comprehensive approach, and thus the collaboration of higher education stakeholders at different levels (European, national and institutional), as well as of other relevant authorities and ministries (e.g. Ministry of Health, of Interior, etc.) and service providers (e.g. disability centres, insurance companies, etc.). Additionally, collaboration with partner institutions from non-European countries is crucial, for addressing inclusion in mobility flows to and from these areas.
2. **Develop a joint multi-layered strategy** (European, national level and institutional). The various stakeholders should be involved in setting up a joint strategy on how to achieve inclusion in international higher education and/or in a specific programme, such as Erasmus 2021-2027. This joint approach would include: working towards developing a common terminology for referring to the different underrepresented groups; setting specific targets and develop comprehensive monitoring systems to be able to identify gaps in participation; and developing realistic planning and support services to widen participation and measure progress.
3. **Work with proper definitions and with a broad understanding of inclusion.** The underrepresented groups should be widely defined and also include groups that may not be underrepresented in higher education per se, but that become so in internationalisation activities (e.g. students in specific fields of study).

<sup>24</sup>Here we don't mean students with a student job, but people who have an actual (part time) job and are completing a study programme at the same time.

4. Listen to underrepresented groups and involve them in the design of measures aimed at widening inclusion in internationalisation. Communication and information campaigns for internationalisation activities need to address underrepresented groups and be designed to respond to their challenges. Using role models from the target group is helpful. Additional solutions should be developed together with the underrepresented groups themselves, and following a flexible, "access needs" approach to what the individual beneficiary would need in order to ensure full participation.
5. Avoid stigmatisation of underrepresented groups as much as possible. Underrepresented students very often do not want to be identified as belonging to a 'special' group, and therefore flexible solutions should be developed, that allow for these students' reach without stigmatisation.
6. Link internationalisation abroad and internationalisation at home activities. Widening inclusion in internationalisation should address both internationalisation *abroad* (outgoing mobility of staff and students, TNE) and internationalisation *at home* (the curriculum, incoming students – credit and degree-seeking – and their integration) activities, as well as activities combining *at home* and *abroad* elements, e.g. virtual mobility and blended learning (online formats), joint study programmes, programmes taught in foreign languages, summer and winter schools, etc.
7. Use multiple, flexible formats and approaches. Different formats for internationalisation and mobility are useful to strengthen inclusion, such as short-term mobility, virtual exchange, blended learning, etc. These new formats shall complement, but not replace longer-term physical mobility. They may be used as a first step/motivation towards longer-term physical mobility, and should nevertheless be paralleled by efforts to widen inclusion also in the 'standard' forms and activities.
8. Adapt financial conditions to the needs of the target groups - money matters! Widening inclusion does not come at no-cost. It requires additional

work for outreach, information as well as a need for adapting grant levels for mobility, portability of grants and enhanced supporting structures.

For example, financial barriers are cited as the most significant obstacle to going abroad for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, students with disabilities and working students. To ensure equal access to mobility programmes, targeted mobility grants towards underrepresented students are necessary. These grants should be based on actual regional living costs and should take all access costs into account (incl. pre-visits, interpreters etc.). Flexibility in calculation and pre-financing are of paramount importance. As students with disabilities, higher education institutions and national authorities experience problems with the transferability of grants and support services (e.g. availability of interpreters, access to health care), there should be an EU level agreement that allows governments to make mutual agreements on flexible transfer of grants and support services for access needs.

9. Provide tailor-made guidance and increased support services. Students from underrepresented groups may require extra levels of support before, during and after the mobility period. A lack of available and qualitative support before, during and after the mobility period, are currently discouraging students from underrepresented groups to take part in mobility programmes. Support with the application administration procedures, language courses that address particular access needs (e.g., courses for deaf students for EU mobility exchange), support with booking accommodation, applying for reasonable adjustments, mental health and medical services, access to peer support networks and reintegration support, are just a few examples of support services that should be realised.

In this context, we would also like to acknowledge and endorse the advice and recommendations put forward by other stakeholder groups active in this area, and specifically by the *Inclusive Mobility Alliance (IMA)*<sup>25</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> Inclusive Mobility Alliance (2019). Recommendations on making the Erasmus programme 2021-2017 more inclusive.  
<https://mapped.eu/sites/default/files/ima/IMA%20Recommendations%20-%20Final%20version.pdf>

## ANNEX – DETAILED NATIONAL CASE EXAMPLES

### Belgium (Flemish Community): Inclusive international mobility

In order to promote inclusion in international student mobility, the Flemish Ministry of Education & Training, the internationalisation organisations and the higher education institutions all cooperate to implement the following measures:

1. At least 25% of all scholarships for outgoing student mobility of the Mobility Action Plan “Brains on the Move”, funded by the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, have to be awarded to students from “underrepresented groups”, which include students from an economically disadvantaged background, students with disabilities and functional impairments and working students.

The implication of the 25% rule is that, in order to use the full budget, higher education institutions have to make efforts to identify these students and encourage them to apply for a mobility grant. Furthermore the grant amount for students from underrepresented groups is 200 euros per month higher than the regular grant amount.

The Flemish Ministry of Education and Training aims for 33% of mobile students to come from underrepresented groups by 2020.

2. The Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, in cooperation with Flanders Knowledge Area, organized conferences and promotion campaigns on mobility participation of underrepresented groups. The *Handbook on study and internships abroad* (2015) includes a chapter dedicated to students with disabilities.
3. EPOS, the Flemish Erasmus + National Agency implemented extra supports measures for students with disabilities or impairments. Beside the funding of extra needs costs, there is also funding available for preliminary visits to the student mobility destination for students with a disability and, if needed, for a trusted person to accompany the student on this preliminary visit.
4. SIHO is the Flemish Support Centre for Inclusive Higher Education. It was founded in 2009 by the Flemish Government when Belgium ratified the UN convention on the rights of persons with disabilities. The core responsibility of SIHO is supporting the implementation

of the UN convention by providing information, support and expertise to the higher education institutions and by drafting policy recommendations for the Flemish Ministry of Education & Training.

### Finland: Internationalisation for all – a national example

In 2016 CIMO (now EDUFI) implemented a project called “*Internationalization for all!*” which looked at equality in internationalisation, especially from the standpoint of internationalisation at home and from the perspective of attitudes. This project was a follow-up to a previous CIMO project under the same theme, which focused on equality of internationalisation opportunities in higher education, focusing specifically in international mobility.

*The main aims of the recent project were:*

- To improve equality in internationalisation in educational institutions
- To gather and share good practices and operating models for educational institutions to promote equality in internationalisation
- Influence young people's attitudes and raise their awareness of the benefits and competencies gained from internationalisation

The project Internationalization for all! had several outcomes<sup>26</sup>, such as:

- A report bringing together the results of the project's background survey as well as the good practices of the educational institutions in promoting equality in internationalisation. In addition, the report includes updated recommendations and tips for educational institutions.
- A presentation, which includes recommendations and implementation tips for educational institutions, education training providers and other actors to promote equality in internationalisation.
- Inspirational Youtube-videos featuring views of educational institutions personnel about equality in internationalisation.
- EDUFI's YouTuber – cooperation with two popular Finnish YouTubers to promote internationalisation for young people, who might not come across this topic elsewhere.

### Germany: Students without higher education background as special target group in DAAD's study abroad campaign

DAAD's campaign "Studieren Weltweit – ERLEBE ES!" aims to motivate German students going abroad. Germany has set itself a high target: 50% of German students shall benefit from some kind of mobility abroad. In order to increase current levels of student mobility, one needs to take into account the diversity of the student population today. 48% of all German students come from non-academic backgrounds, e.g. are the first generation pursuing higher education in their family and 20% have a migration background. Both groups are, however, less mobile.

In the framework of a DAAD conference "enhancing student mobility – social diversity and teacher training as challenge and chance"<sup>27</sup>, that took place in summer 2017, DAAD elaborated together with the target group (students and multipliers, such as "ArbeiterKind.de") an agenda for actions that would enhance outbound student mobility. It was decided to include students with a migration background in the group of students without higher education background ("first time academics") in order to avoid stigmatisation. The target group identified a number of challenges, among them funding (especially pre-funding), the lack of role models and support from the family as well as no target-group specific- and adequate information; and developed a set of recommendations for the DAAD, HEIs and policy-makers: early information in schools, easy to read and clear information, use of alumni, role models and testimonials, opportunities for pre-financing, cooperation with ArbeiterKind.de, etc. DAAD's campaign has taken on board some of these recommendations and has developed specific tools to reach students without higher education background. Besides this group, the campaign also targeted teacher training students and students with disabilities, as these groups were equally identified as being less mobile.

### Greece: Mobility for all, through IKY programmes

In 2018, IKY (the State Scholarships Foundation) as National Agency for the Erasmus+ programme launched an initiative, in order to promote mobility and inclusion of students from a lower socio-economic background. More specifically, students from disadvantaged backgrounds are entitled to an additional € 200 per month on the monthly grant received for mobility activities. This extra monthly grant provides extra motivation for students from low-income families to participate in mobility for studies or traineeships<sup>28</sup>.

IKY, aiming at the inclusion of pupils and higher education students from underprivileged social environments, also implemented the Erasmus+ Initiative 'Role Models'. Primary, secondary and vocational education teachers and HEIs students (peer counsellors), as well as prospective role models, received training after which a three month project was run in three regions in Greece.

Other IKY programmes focusing on mobility, social inclusion and internationalisation are the following:

- IKYDA Programme implemented by DAAD and IKY for sixteen (16) research teams for the promotion of exchange and scientific cooperation between Germany and Greece.
- Programme for Greek researchers studying at PhD or Postdoctoral level in European University Institute in Florence.
- Programme for international graduates on Greek Language and Culture for Foreign students in Greece: Fifty (50) graduates selected from Albania, Armenia, Belarus, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Cameroon, Chile, Colombia, Egypt, Ethiopia, France, Hungary, India, Italy, Iran, Kazakhstan, Montenegro, Morocco, Mozambique, Pakistan, Poland, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Sudan, Tanzania, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States, Venezuela, Vietnam.
- Programme for financial support of PhD students, from a lower economic background, at Greek Universities (NSRF 2014-2020).

<sup>26</sup><http://www.cimo.fi/tasa-arvo>

<sup>27</sup><https://www.studieren-weltweit.de/informationen-fuer-multiplikatoren/veranstaltungen/studentische-auslandsmobilitaet-erhohen/>

<sup>28</sup>Video on International Credit Mobility: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TPtIZXGCK7o&t=92s>,

Video on International Mobility – The Crete Trip 2018 by ESN Greece: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AcrykNn91hs>

### Iceland: Inclusion in mobility

Iceland participated for the first time in the EUROSSTUDENT survey in March 2018. The results showed that 39% of students in Iceland consider themselves to have an impairment, disability or other long-standing health problem, i.e. a higher share than in any other country participating in the survey. An astonishing 15% indicate mental health problems and 18% learning disabilities, while the EUROSSTUDENT averages are at 4% and 3% respectively. The results do not show whether impairments are more common in Iceland than elsewhere or if this simply reflects a relatively-open culture for being aware and enclosing one's disability. They do, however, show that a large proportion of Icelandic students sees themselves as having a condition that may cause limitations to their studies. This has an impact on mobility opportunities: students with a disability are underrepresented in exchange programme schemes such as Erasmus+, in which only four disabled students from Iceland have participated since 2014.

This is why Rannis has introduced an action plan with six pillars:

1. Enhanced information about Erasmus+ opportunities and funding;
2. Simplified application process for Erasmus+ special needs funding;
3. Diverse Role Models – diverse student body as Erasmus+ ambassadors;
4. Reinforced guidance to higher education institutions;
5. Collection of more reliable data;
6. Enhanced inclusion in Erasmus 2021-2027, through a) secured funding for underrepresented groups and b) flexibility in the activities.

It has, for instance, been pointed out that short-term mobility may be the solution for students who require intensive support, medical care, therapies and 24-hour assistance. This kind of flexibility may also be helpful for another underrepresented group in the Icelandic national context: students with children, which Rannis would like to identify as a target group for inclusion in the future programme.

### Norway: Internationalisation in teacher training<sup>29</sup>

NOTED was established in 2017 as part of the implementation of the Norwegian Government's strategy "Promotion of the status and quality of teachers – joint effort for a modern school of knowledge"<sup>30</sup> [Lærerløftet – på lag for kunnskapsskolen] and in connection with the introduction of five-year master's degree programmes for teachers in primary and lower secondary school (grunnskolelærerutdanning, GLU).

The programme supports higher education institutions in Norway that offer five-year GLU study programmes to establish and develop partnerships with relevant higher education institutions and schools abroad. Other teacher education programmes may be included in projects, if they contribute to improving the quality of the study programmes for teachers in primary and lower secondary school. Student mobility through strategic partnerships is a core element in the programme. All projects must include plans to increase mobility of students between partner institutions, including mobility in connection with teaching practice. Projects should be designed to increase student mobility not only within the project period, but also in the longer term.

The overall aim of the programme is to improve the quality of Norwegian teacher education and schools in Norway. The programme seeks to achieve this through supporting projects that lead to:

- Increased quality and internationalisation of teacher education programmes in Norway.
- Increased student mobility within the framework of strategic partnerships between Norwegian teacher education institutions and partners abroad, including mobility in connection with teaching practice.
- Increased staff mobility within the framework of strategic partnerships between Norwegian teacher education institutions and partners abroad.

<sup>29</sup><https://www.siu.no/content/download/88476/1078761/file/NOTED%20-%20Call%20for%20applications%202019.pdf>

<sup>30</sup><https://www.regjeringen.no/en/topics/education/innsikt/larerloftet/id2008159/>

### Poland: Programmes addressing underrepresented groups

In Poland, NAWA – the Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange – implements a number of programmes which embody activities and aim to provide incentives for increasing participation of underrepresented groups. For example:

- *PROM* – *International exchange scholarships for PhD students and academics* programme is offering scholarships only for short-term mobility, which is more accessible for PhD students with family or professional obligations.
- *Wilhelmina Iwanowska Programme of medium-term mobility of doctoral students* is offering an additional financial allowance for assisting person, for the participants that hold a certificate of severe or moderate disability.
- Two of NAWA's scholarship programmes for foreign students aim to support the socio-economic growth of developing countries by improving the knowledge and education of their citizens. These programmes offer scholarships for students to pursue second-cycle studies in Poland, and are financed by the Polish Development Aid Fund.
- Some of NAWA programmes are financed by the European Social Funds, so they encompass all equality requirements in relation to gender or disabilities. e.g. additional resources/funding for addressing the (specific) needs of people with disabilities.

### Sweden: The academic value of mobility – a Swedish initiative

The Swedish Council for Higher Education (UHR) conducted between 2014 and 2018 a project titled "*The Academic Value of Mobility*" to increase outward student mobility. The project was primarily financed by the EU (Erasmus+ KA3). The aim of the project was to propose measures that could increase the amount of outward exchange students.

The project had its starting point in a hypothesis that if the academic value of mobility becomes more obvious to the students, the number of outgoing students would increase. It would also strengthen the quality and attract new groups.

The project group identified several recommendations which highlighted the academic value of mobility. The measures focused on student counselling and internationalisation of the intended learning outcomes. The recommendations were tested by seven higher education institutions in order to see if they gave the intended results and to see if the proposed actions were feasible.

#### Project results

*Guidance* can be developed – coordinated, proactive guidance does deliver results. The project proposes proactive guidance on opportunities for student exchange from the very start of the study period, to then be repeated throughout the study period. The pilot projects confirm that guidance is more effective if HEIs coordinate the work of various staff categories and clarify the academic value of student exchanges.

The aim of increasing outward mobility has been partially achieved. Mobility has increased for several of the institutions that participated in the pilot projects on guidance, albeit from a low level. However, the clearest and perhaps most important conclusion of the pilot project's experiences is that internationalisation and mobility cannot be a priority for a single unit at a HEI. Coordinated efforts with shared objectives and participants from multiple areas of the HEI are necessary for success<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>31</sup>[https://www.uhr.se/globalassets/\\_uhr.se/internationell/bolognaprocessen/projekt-mobilitet/mobilitet\\_en\\_inlaga.pdf/](https://www.uhr.se/globalassets/_uhr.se/internationell/bolognaprocessen/projekt-mobilitet/mobilitet_en_inlaga.pdf/)

## ABOUT ACA

*Working under the motto “the European voice of national organizations for the internationalisation of higher education”, the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA) is a leading European association supporting research, innovative practice-development and smart policy-making in international higher education (HE). Created in 1993, as a member-driven platform, ACA provides a shared voice to national agencies for the internationalization of higher education in Brussels, and represents them in Europe, but also globally. Within ACA, the member organisations enhance their capacities and join forces in supporting and ‘doing’ future-oriented, top-quality internationalisation. ACA is also a brain-trust, with a long track record in conducting sound research and providing expert advice on key developments in international HE to universities, governments and supra-national organizations alike. ACA’s core membership and identity is distinctly European, ‘with an eye’ on global trends. The association is supported by a Brussels-based Secretariat that plays a coordinator and expert role for the membership.*