

IDEM Guidelines

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1. Introduction

Inclusion, Diversity, Equity in Mobility (IDEM¹) is a three-year Erasmus+ Cooperation project (KA2 Strategic Partnership) running from 2022 to 2025, involving five universities from the Unite! Alliance²: Technische Universität Darmstadt, Germany; Aalto University, Finland; Grenoble INP UGA, France; ULisboa, Portugal; and Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya, Spain.

Unite!, which stands for the University Network for Innovation, Technology and Engineering, is an alliance of nine esteemed European technological universities. It was launched in 2019 to contribute to the European Universities Initiatives, proposed by the European Commission and funded by the Erasmus+ and H2020 programs.³

The primary aim of the IDEM project is to increase the number of underserved students participating in mobility programmes and to actively co-create a European inter-university campus. This project idea was developed alongside the activities in the early phases of the Unite! Alliance. The IDEM project addresses not only the need to enhance the Unite! agenda by making the alliance more inclusive and diverse but

¹ idem-project.eu, "Inclusion, Diversity & Equity in Mobility," June 4, 2024, accessed January 1, 2025, <https://www.idem-project.eu/>.

² UNITE! University, "Unite! University," accessed January 1, 2025, <https://www.unite-university.eu/>.

³ UNITE! University, "Unite! University," accessed January 1, 2025, <https://www.unite-university.eu/>.

also the broader goal of contributing to the creation of a more inclusive society for all.

Inclusion, diversity, and equity are foundational values of the European Union (EU) and part of the core mission of Unite! Alliance. The Unite! Charter on Diversity and Inclusion defines **inclusion**

as a cross-sectional task, systematically embedded in the structure and development of all Unite! operations, to practically implement and realise equitable participation. We aim to increase representation of all marginalized groups as our efforts are always led by an anti-discriminatory approach. We continually reflect on our own work and actions to identify and eliminate structures and practices within our reach that generate or sustain unjust treatment and discrimination.

Furthermore, according to the Unite! Charter on Diversity and Inclusion,

diversity is a key guiding value for Unite!. We are convinced that our shared differences are an essential component of international and democratic cooperation, and further, a fundamental accelerator of social change and innovation. Therefore, we strive to ensure and maintain an environment that not only celebrates and welcomes diversity, but also offers opportunities and chances for personal growth and fulfilment regardless of individual differences.

Equity, in turn, can be defined as an aim to provide a non-discriminatory, equal, and accessible environment in which employees and students from diverse backgrounds receive equal opportunities and fair treatment and are free to study and work without discrimination. While equality is often viewed as treating everyone the same, equity involves offering individual support based on people's differing needs.

To navigate increasing diversity and to foster inclusive societies, the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes have made promoting inclusion and diversity one of their key aims for the 2021-2027 period. This aims to enable a greater number of individuals and wider target groups to participate in the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes.⁴ Similarly, according to the definition of the social dimension provided by the 2007 London Communiqué⁵ and expanded upon in the 2020 Rome Communiqué⁶, “the composition of the student body entering, participating in, and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the **diversity** of our populations” in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The social dimension encompasses “the creation of an inclusive environment in higher education that fosters equity, diversity, and is responsive to the needs of local communities.”⁷

⁴ European Commission, *Implementation Guidelines: Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Inclusion and Diversity Strategy*, version 1 (April 29, 2021), accessed January 4, 2025, https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2021-09/implementation-inclusion-diversity_apr21_en.pdf.

⁵ European Higher Education Area (EHEA), *London Ministerial Communiqué: Towards the European Higher Education Area: Responding to Challenges in a Globalised World*, Ministerial Conference, accessed January 1, 2025, https://ehea.info/Upload/document/ministerial_declarations/2007_London_Communique_English_58_8697.pdf.

⁶ European Higher Education Area (EHEA), *Rome Ministerial Communiqué: Annex II*, accessed January 1, 2025, https://ehea.info/Upload/Rome_Ministerial_Communique_Annex_II.pdf.

⁷ European Higher Education Area (EHEA), *Rome Ministerial Communiqué: Annex II*, accessed January 1, 2025, https://ehea.info/Upload/Rome_Ministerial_Communique_Annex_II.pdf.

In the IDEM project, **inclusive mobility** means creating and ensuring adequate conditions to learn, work, or volunteer abroad for people with fewer opportunities, by addressing their diverse support needs.⁸ These goals are crucial as students with fewer opportunities are still significantly underrepresented in conventional mobility programs, such as Erasmus+. People with fewer opportunities are defined as

people who, for economic, social, cultural, geographical or health reasons, due to their migrant background, or for reasons such as disability or educational difficulties or for any other reason, including a reason that could give rise to discrimination under Article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, face obstacles that prevent them from having effective access to opportunities under the programme.⁹

In addition to the term 'students with fewer opportunities', the terms 'students with disabilities, learning difficulties, and disadvantages' and 'underrepresented students' are commonly used in the relevant literature, each with slightly different meanings. However, for the sake of conciseness and consistency, this document will hereafter use the term '**underserved students**' to refer to all these groups. What these students have in common is that, due to the aforementioned factors, they often encounter barriers that prevent them from participating in mobility programmes on an equal footing with others.

⁸ epfime.inclusivemobility.eu, "EPFIME – Inclusive Mobility," accessed January 4, 2025, <https://epfime.inclusivemobility.eu/>.

⁹ European Commission, *Erasmus+ Programme Guide*, accessed January 1, 2025, <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-programme-guide>.

Despite these challenges, the ambitious recommendation ‘Europe on the move’¹⁰, adopted by the European Council in spring 2024, aims for at least 20% of all underserved students to have a learning experience in another EU country by 2027. This goal is crucial, as an earlier Erasmus+ initiative, ‘Establishing a thought-out Policy Framework for Inclusive Mobility across Europe (EPFIME)¹¹, found that international mobility offers comparable benefits for both underserved students, such as those with disabilities, and their peers without disabilities. These benefits include higher academic achievement, personal development, enhanced language skills, and increased confidence. In addition, students with disabilities have reported an improved self-perception after participating in mobility programmes, feeling more like their peers. Furthermore, compared to non-mobile students, those from underserved groups who go abroad tend to begin their career sooner, with higher starting salaries, and are less likely to experience long-term unemployment, thus facilitating upward mobility.

¹⁰ European Union, *Proposal for a Council Recommendation ‘Europe on the Move’ – Learning Mobility Opportunities for Everyone*, EUR-Lex - 52023DC0719 - EN - EUR-Lex, November 15, 2023, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=COM:2023:719:FIN>.

¹¹ epfime.inclusivemobility.eu, *Making Mobility Programmes More Inclusive for Students with Disabilities: Inclusive Mobility - Booklet of Policy Recommendations and Good Practices*, accessed January 1, 2025, https://epfime.inclusivemobility.eu/docs/Website_Booklet_Inclusive_MobilityTAGS.pdf.

To help achieve the ambitious goals set by the European Council, Commission, and others, the IDEM partnership aims to provide guidelines to facilitate the mobility of underserved students and ultimately increase their participation in such programmes. Moreover, IDEM seeks to offer practical tools to further enhance the institutional commitment to the Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Accessibility (IDEA) policies at the partner universities. By signing the Erasmus+ Charter¹², the IDEM partners have already committed to ensuring equal access and opportunities to participants from all backgrounds and to reaching out to underserved groups through their inclusion strategies.

This institutional commitment is also reflected in the project name, 'IDEM', a Latin term meaning 'the same', which encapsulates the ultimate goal of this partnership: to give underserved students the same opportunities to benefit from mobility programmes as everyone else, while recognizing their unique needs.

This document, ***Inclusion, Diversity, Equity in Mobility (IDEM) – Guidelines for Inclusive Mobility in Higher Education Institutions*** (hereafter ***IDEM Guidelines***), is one of the two main outputs of the IDEM project. The *IDEM Guidelines* aim to provide a roadmap for mobility officers, support services, administrations, and departments to facilitate inclusive mobility, as these stakeholders can play a key role in making it a reality.

¹² European Commission, *Erasmus Charter for Higher Education*, last updated February 28, 2024, <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/resources-and-tools/erasmus-charter-for-higher-education>.

This document is organised into the following sections: Chapter 1 offers a short introduction to the topic and outlines the purpose of the document. Chapter 2 reviews the methods used to produce the other IDEM outputs, which form the basis of the *IDEM Guidelines*. Most importantly, Chapters 3 to 8 highlight the empowering and disempowering factors for underserved students before, during, and after mobility. Based on these factors, the chapters provide Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) with evidence-based guidelines for delivering inclusive mobility. Finally, Chapter 9 draws some conclusions on the *IDEM guidelines*, discusses their limitations, and points to potential future Erasmus+ initiatives.

This document is accompanied by the *IDEM Guidelines with Questions*. The aim of this abridged version of the *IDEM Guidelines* is to strengthen institutional commitment to their implementation by offering key stakeholders accessible questions, which can help identify the individuals responsible for executing the guidelines in each institution and establish ways to monitor progress more effectively.

The underserved students reported the dis/empowering factors presented in this document in the Inclusion Training, Bootcamp I and II, and through Questionnaires – the key activities implemented during the IDEM project. Incorporating the experiences of underserved students into the *IDEM guidelines* for HEIs is crucial for several reasons:

- 1) Identifying Gaps: Students' experiences can help identify gaps in the current mobility programmes and services. By incorporating their feedback, institutions can better understand the challenges students face and make improvements to ensure inclusivity in mobility programmes.
- 2) Tailoring Support: Students' experiences provide valuable insight into the specific barriers they face before, during, and after mobility. Understanding these challenges allows institutions to tailor support services to meet individual needs, ensuring equal opportunities for all students to participate in mobility programmes.
- 3) Promoting Equity: Listening to students' experiences demonstrates an institution's commitment to equity and inclusion. This fosters a more welcoming and supportive environment for all students, regardless of their background or abilities.
- 4) Enhancing Programme Effectiveness: Understanding students' experiences enables institutions to design more effective programmes that better address the diverse needs of students. By incorporating their insights, institutions can create more meaningful and impactful mobility experiences.

Since inclusive mobility involves planning, implementation, and return phases, it is crucial to address all of them to create a clear and well-managed exchange process for students with diverse backgrounds, abilities, and needs. This approach aligns with the Implementation Guidelines of Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Inclusion and Diversity Strategy.¹³

¹³ European Commission, *Implementation Guidelines – Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Inclusion and Diversity Strategy*, accessed January 1, 2025, <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/document/implementation-guidelines-erasmus-and-european-solidarity-corps-inclusion-and-diversity-strategy>.

2. Methods

To enable underserved students to enjoy similar opportunities for mobility programmes as other students, the IDEM project implemented four key activities: Inclusion Training, Bootcamp I and II, and Questionnaires, which together informed the development of the *IDEM Guidelines*. To avoid fundamental biases associated with relying on a single method, multiple data collection methods (methodological triangulation¹⁴) were used to explore the research question: What are the dis/empowering factors in mobility for underserved students? Despite criticisms, triangulation in research has been recognised for providing a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being studied than a single approach would.^{15,16} Below is a brief explanation of the Inclusion Training, Bootcamp I and II, and the Questionnaires, with links provided for further details on their methodologies.

2.1 Inclusion Training

To prototype inclusive mobility for underserved students, IDEM developed an inclusion training involving students from underserved groups in mobility

¹⁴ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, *Successful Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide for Beginners* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2013).

¹⁵ Roberta Heale and Dorothy Forbes, "Understanding Triangulation in Research," *Evidence-Based Nursing* 16, no. 4 (2013).

¹⁶ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, *Successful Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide for Beginners* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2013).

programmes, as well as teachers, mobility officers, and technicians working with these students. A total of 30 participants from the five IDEM universities took part in the training session. The training combined group work with interactive theoretical workshops and aimed to achieve three main objectives:

1. To raise awareness and facilitate inclusion in international exchange programmes for underserved students.
2. To promote effective communication and collaboration among various stakeholders.
3. To employ the Universal Design Thinking methodology as a first step in prototyping inclusive mobility guidelines based on the different IDEM project activities.

The students and staff shared their views during the training. One student remarked, *“I was invited to join this programme because I am a student with a disability. It felt right for me to share the struggles I face daily and the factors I need to consider before embarking on an Erasmus+ experience”*.

This training served as a starting point for identifying the necessary changes required to implement the proposed solutions for inclusive mobility. The *Inclusion Training in Higher Education Guidelines for Trainers* handbook can be found [here](#).

2.2 Bootcamp I

Bootcamp I was developed as an interactive, hands-on event to better understand the decision-making process and the factors leading to self-exclusion from mobility. During Bootcamp I, 18 students with varying abilities and needs—both with and without mobility experience—collaborated with 21 members of faculty and staff from the five partner universities to identify common challenges related to self-exclusion and the decision-making process in student mobility, as well as to prototype potential solutions to address these challenges.

During the three days of work, participants were guided through creativity methods, empathy exercises, and personal introspection to identify the personal and structural challenges that lead to self-exclusion. After identifying these [challenges](#), participants prototyped the possible solutions that could be used by the IDEM project itself, as well as by other initiatives to inspire their work. The outcomes and prototypes can be found in [Bootcamp I Report](#).

2.3 Bootcamp II

The second IDEM Bootcamp, like the first, was a practical, hands-on event aimed at deepening understanding of the factors leading to psychological safety and inclusive environments. This Bootcamp engaged 48 persons, including 23 students, 25 staff/faculty members from the five partner universities, and one external guest. Bootcamp II was planned as a three-phase event. The first phase focused on reviewing the results achieved up to that point, ensuring all participants were on the same page

regarding the IDEM project and the purpose of the bootcamp. The second phase concentrated on the two topics of the bootcamp, Psychological Safety and Inclusive Environments, using two group dynamics (Psychological Safety Workshop & User Journey) to gather relevant inputs and information. The third phase was dedicated to organising information and co-creating outputs and conclusions. The Bootcamp II Report can be found [here](#).

The Psychological Safety Workshop and the User Journey were conducted in accordance with universal design principles and built upon the learnings from Bootcamp I to create safe environments and activities that were adaptable enough to meet the needs of most participants.

Psychological safety profoundly shapes decision-making processes and is rooted in principles from psychology and neuroscience. It empowers individuals. Psychologically safe people are more inclined to express themselves genuinely, feel more confident in making decisions, take more risks, collaborate effectively, and make meaningful contributions. Conversely, the absence of psychological safety can trigger self-doubt, insecurity, and disengagement, limiting individuals from realising their full potential. Psychological safety was explored during the workshop within the framework of higher education mobility programmes. The workshop aimed to pinpoint obstacles, devise strategies for fostering inclusive environments, and gather insights to refine mobility programs into more supportive structures to underserved students.

A User Journey is a method used in User Experience Research to gather information directly from the users of a product or service. Guided through different steps by the facilitators, participants started sharing information and empathising with students about their real experiences during mobility to identify the different steps of the process. After that, to identify the key actors, participants worked in small groups to delve in to each step, focusing on the main difficulties and emotions experienced. The groups finally worked on the pains and gains of the user through each step and sought to identify possible opportunities for improvement. The detailed methodology of the User Journey can be found in [the Bootcamp II Report](#).

2.4 Questionnaires

To further understand the mobility experiences of underserved students, a three-part online questionnaire was employed to track their experiences before (background information, planning and organising), during, and after mobility. The Questionnaires can be seen in

Appendix 1. Questionnaires on Mobility Experiences During the IDEM Project.

Primarily, underserved students participating in mobility programmes in Unite! Alliance partner universities between 2022 and 2024 were invited to respond to the questionnaires. However, due to the small number of underserved students participating in these programmes during this period, responses from underserved students outside the Unite! network were also accepted if their host university belonged to the Unite! Alliance. The pre-exchange questionnaires (background

information, planning and organising) were sent by the home university IDEM representatives, while the during and after questionnaires were distributed by the host university IDEM representatives.

In total, data concerning the mobility experiences of underserved students at the following Unite! universities were collected: Aalto University, Finland; Grenoble INP UGA, France; Technische Universität Darmstadt, Germany; ULisboa, Portugal; Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya; Politecnico di Torino, Italy; KTH, Sweden; and WroclawTech, Poland. Thirty-five students responded to the Before (Background information) questionnaire, 18 to the Before (Planning and organising) questionnaire, 31 to the During questionnaire, and 18 to the After questionnaire. Not all respondents responded to each question. The main themes from these responses are summarised in Chapters 3, 5, and 7. Additionally, responses pertaining to specific host universities are summarized in [Appendix 2. Student Experiences During Mobility with Their Dis/empowering Factors per Host University.](#) and [Appendix 3. Student Experiences After Mobility with their Dis/Empowering Factors per Host University.](#)

3. Student Experiences and Their Dis/empowering Factors Before Mobility

This chapter discusses the experiences and challenges faced by students in the pre-mobility phase, addressing key issues such as information dissemination, outreach, financial concerns, academic planning, and cultural preparation, as well as

empowering factors for overcoming these challenges. It integrates the results from all relevant key activities of the IDEM project: Inclusion Training, Bootcamp I, Bootcamp II, and the pre-mobility Questionnaires. The chapter highlights both dis/empowering factors behind the students' experiences in each data source, informing **4. Guidelines for Inclusive Pre-Mobility Experiences**.

3.1 Inclusion Training

Throughout the Inclusion Training, decision-making emerged as a central focus of discussion: participating students identified self-exclusion as a critical factor influencing their consideration of participation in mobility programs. The disempowering factors included a lack of clear information and the issue of students receiving funding after mobility, which excludes those without savings. While factors leading to disempowerment are well-known and have been thoroughly investigated by other Erasmus+ projects, such as SIEM¹⁷, participants at the IDEM Inclusion Training also explored factors that could encourage students to participate in mobility programmes.

The following factors were identified as potentially empowering for considering mobility: a centralised website showcasing inclusive universities and their support

¹⁷ siem-project.eu, "Social Inclusion & Engagement in Mobility," accessed January 1, 2025, <https://siem-project.eu/>.

services, and an Inclusion Office or team at each university dedicated to advocacy, counselling, and addressing the lack of information regarding mobility for students with specific needs. Additionally, practical information and services were considered vital, including timely, visual, accessible, and targeted information in relevant languages with personal experiences consolidated in one place; welcome webinars to reduce loneliness, provide information, and raise awareness of existing support; pre-departure information; student ambassadors; and a checklist to identify students' specific personal, academic, and social needs along with available services in the host institution. The Inclusion Training helped define self-exclusion as the main focus of Bootcamp I.

3.2 Bootcamp I

In Bootcamp I, participants identified a "[wall of challenges](#)" related to the decision-making process for mobility and the mechanisms leading to self-exclusion. After identifying these challenges, small groups brainstormed solutions for five key disempowering factors: health-related challenges; feeling responsibility toward others; overcoming loneliness (e.g., fear of being lonely and rejected, difficulty interacting); lack of self-confidence; and reluctance to ask for help.

Empowering factors for addressing these challenges included uniting students and educating staff about the experiences and challenges of underserved students; creating networks of students willing to serve as ambassadors to share their experiences; supporting and enhancing student engagement in extracurricular

activities to foster socialisation and interaction with peers; creating an environment where students feel empowered to make mobility decisions without the fear of exclusion; and encouraging students to seek help and connect with their peers for support.

3.3 Bootcamp II

Bootcamp II focused on psychological safety and creating an inclusive environment. The workshop on psychological safety revealed that, before mobility, several factors contributed to fostering students' 'best selves' and a more empowered mindset. These included pre-mobility testimonials, student union-organised meetings, a deeper understanding of the Erasmus+ Programme, staff who anticipated and addressed special needs, and students being actively listened to and asked for their opinions. The findings from this workshop complemented those from the user journey, the second Bootcamp II activity.

The Bootcamp II User Journey revealed that students' pre-mobility experiences were characterised by uncertainty, anxiety, worry, loneliness, doubt, and feelings of being overwhelmed. Students identified unclear and incomplete information as the primary disempowering factor during various stages of pre-mobility, including decision-making, attending information sessions on mobility, gathering information, securing financial support, choosing a host institution, applying, finding accommodation, and travelling to their destination. However, once they had

navigated the pre-mobility phase, students reported feeling confident, enthusiastic, hopeful, relieved, safe, excited, and accomplished.

The empowering factors for overcoming the challenges mentioned included access to clear information, reading mobility reports, contact with returning students, using disability and diversity support offices and websites, talking with administrative and teaching staff, putting effort into the application process, connecting with locals, and asking for help. Additionally, students identified several potential areas for university improvement that could empower them further, including a mobility report database with details on economic conditions, ways to find accommodation, and social networks; face-to-face meetings with students who had participated in mobility; student associations at mobility fairs; organising events to share experiences; clearer information on financial support; greater transparency in the application process and course validation; Telegram or WhatsApp groups for students on mobility; university websites providing information on student life in the host country; services for students with special needs at airports and train stations; a pick-up service for students with special needs from airports; and having a direct contact person for extra financial support for students travelling with an assistant.

3.4 Questionnaires on Student Experiences Before Mobility

The first questionnaire on student experiences before mobility provided background information about the potentially disempowering factors for student mobility, such as barriers to mobility, disability-related challenges in learning and daily life, and

other types of challenges. Various barriers to mobility were reported, including health problems, barriers linked to education system and cultural differences, as well as social, economic, and geographical barriers. Other factors, such as discrimination, immigrant background and non-EU status, were also highlighted. While some students reported only one barrier, others indicated intersecting challenges.

Although some disabilities were mentioned as disempowering factors for pursuing studies and practical work due to a lack of motivation, focus, organisational skills, and panic attacks, only generalised anxiety was reported to negatively affect attendance. No adaptations were reported as necessary for these students' accommodation or daily assistance due to their disabilities. Furthermore, no disability-related challenges with learning facilities were mentioned either. It was unclear from the reported challenges with communication and social interactions whether issues such as isolation, shyness, language barriers, loneliness, prejudice, and discrimination were related to disabilities per se. Most students reported no long-term conditions requiring regular medical check-ups, with only a few needing them every few weeks or months.

None of the students had individual study arrangements at their home universities; one reported having no idea whether they existed in their home university; and another noted that they did not know what individual study arrangement meant. This may imply that either the IDEM project did not manage to attract students with individual study arrangements, these students excluded themselves from mobility, those participating in IDEM did not want to disclose their need for such arrangements, or that there is still a lack of such practices in some of

the IDEM universities. As a result, the *IDEM Guidelines* lack suggestions for specific support related to students with individual study arrangements in the IDEM partner universities.

On the other hand, financial challenges were emphasised by many students (particularly those outside the EU) as disempowering, as they needed to work alongside their studies or rely on parental financial support. While students attempted to address their financial challenges through Erasmus+ and other grants, the insufficiency of these funds was mentioned several times.

Being a first-generation student was more disempowering for some than others, with issues including financial strain, parents having to work harder, hidden pressure to succeed, and a lack of understanding from their parents. Other family-related challenges included divorce, the loss of a parent, ill health, solo parenting, caregiving responsibilities, and financial problems.

The second questionnaire on student experiences before mobility provided information about the dis/empowering factors in planning and organising mobility, covering important topics such as finding information and arranging formalities. In addition, it provided information about support needed versus what was available and students hopes and fears regarding mobility.

Students felt that mobility opportunities were not well-promoted, leaving many unaware of the available support. There was a general lack of dedicated communication channels tailored to under-represented groups, leading to insufficient awareness of opportunities and support. Information often came through word of mouth rather than through official channels. Although current

promotional efforts may include diverse imagery, they lack genuine engagement and outreach, prompting a call for deeper conversations and more authentic representation in promotional materials.

Scholarships often do not cover the full costs of living abroad, and delays in receiving financial aid can prevent economically vulnerable students from participating in mobility programs. On the other hand, some believed that opportunities were equally available to all students and that rejection was unrelated to minority status. However, this perception overlooks the specific barriers faced by under-represented students.

The most common channels for finding information about exchange or host universities included university websites, the internet, Erasmus coordinators, personal networks, faculty and staff, and earlier exchange students. While many students found the information easy to locate and clearly displayed on faculty websites, others struggled to find it, reporting that it was not well-advertised or easily accessible without proactive searching. Specific difficulties were noted regarding information on thesis opportunities abroad and guidelines for postgraduate internships. Understanding the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) accreditation process was also challenging for some, although departmental tutors were found to be helpful.

Regarding the inclusivity of information, many students felt that it was clear, detailed, and met their needs. In contrast, a few suggested that the documents could be more accessible, noting that presenting information as a list may not cater to

different learning preferences. Suggestions were made for videos explaining the process, indicating a preference for multimedia formats over text-based documents.

Concerning the awareness and use of social top-ups or additional support, some students were aware of these options and had either applied or planned to apply, but many were unaware or unsure how to access them. One student highlighted the delay in receiving additional financial help, suggesting potential issues with the timely disbursement of funds. Several students expressed a desire to learn more about the support options and how to apply, indicating a gap in communication and information dissemination.

As for differences in social security systems between countries, some students found useful information on university websites, while others did not. A few students noticed substantial differences through personal experiences or interactions with peers from other countries.

Finally, many students felt they had sufficient information about mobility, often thanks to comprehensive guides, effective coordinators, and diligent research. However, there was a desire for a single comprehensive document containing all necessary information to streamline the process and reduce the need for extensive personal research. Some students valued informal conversations with peers who had attended the same host university, suggesting a need for more structured sharing of these experiences. Others preferred a clear, step-by-step guide to help them navigate the process. More information on support for social inclusion was also highlighted as a need.

Arranging formalities related to students' specific situations included informing the university about long-term illnesses, arranging necessary support, and wishing for help with finding accommodation due to their difficulties.

The biggest challenges in organising mobility experiences were securing accommodation, taking care of complex and arduous bureaucracy and paperwork (lack of centralised platform for submission), financial issues (delays in scholarships, cost of living), health and personal needs in different health care systems, visa issues, communicating with host university (including receiving timely responses), and general uncertainty caused by a lack of clear guidance.

For organising mobility, students primarily received informational support from programme coordinators, staff, friends, colleague, info sessions, and emails. Emotional support typically came from friends and family, while health-related support was provided by healthcare professionals. Several students indicated that the support received was sufficient, with many emphasising the value of communication with peers who had gone through similar experiences. This peer-to-peer exchange was crucial in navigating the process effectively. In addition, the guidance and motivation provided by support personnel were key factors in successfully organising mobility. Those who received financial support via an Erasmus+ grant found it particularly important in easing their financial burden, especially concerning accommodation costs. However, concerns were raised about the timing of financial support, particularly with Erasmus+ grants. Students emphasised the importance of receiving full financial assistance upfront, rather than in instalments to better manage expenses during mobility.

Key themes for the students' hopes and aspirations for mobility included cultural exchange (engaging with diverse cultures and perspectives), personal development (enhancing independence, resilience, and adaptability), career advancement (accessing better job opportunities and professional networks), language and skills (improving language proficiency and acquiring new academic and practical skills), social connections (building global networks and friendships), and academic enrichment (accessing resources and learning methods not available at home).

On the other hand, students feared the following aspects about mobility: academic performance (meeting high academic standards and passing courses), financial stability (managing expenses and the adequacy of financial support), cultural adaptation (adjusting to new cultural norms and social dynamics), family support (ensuring support for family and health concerns), administrative challenges (dealing with bureaucratic hurdles and paperwork), social integration (connecting with locals and overcoming communication barriers), mental health (maintaining well-being and managing stress levels), and educational value (fear of missing out on deeper educational experiences or career opportunities due to language barriers or superficial engagement in the host country).

4. Guidelines for Inclusive Pre-Mobility Experiences

Based on the student experiences reported in the Inclusion Training, Bootcamp I, Bootcamp II, and the Pre-Mobility Questionnaires, the following guidelines are

offered for HEIs to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for underserved students considering mobility programmes.

4.1 Provide Clear and Accessible Information

Comprehensive and Centralised Information: Ensure that all information regarding mobility programmes, support services, and application processes is clearly articulated and easily accessible in multiple languages. Establish a dedicated website or platform that consolidates all relevant information, including inclusion offices and student testimonials. In developing this website, consider the digital divide by providing alternatives for students with limited access to technology or those facing digital literacy challenges. Create offline or low-tech resources for students unable to access online platforms and ensure that any technological solutions are complemented by in-person or traditional methods to ensure equitable access.

4.2 Establish Dedicated Support Services

Inclusion Offices and Peer Support Networks: Each university should have an Inclusion Office or Team that advocates for mobility students with specific needs, offers advice on completing mobility-related paperwork (also in a drop-in or mobility clinic style), and responds promptly to inquiries related to mobility. Implement student ambassador programmes where current students share their experiences and support prospective students, fostering a supportive environment and alleviating fears of loneliness and rejection.

4.3 Facilitate Decision-Making and Reduce Self-Exclusion

Inclusive Promotion, Comprehensive Guides, and Emotional Training: Promote mobility opportunities through dedicated communication channels tailored to underrepresented groups, ensuring promotional materials, such as brochures, genuinely engage diverse student experiences. Collaborate with student guild boards/ spokespersons who know which communication channels students use. Collaborate with persons in charge of individual study arrangements at schools to reach underserved students. Develop clear, step-by-step guides with timelines and milestones to streamline the mobility process and consider using videos to explain the process effectively. Integrate emotional intelligence training, such as Emotional Awareness Workshops, to help students recognise and manage emotional barriers related to mobility decisions.

4.4 Offer Pre-Mobility Preparation

Welcome Webinars and Checklists for Personalised Support: Host inclusive welcome webinars to introduce incoming students to university life, local culture, and support services. Provide [checklists](#) for students to identify specific academic, social, personal or well-being needs and engage mobility coordinators to ensure these needs are addressed throughout the mobility experience.

4.5 Enhance Psychological Safety and Emotional Support

Workshops and Peer-to-Peer Exchange: Organise workshops on psychological safety and inclusivity, educating staff and students about the challenges faced by

underserved students. Encourage peer-to-peer exchanges through social networks and support groups, which are crucial for effectively navigating mobility.

4.6 Provide Financial and Administrative Support

Transparency and Bureaucratic Assistance: Ensure clarity regarding financial support options, including scholarships and grants. Address concerns about delayed funding disbursement. Streamline bureaucratic processes with a centralised platform for submissions and clear guidelines for visa applications, health care access, and accommodation arrangements.

4.7 Promote Cultural and Social Integration

Social Integration Programs: Organise mobility fairs, cultural exchanges, and other events that facilitate interaction between local and international students, promoting cultural understanding and alleviating fears of social isolation. Offer language courses to help students overcome language barriers.

4.8 Utilise Technology for Better Communication

Social Media Groups and Comprehensive Mobility Database: Create social media groups (e.g., WhatsApp, Instagram) for students on mobility to foster community and provide real-time support. Develop a mobility report database with information on economic situations, accommodation options, and student life in different host countries.

4.9 Ensure Accessibility and Inclusivity

Accessibility Standards: Ensure all information and services meet accessibility standards, including accommodations for students with disabilities in both digital and physical environments.

4.10 Use Continuous Feedback for Improvement

Student Feedback Surveys: Regularly solicit feedback from students about their pre-mobility experiences to identify areas for improvement and refine support services and information accessibility accordingly.

4.11 Establish Partnerships and Collaborations

External Partnerships: Collaborate with external organisations, host institutions, and local communities to enhance support networks and provide comprehensive resources for students during their mobility experience.

5. Student Experiences and Their Dis/Empowering Factors During Mobility

This chapter explores the experiences, needs, and challenges of underserved students during their mobility period addressing key areas such as cultural adjustment, language support, mentorship, social and academic integration, as well as health and well-being. It integrates the results from the IDEM key activities aimed at improving inclusivity during mobility: Bootcamp II, the Questionnaire on during mobility, and the host university-specific parts of the Questionnaire on after mobility.

The chapter highlights both enabling and disempowering factors behind the students' experiences, setting the stage for

6. Guidelines for Inclusive During Mobility Experiences.

5.1 Bootcamp II

From the psychological safety workshop, we identified triggers that activate either one's 'best self' state during the mobility period—associated with adaptive and empowering responses—or one's 'worst self' state, linked to less adaptive or disempowering responses. Triggers that activate disempowering states of mind can be categorized as follows: feelings of exclusion and loneliness, negativity and judgments, challenges with communication and language, bureaucracy and logistical issues, inadequate support and responsiveness, lack of respect and identity issues, academic challenges and attitude problems, safety and accessibility concerns, and financial struggles.

Conversely, triggers that activate empowering states of mind include positive environment and relationships, support and recognition, effective communication and teaching, sense of belonging and acceptance, efficiency, easy accommodation, clear information, and minimal bureaucracy. These findings from the workshop align with the outcomes from the User Journey, the second Bootcamp II activity.

The user journeys revealed that students' experiences during mobility were characterised by feelings of social anxiety, fear of missing out, being lost, overwhelmed, and helpless. The disempowering factors behind these feelings included non-inclusive forms, decentralised information, language and communication barriers, culture shock, different teaching/ evaluation methods and expectations, a lack of assistance for specific needs, and challenges with learning and adapting to different cultural codes and social norms.

Overcoming these challenges made students feel relieved, a sense of belonging, self-confident, independent, free, emotionally stable, proud, accomplished, excited, joyful, positive energy, happy in new surroundings, learn to ask for help, and place trust in the new community. They reported being empowered by several factors, including accessing university services (e.g., Inclusion Office); using apps; talking to tutors, other students, locals, with professors and student support staff. They engaged in study groups, proactively sought for information, maintained a positive attitude, remained aware of their own resources, attended orientation activities, tried to engage in various organised extra-curricular activities, interacted with student ambassadors, used different media to find suitable social outlets, and attended intercultural training and language courses.

Other potential sources of empowerment included physical support from admission office staff, appointment booking platforms, meetings with inclusion officers, accessible health services, transportation for special needs, tutors and

mentors, and workshops on maintaining daily routines. Furthermore, a clear timetable in Moodle, language courses, psychological safety measures, and accessible campus facilities were considered potential sources of empowerment.

5.2 Questionnaire on Student Experiences During Mobility

This section reviews student experiences regarding reception, orientation week, feeling welcome, participation in student life, facing prejudice or discrimination, the embracing of diversity, comfort in self-expression, inclusivity in teaching, barriers to learning, equity of opportunities, and the dis/empowering factors at their host universities. A more detailed break-up of these experiences per Unite! host university is available in [Appendix 2. Student Experiences During Mobility with Their Dis/empowering Factors per Host University](#). The host universities should consider the more detailed student experiences in Appendix 2. for further insights on their respective inclusivity as the results clearly differ.

Based on the questionnaire data, most students felt well received by their host universities, with only a few expressing poor receptions. Empowering factors included student guilds, associations, tutors, orientation week with readily available information, contact with staff, and many events. Disempowering factors included local students excluding foreign students.

Most students reported having participated in the orientation week. Empowering factors included a willingness to engage and accessible information.

Disempowering factors were the absence of orientation programmes for some courses and students' unwillingness to integrate.

Students reported mixed feelings about being welcomed at their host universities. Empowering factors included tutor groups, respect for other cultures, equality with locals, friendly staff, various events, active ESN, local students, and weather. Disempowering factors included exclusion by local students, no orientation or casual events with locals, and unresponsive staff.

The students felt both able and unable to fully participate in student life. Empowering factors included events being conducted in English and reasonably priced, a variety of activities open to all, readily available information, and assistance from teachers and students with language support. Disempowering factors, on the other hand, included a lack of information or events, a lack of interest, excessive administrative work, and too much schoolwork.

While many students felt integrated into student life, others did not. Empowering factors included tutors, responsive staff, equal treatment, ESN activities, and a diverse range of events. Disempowering factors included the lack of formal integration mechanisms, difficulties making friends with locals, and events hosted by other universities.

Most students reported having faced no prejudice or discrimination at their host university. Empowering factors included open-mindedness and respect at their host universities.

Diversity was generally well embraced, with empowering factors such as availability of resources in English, international student life, and respect for different cultures. Disempowering factors included courses being taught in the local language, despite earlier information suggesting they would be in English.

For the most part, the students reported feeling comfortable being themselves and not needing to hide their challenges. Empowering factors included everyone being kind, respectful, and open-minded; one's own self-confidence; non-judgmental and helpful teachers, students, colleagues, and atmosphere; as well as 'being comfortable being yourself' being exemplified by both teachers and students. Disempowering factors included a lack of self-confidence as well as cultural or language barriers.

Students were divided in their views on the inclusivity of teaching. Empowering factors included interactive, practically oriented teaching involving everyone, accommodating teachers, group work, multilingualism, students being treated like adults with autonomy to choose how to engage. Disempowering factors were different teaching styles; opinionated, close-minded teachers, harsh with students unable to speak the local language; lower-level teaching; last minute changes in teaching; poor-quality materials; and unsuitable teaching methods.

While some students experienced no obstacles to their learning, others faced barriers such as language difficulties, unsuitable teaching methods or a lack of teaching, difficulties finding a place to study on campus, and too much independent work.

In terms of equity of opportunities, most students reported fairness, although some felt discriminated against, particularly regarding internship applications, double-degree status, and the language of instruction.

During mobility, students engaged in academic and social activities such as studying, attending events, and participating in cultural activities. This shows that students are actively seeking opportunities to bond and engage in shared experiences both within and outside the academic setting. However, some students felt lonely, indicating a need for more integration events, mental health support, and assistance with practical matters like accommodation to overcome these challenges.

Furthermore, some students experienced feelings of homesickness, while others did not. Those who felt homesick missed their home, family, and familiar surroundings to varying degrees, and others expressed nostalgia for aspects of their home country, such as food. However, many students also expressed positive experiences and a sense of enjoyment during their time abroad, which can mitigate feelings of homesickness.

When asked about their fears and concerns regarding mobility during their mobility, some students mentioned that they had no fears or concerns at all. For those with fears or concerns, disempowering factors included adapting to new academic systems, financial concerns, language and cultural challenges, stress over academic workload and integration, and delayed Erasmus grants.

5.3 Questionnaire on Student Experiences After Mobility

This section summarises the student experiences regarding their host universities after mobility, covering perspectives such as what went well, whether their mobility expectations were met, the inclusivity of the host university, whether they would recommend it to other students, and areas for improvement. Although these experiences were collected post-mobility, the content is directly related to what occurred during mobility. Therefore, these responses are reported in Chapter 5.

Student Experiences and Their Dis/Empowering Factors During Mobility. A more detailed breakdown of these experiences by Unite! host university is available in **Appendix 3. Student Experiences After Mobility with their Dis/Empowering Factors per Host University.** As the responses vary significantly between host universities, these detailed experiences in Appendix 3 should also be considered by the institutions for further insights into their respective inclusivity.

Based on the host university-specific post-mobility data, students generally felt their overall experience was positive, with many aspects working well, including arrival, welcome, student life, integration, admission, course selection and completion, and communication with teachers and peers. Empowering factors behind these positive experiences included orientation week; friendliness of locals, teachers, and staff; prior knowledge of the local language and subjects; friendships and well-planned studies.

Students reported that several of their mobility expectations were met, such as personal growth, meeting new people, learning the local language and about new cultures, applying theory to practice, improving fieldwork skills, gaining motivation and resilience, spending time in nature, and travelling. Empowering factors behind these fulfilled expectations included events organised by student associations, personal effort, and the patience and support of peers and teachers.

However, students also reported unmet expectations, such as being unable to engage in desired hobbies, integrate into the university, travel the country, connect with local students, meet new people, learn the language, benefit from courses, or participate in group work. Disempowering factors contributing to these feelings included hobbies offered at a different level, exclusion from lab work, locals being unapproachable, and a lack of personal effort.

Most students found their host universities to be largely inclusive. Empowering factors behind this perception included the use of English in all courses and by everyone, positive learning experiences, an emphasis on happiness, the inclusion of all students regardless of challenges, international friendships, approachable teachers, available help from peers and teachers, and various events designed to integrate foreign students. In contrast, disempowering factors at less inclusive universities included a lack of interest from locals in integrating with exchange students and limited use of English.

Students indicated that they would recommend their host university for mobility to other underserved students, if not for academic reasons, then at least for the

overall positive experience. Empowering factors included personal and professional growth, inclusivity, and the uniqueness of certain universities.

Students also identified areas for improvement in teaching and services at some host universities. Regarding teaching, they wished for more group work, interactive teaching, access to equipment, on-campus courses in English, better orientation to bureaucracy, improved use of institutional digital infrastructure, teacher training on communication and neurodiversity, better reception of exchange students, equitable treatment compared to locals, more accessible course materials, greater transparency in course practices, and higher academic standards.

As for services, while some were reported to be well-developed, students desired more structured websites, earlier disbursement of Erasmus grants, more information in English, policies and programmes to integrate local teachers and students with exchange students, better pre-departure information on the host country and local facilities, access to more courses for better validation at home universities, improved course coordination to avoid scheduling overlaps, assistance with visa applications and accommodation, and better communication between support services, teachers, and students.

6. Guidelines for Inclusive During Mobility Experiences

Based on the student experiences reported in Bootcamp II, the Questionnaire on During Mobility and the host university-specific sections of the Questionnaire on After Mobility, the following guidelines are offered for HEIs to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for underserved students during their mobility.

6.1 Foster Psychological Safety and Support Structure

Positive Environment: Ensure a welcoming atmosphere through comprehensive orientation programs, friendly interactions with staff and local students, and activities designed to integrate international students with local communities.

Recognise and celebrate diverse student backgrounds to foster a sense of belonging.

Effective Communication: Provide all necessary information (e.g., accommodation, local health services with phone numbers, academic expectations) in accessible formats, communicated well in advance. Establish clear communication channels for students to seek help and information.

Support Services: Strengthen Inclusion Offices to advocate for underserved students, ensuring a clear point of contact upon arrival. Provide contact information for mental health and counselling services. Use student ambassadors to share experiences. Assign tutors or mentors to help new students navigate their initial days and establish supportive tutor groups. Train staff to act as safety agents, ensuring student well-being.

6.2 Streamline Bureaucracy and Logistics

Centralized Information: Provide a unified platform for all necessary information to reduce confusion caused by decentralised resources. Simplify and clearly outline administrative procedures related to mobility (including course registration, visa applications, and financial aid), ensuring responsive support from administrative and support staff. In developing this platform, consider the digital divide by providing

alternatives for students with limited access to technology or those facing digital literacy challenges. Create offline or low-tech resources for students unable to access online platforms and ensure that any technological solutions are complemented by in-person or traditional methods to ensure equitable access.

6.3 Address Language and Communication Barriers

Language Support, Intercultural Training, and Communication Channels: Offer language courses to improve students' proficiency in the host country's language and intercultural training to help students adapt to cultural norms. Provide important information in multiple languages. Enhance information dissemination by using student-friendly communication channels (e.g., WhatsApp, Slack) and consider that not everyone uses social media channels.

6.4 Create Inclusive and Accessible Learning Environments

Inclusive Teaching Practices: Encourage interactive and inclusive teaching methods, ensuring that faculty are trained to cater to diverse learning needs. Offer courses in a widely spoken language, such as English. Ensure course materials are accessible to everyone. Promote equitable treatment of all students, ensuring that exchange students are integrated and valued in the academic community. Maintain transparency in policies and procedures to ensure all students understand their rights, responsibilities, and the academic expectations at the university.

6.5 Promote Social Integration

Social Activities and Student Engagement: Organise regular social activities to help students form connections and foster a sense of community. Encourage participation in student associations and comprehensive orientation programs that include social integration activities, offering incentives for participation.

6.6 Ensure Safety and Accessibility

Safe and Accessible Environments: Maintain a secure environment on campus and in accommodations, ensuring facilities are accessible for students with disabilities. Provide information on the accessibility of campus facilities with clear room numbers.

6.7 Facilitate Financial Stability

Financial Support Information and Timely Aid: Provide clear information about financial support options and how to apply for them, ensuring timely disbursement of scholarships and financial aid to prevent financial strain. Offer affordable extracurricular activities to ensure all students can participate.

6.8 Utilize Feedback for Continuous Improvement

Regular Feedback Mechanisms: Collect and actively address feedback from students about their mobility experiences to continuously improve mobility support services.

7. Student Experiences and Their Dis/empowering Factors After Mobility

This chapter discusses the student experiences and challenges after their mobility period, addressing key areas such as re-integration into the home environment. It reviews the insights gained from Bootcamp II and the Questionnaire on Student Experiences After Mobility. Both enabling and disempowering factors are highlighted, paving the way for **8. Guidelines for Inclusive Post-Mobility Experiences.**

7.1 Bootcamp II

It became evident through the user journeys that student experiences after mobility were characterised by feelings of sadness and reverse culture shock. The disempowering factors identified by students included challenges with re-adapting to home, old social circles, and their home university. On the other hand, re-integration also provided a sense of self-realisation, relief, closure, excitement about returning home, and feelings of accomplishment. Empowering factors included support from the international office to readjust to academic life at their home university, relying on pre-existing social networks for emotional support, and giving testimonials about their mobility experiences. In addition, students recognized that mobility feedback sessions, along with improving surveys and forms, could serve as empowering tools for enhancing the re-integration process.

7.2 Questionnaire on Student Experiences After Mobility

In the post-mobility questionnaire, some students described their mobility experiences as good, great, awesome, and culturally enriching. It was clear that the student had experienced significant personal growth and resilience during their mobility, such as overcoming the fear of speaking and studying in a foreign language despite being dyslexic, living alone or with strangers in a new country, learning new approaches to tasks, and managing under challenging learning conditions. Some also learned to better appreciate aspects of their home environment. Most students had no regrets about their mobility experience and expressed no desire to do anything differently if they were to attend the same university again.

8. Guidelines for Inclusive Post-Mobility Experiences

Based on the students' post-mobility experiences reported in Bootcamp II and the post-mobility questionnaire, the following guidelines are offered for HEIs to create a supportive and inclusive environment that helps underserved students successfully reintegrate and thrive after their mobility experiences. These guidelines address the challenges of reintegration while leveraging the positive aspects of students' experiences to foster personal and academic growth.

8.1 Provide Support for Reverse Culture Shock and Reintegration

Reintegration Programs and Psychosocial Support: Provide reintegration workshops on reverse culture shock, managing expectations, and re-adapting to

social circles. Provide access to counselling and mental health services for coping with feelings of sadness. Organise reintegration events and establish peer support groups where returning students can share their experiences, celebrate achievements, and support each other in re-adapting to home, social circles, and academic life.

8.2 Strengthen Social Networks and Connections

Encouraging Reconnection and Alumni Network: Encourage students to reconnect with pre-existing social networks (friends, family, campus groups) for emotional support. Facilitate connections with alumni from mobility programs who can provide advice and mentorship.

8.3 Leverage International Office and Career Support

Dedicated Re-Entry Support and Career Counselling: Establish a dedicated re-entry support team within the international office to assist students with academic and personal readjustment. This team can offer one-on-one advising and tailored resources, such as guidance on course selection, credit transfer, and academic planning. Collaborate with career services to help students articulate the skills gained during mobility on their resumes and in interviews, including workshops on leveraging their international experiences for career development.

8.4 Recognize and Celebrate Experiences, Create Positive Re-entry Narratives

Formal Recognition, Sharing Testimonials, and Highlighting Success Stories:

Ensure that academic and personal achievements during mobility are formally

recognized in academic records, certificates, or awards. Encourage students to share testimonials and experiences via university platforms, events, and publications, validating their journeys and inspiring future participants. Regularly feature success stories of returning students to promote a positive narrative around re-entry and encourage participation in mobility programs.

8.5 Enhance Personal Growth Opportunities

Continued Support for Language and Cultural Skills: Offer ongoing support for language learning and intercultural skills to help students maintain and build upon competencies gained abroad.

9. Conclusion

The *IDEM Guidelines* were created to respond to the needs to increase the number of underserved students in mobility and to contribute to building a more inclusive higher education (starting with the Unite! Alliance) and society for all as recommended, for example, by the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps program¹⁸, Erasmus+ Charter¹⁹, the European Council²⁰, the horizontal

¹⁸ European Commission, *Implementation Guidelines: Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Inclusion and Diversity Strategy*, version 1 (April 29, 2021), accessed January 4, 2025, https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2021-09/implementation-inclusion-diversity_apr21_en.pdf.

¹⁹ European Commission, *Erasmus Charter for Higher Education*, last updated February 28, 2024, <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/resources-and-tools/erasmus-charter-for-higher-education>.

²⁰ Council of the European Union, *Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on Promoting Common Values, Inclusive Education, and the European Dimension of Teaching*, accessed January 1, 2025, https://ehea.info/Upload/Rome_Ministerial_Communique_Annex_II.pdf.

priorities set by the European Commission²¹, and social dimension outlined by the 2007 London Communiqué²² and by the 2020 Rome Communiqué²³. The IDEM students' experiences before, during, and after mobility collected through the IDEM key activities (Inclusion Training, Bootcamp I and II, and the Questionnaires) provided rich data on the dis/empowering factors behind their mobility experiences, upon which the *IDEM Guidelines* for inclusive mobility were created.

9.1 Similarities between the IDEM Guidelines, Earlier Erasmus+ Guidelines and Erasmus Student Network Survey XV Edition Results

The *IDEM Guidelines* for inclusive mobility for underserved students share several similarities with earlier Erasmus+ project guidelines and the recent Erasmus Student Network (ESN) Survey XV Edition results²⁴. These commonalities demonstrate continuity in addressing barriers to mobility and promoting inclusivity. Key similarities include:

²¹ European Commission, *Inclusiveness in the New Erasmus+ Programme 2021–2027*, accessed January 4, 2025, <https://www.ehea.info/Upload/BFUG%20inclusion%20in%20the%20E%2B%20programme%2016-11-21.pdf>.

²² European Higher Education Area (EHEA), *London Ministerial Communiqué: Towards the European Higher Education Area: Responding to Challenges in a Globalised World*, Ministerial Conference, accessed January 1, 2025, https://ehea.info/Upload/document/ministerial_declarations/2007_London_Communique_English_58_8697.pdf.

²³ European Higher Education Area (EHEA), *Rome Ministerial Communiqué: Annex II*, accessed January 1, 2025, https://ehea.info/Upload/Rome_Ministerial_Communique_Annex_II.pdf.

²⁴ Erasmus Student Network (ESN), *ESNsurvey XV*, accessed January 1, 2025, https://www.esn.org/sites/default/files/pages/esnsurvey_xv.pdf.

Holistic Approach to Inclusivity

There is a consistent recognition of the importance of inclusivity at every stage of the mobility experience, with a strong focus on clear, accessible communication, psychological support, and tailored services for underserved students.

Emphasis on Accessible Information and Resources

Accessibility of information, delivered through centralised platforms and in multiple languages, is a fundamental aspect of supporting underserved students in mobility programmes. The guidelines underline that universities should make concerted efforts to reduce information gaps.

Psychological and Emotional Support through Peer and Alumni Networks

Psychological and emotional support is crucial across all phases, from pre-mobility to reintegration, with a focus on mental health and peer networks to help students navigate their experiences. Peer-to-peer engagement and alumni networks are recognised as highly effective tools for fostering social and emotional support throughout the mobility process, ensuring underserved students feel connected and supported at every stage. The systematic embedding of peer-to-peer networks and alumni engagement as part of the mobility process reflects an intentional strategy to build supportive communities, similar to those of other ongoing European university

alliances and Erasmus+ projects, including RUN-EU²⁵, ENHANCE²⁶, UNIC²⁷, EC2U²⁸, and YUFE²⁹.

Promotion of Social and Cultural Integration

Social and cultural integration is essential, and fostering inclusive environments through targeted social activities, intercultural training, and support structures is key to ensuring that underserved students do not feel isolated. Strategies to foster interaction between international and local students and communities, such as social activities and student associations, are highlighted as essential for reducing isolation and building inclusive communities³⁰.

²⁵ Regional University Network (RUN-EU), "Mobility," accessed January 1, 2025, <https://run-eu.eu/mobility/>.

²⁶ ENHANCE Alliance, "Buddies," accessed January 1, 2025, <https://enhanceuniversity.eu/enhance-for-students/buddies/>.

²⁷ UNIC European University, "UNIC European University," accessed January 1, 2025, <https://unic.eu/en>

²⁸ EC2U Alliance, "Student Ambassadors," accessed January 1, 2025, <https://ec2u.eu/for-students/students-ambassadors/>.

²⁹ Young Universities for the Future of Europe (YUFE), "Young Universities for the Future of Europe," accessed January 1, 2025, <https://www.yufe.eu/>.

³⁰ Erasmus Student Network (ESN), *ESNsurvey XV*, accessed January 1, 2025, https://www.esn.org/sites/default/files/pages/esnsurvey_xv.pdf.

Need to Reduce Administrative and Financial Barriers

The guidelines acknowledge the challenges posed by bureaucracy and financial constraints, with the latter being one of the most significant barriers for students³¹.

The guidelines recommend streamlined administrative processes, timely disbursement of financial aid, and transparent information about scholarships and funding options.

Tailored Pre-Mobility Preparation

The inclusion of personalised preparation tools, such as tailored checklists for identifying academic, social, and personal needs builds on the Support Mobility Plan suggested by earlier Erasmus+ projects Mob4All³² and EPFIME³³.

Enhanced Use of Technology for Inclusivity

Social media and real-time networks are leveraged to foster connectivity, inclusivity, and immediate support during mobility and encouraged to be integrated into the institutional support systems to complement in-person services.

³¹ Erasmus Student Network (ESN), *ESNsurvey XV*, accessed January 1, 2025, https://www.esn.org/sites/default/files/pages/esnsurvey_xv.pdf.

³² Ulysseus European University, *Mobility for All Guidelines*, accessed January 1, 2025, https://ulyseus.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Mobility-for-All-Guidelines_English-1.pdf.

³³ epfime.inclusivemobility.eu. *Making mobility programmes more inclusive for students with disabilities. Inclusive Mobility – Guidelines for higher education institutions*. Accessed January 5, 2025. <https://inclusivemobilityframework.eu/resourceFiles/ce71978b-351a-4aef-941e-0c7a66c91fd4.pdf>.

Feedback and Continuous Improvement

Ongoing feedback and student involvement in program refinement are essential for ensuring that mobility programmes remain responsive and relevant to the needs of underserved students³⁴.

9.2 Challenges with Institutional Commitment to Earlier Guidelines

The fact that similar guidelines for inclusive mobility for underserved students are published by IDEM, as have previously been published by other Erasmus+ projects, suggest a few conclusions about institutional commitment to applying these guidelines as well as the relevance of reissuing them.

Limited or Inconsistent Implementation

The fact that similar guidelines are being reissued may indicate that earlier recommendations have either not been fully implemented or have only been applied inconsistently across HEIs. This suggests that while some institutions may have committed to inclusive practices in principle, practical application remains uneven.

Ongoing Challenges

Persisting challenges in the areas addressed by earlier guidelines, such as accessibility, support services, and integration, suggest that institutions might still struggle with the structural or cultural changes needed to create genuinely inclusive mobility programmes.

³⁴ Erasmus Student Network (ESN), *ESNsurvey XV*, accessed January 1, 2025, https://www.esn.org/sites/default/files/pages/esnsurvey_xv.pdf.

Institutional Resistance or Slow Adaptation

The recurrence of these guidelines might point to institutional resistance or slow adaptation to change. Some universities may not have the necessary resources or prioritisation to implement inclusive mobility practices for underserved students.

This indicates a need for continued advocacy and capacity-building to ensure that guidelines are embraced and put into practice.

Need for Better Monitoring and Accountability

Institutions may lack robust monitoring mechanisms or accountability structures to ensure that the guidelines are effectively implemented. Without clear benchmarks, follow-up, and reporting mechanisms, HEIs may struggle to evaluate their progress in fostering inclusive mobility.

9.3 Incremental Innovation in the IDEM Guidelines

In addition to the similarities to earlier Erasmus+ guidelines for inclusive mobility for underserved students, the *IDEM Guidelines* show some incremental innovation in the following area:

Focus on Psychological Safety and Emotional Support

The explicit emphasis on psychological safety and emotional barriers (e.g., Emotional Awareness Workshops, Emotional Intelligence Training) is a practical enhancement. This specific approach to addressing the emotional barriers that underserved students may face when deciding on mobility programmes appears to

be more comprehensive than those provided by previous guidelines. Emotional Intelligence Workshops, designed to help students overcome self-exclusion and manage emotional barriers, represent a novel focus on self-awareness and personal development.

9.4 Limitations of the IDEM Guidelines

Apart from the incremental innovation presented above, the *IDEM Guidelines* also include several limitations, pointing to a need for future Erasmus+ initiatives.

Limited Focus on Structural Barriers

Although the guidelines address emotional, social, and logistical aspects, they do not sufficiently tackle broader structural inequalities such as the deep-rooted socio-economic disparities that may prevent underserved students from considering mobility in the first place. Earlier Erasmus+ projects have pointed to these structural issues, such as students from low-income backgrounds being discouraged due to financial risks, but these guidelines do not present substantial measures to counter this, aside from addressing financial aid disbursements. There is also limited discussion on advocating for policy changes at the national or European level to address systemic barriers, such as housing shortages that lie beyond the control of individual institutions.

Generalisation of Underserved Groups and Insufficient Attention to Intersectionality

The guidelines treat underserved students as a broad, homogeneous group, offering limited specificity regarding the unique needs of subgroups (e.g., students with disabilities, ethnic minorities, students from low-income families, or first-generation

students). The guidelines could do more to differentiate between various underserved groups and provide specialised interventions for each category.

Although the IDEM proposal included a plan to collect separate questionnaire data on students with disabilities and difficulties/ disadvantages to provide more specific guidelines for these sub-groups, this plan was abandoned due to the difficulty of finding enough students from these sub-groups to participate in the mobility programmes across the IDEM partner universities. Instead, students from all these sub-groups were included in the same data collection to ensure sufficient data for analysis.

Moreover, although the questionnaires included questions about the specific barriers faced the IDEM students and their effect on their attendance and performance at university, the responses did not allow sufficient attention to intersectionality or the development of guidelines for specific sub-groups, such as students with individual study arrangements, as mentioned in section [3.4](#)

Questionnaires on Student Experiences Before Mobility.

In addition, due to the methods chosen for this project, the outcomes from the other key project activities (Inclusion Training, Bootcamp I and II) did not allow for differentiating the guidelines for specific sub-groups either, which explains the somewhat generic nature of the guidelines.

Limited Innovation in Financial Support Mechanisms

Although financial aid transparency and assistance are addressed, there are few new ideas about how to provide alternative or more robust financial support.

Lack of Focus on Cultural Competency for Hosting Institutions: While there is an emphasis on preparing students for cultural integration, there is less focus on preparing the host institutions for supporting diverse, underserved students. The guidelines touch on training staff but do not provide robust frameworks for ensuring that host institutions are fully equipped to meet the specific needs of underserved students.

It is essential to enhance the cultural competency of host institutions to ensure they are prepared to receive and support underserved students. This could include:

- Staff training on cultural sensitivity and inclusivity, such as mandatory training for staff and local students at host universities on supporting underserved students and recognising the specific challenges they face.
- Cultural competency toolkits for universities to foster a more inclusive and welcoming environment for all students.

Weak Monitoring and Accountability Mechanisms

The guidelines propose regular feedback mechanisms but lack a robust framework for monitoring the effectiveness of support services for underserved students. These guidelines do not outline how to systematically evaluate the impact of their inclusion measures.

Emphasis on Physical Mobility

The guidelines focus heavily on physical mobility experiences, with limited attention to online or blended mobility options.

9.5 Recommendations for Future Erasmus+ Initiatives

Future Erasmus+ initiatives aiming to enhance underserved students' mobility should build on the strengths of the current guidelines while addressing their limitations. Based on some of the identified gaps in the current guidelines, the following focus areas may guide future efforts:

Focus on Intersectional and Targeted Approaches for Enhanced Support

Future Erasmus+ initiatives should prioritise an intersectional approach that considers the complex, overlapping identities and unique challenges faced by diverse underserved student groups and addresses them in programme design and implementation. This includes a focus on specific target groups such as first-generation students, students with disabilities, students with care responsibilities, low-income students, and those with chronic illnesses.

By concentrating on these distinct groups, projects can develop deeper insights into their specific needs and the barriers they face throughout the mobility experience. Moreover, tailored guidelines should be developed to address the unique circumstances of each subgroup, providing targeted and effective support mechanisms. This approach will empower higher education institutions to better prepare for and accommodate diverse students, ultimately enhancing the inclusivity and success of mobility programmes.

Establish Innovation in Financial Aid

To address the ongoing issue of delayed financial aid and insufficient funding to cover living costs and find affordable accommodation³⁵, future projects could investigate innovative funding mechanisms to alleviate financial concerns for underserved students.

Establish Stronger Feedback and Monitoring Framework

Future initiatives should include a more rigorous feedback loop that goes beyond student surveys. Monitoring systems could use real-time data and involve underserved students in the evaluation and co-creation of mobility programmes, ensuring continuous improvements and accountability.

Focus on Stakeholders to Close the Gap Between Student Expectations and Stakeholder Delivery

More Erasmus+ projects should be developed in the future from the perspective of stakeholders such as mobility officers, support services, administrations, and departments. Focusing on the stakeholders' perspectives is crucial because they are at the forefront of implementing mobility programs and play a significant role in determining their accessibility and inclusivity. By addressing the challenges faced by these stakeholders and providing them with targeted support, future Erasmus+ projects can significantly enhance the inclusivity and accessibility of mobility

³⁵ Erasmus Student Network (ESN), *ESN Survey XV*, accessed January 1, 2025, https://www.esn.org/sites/default/files/pages/esnsurvey_xv.pdf.

programs and thereby help close the gap between what underserved students wish for and what stakeholders can deliver.

By focusing on these areas, future Erasmus+ initiatives can build on the progress made in these guidelines and offer more comprehensive and sustainable solutions to enhance mobility opportunities for underserved students.

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Appendix 1. Questionnaires on Mobility Experiences During the IDEM Project

Please note that the questionnaire is answered anonymously. The data will only be used for the purposes of the IDEM project. The IDEM project is responsible for data storage. The data will be destroyed at the end of the project in early 2025. The data from the questionnaire will not be published. It will be analysed and used to improve mobility opportunities for under-represented students. We treat your data confidentially. We will not disclose information to any third parties in a way that could identify you.

Before exchange

Background information

Please, provide as much information as possible about your disability/special needs/challenges so that we can better meet your needs.

Not all questions may apply to every student, depending on their situation.

1. Which of the following barriers to mobility do you face:
 - disabilities
 - health problems
 - barriers linked to education training system
 - cultural differences
 - social barriers
 - economic barriers
 - barriers linked to discrimination
 - geographical barriers
 - others
2. What's your home university?
3. Please list any disability-related difficulties in carrying out your studies and practical work (e. g. following teaching, lab work, group work or other)
4. Please list any disability-related difficulties related to attendance at the university/access to the building/mobility.
5. Do you need any adaptations to the apartment you will be living in (e. g. hoist, grab rails, etc.)? If yes, please indicate.
6. Do you need help with basic daily activities? Do you need an assistant? Is assistance needed around the clock, or only in certain situations?
7. Please list any difficulties related to learning facilities and the ICT network (e. g. using a computer, Internet, software, multimedia material)
8. Please list any difficulties in communication/social interaction.
9. Are you a neurodiverse student? Please list any neurodivergence-related difficulties.
10. Do you have a long-term condition that requires regular medical check-ups? How often?

11. Do you have individual study arrangements at your home university? If yes, please describe them.
12. Do you face financial challenges in financing your studies/mobility? If yes, how do you solve them at your home university?
13. Are you a first-generation student? How does this affect your studies?
14. Are there any factors in your family situation that make it difficult for you to participate in the mobility? If yes, please indicate.
15. Please include here any information that will help us to better understand your specific situation.

Planning and organising your mobility

1. Which are your home and host universities?
2. Where did you find out about the exchange?
3. Was the information easy to find? If not, tell us about the challenges and any ideas for improvement.
4. Was the information provided in a format inclusive for you? If not, what improvements would you have needed.
5. How/where did you find needed information at your host university (e. g. about individual study arrangements, about accommodation or support services)?
6. Are you aware of accessibility/social top up/additional support? Are you planning to apply for it?
7. What do you think about the communication and promotion of mobility and opportunities for under-represented students?
8. What formalities/needs related to your specific situation do/should you have arranged before the mobility?
9. Have you found out the differences in social security (e. g. personal assistance, financial support) between the countries?
10. What is the biggest challenge in organising the mobility?
11. What kind of support do you get to organise your mobility (informational, emotional, equipment, something else)?
12. Is the support you received sufficient? If yes, what is exceptionally important? If not, what is missing?
13. What are your hopes/aspirations for mobility? What opportunities do you see?
14. What are your fears/concerns regarding about mobility?
15. Do you think you have enough information before starting the mobility? What information would you like to have more of?
16. Please give us some open feedback.

During exchange

1. Which are your home and host universities?
2. How were you received at your host university?
3. Have you participated in the welcome week/orientation for exchange students and how were under-represented students taken into account?
4. Do you feel welcome at your host university? What factors influence your feelings?

5. Have you made acquaintances with fellow students and how do you spend your time with them?
6. Are you able to participate fully in student life at your host university? Please, justify your answer.
7. Do you feel integrated into student life at the host university? How do staff/teachers/peer students make integration possible?
8. Do you feel lonely? If yes, what kind of support would you like?
9. Are you homesick?
10. Are you facing prejudice or discrimination at your host university? If yes, have you contacted the staff/teachers and what action has been taken?
11. How is diversity embraced at your host university? Do you feel comfortable with being yourself, or do you feel the need to hide your challenges from others? If you feel comfortable, what enables you to do this? If not, what makes you feel the need to hide your challenges?
12. Does teaching meet your learning needs? Are there any good examples of teachers trying to involve everyone in their teaching?
13. If inclusion in teaching doesn't work, what makes you feel excluded? What barriers/obstacles to learning did you notice?
14. Do you feel you have equal opportunities with others? If not, what inequalities do you perceive? How should these inequalities be eliminated?
15. Please give us some open feedback.

After exchange

1. Which are your home and host universities?
2. What went well during your mobility? Why?
3. Is there something that could have gone better during your mobility? Why?
4. Would you do anything differently if you went to the same university for another exchange?
5. How would you improve information on mobility for under-represented students?
6. What should be improved in the exchange process to make it more inclusive?
7. How should teaching at your host university be developed to be more inclusive?
8. How could support services be further developed?
9. What did you learn about yourself during the exchange?
10. Which of your mobility expectations have been met? What made it possible?
11. Which of your mobility expectations were not met? What prevented it?
12. Would you call your host university an "inclusive university"? If yes, what factors contributed to this? If not, what needs to be improved?
13. Would you recommend the university to other under-represented students? Please, justify your answer.
14. What other forms of mobility could be particularly useful for under-represented students?
15. Please give us some open feedback on your exchange.
16. Please give us some open feedback on the IDEM project and your involvement in it.

Appendix 2. Student Experiences During Mobility with Their Dis/empowering Factors per Host University.

Appendix 3. Student Experiences After Mobility with their Dis/Empowering Factors per Host University