THE STRATEGY FOR INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY IN THE ERASMUS+ PROGRAMME
THE INTERNATIONAL VICE-RECTORATE OF "VICTOR BABEŞ" UNIVERSITY OF MEDICINE AND PHARMACY, TIMIȘOARA

1. <u>Introduction</u>

The principles of equity/equality and inclusion are an integrant part of the fundamental values of the European Union. At the same time, societies are more and more diverse from several points of view. This leads to a greater need to learn to sail through diversity and create societies based on cohesion, encouraging inclusion in Europe. The Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps programmes (hereby called "programmes) are essential programmes which may be of real support in attaining this objective.

The programmes of the European Union (EU) should offer opportunities that are accessible to everyone. Still, certain persons cannot benefit equally from these opportunities because they meet with various barriers. The inclusion of persons who face barriers to their access or who benefit from fewer opportunities in their education, training and youth activities is a key-objective of several policy initiatives. Although EU programmes in the field of education, youth and sports focused on inclusion in the past, the assessment and research activities show that access and inclusion definitely need to be enhanced even more.

2. <u>The context</u>

a) The political frame and determining factors

The principles of inclusion and equality/equity are an integrant part of the EU policy and they are defined in all EU treaties: "In EU external action, we promote diversity and inclusion through the principle of non-discrimination established by human rights standards and in line with EU law and policy, as well as by emphasising participation and inclusion as guiding principles."

The inclusion of persons facing barriers restricting their access or who have less opportunities for education, training and youth activities is a key-objective of the Commission, which aims at constructing a European space for education, as well as of the EU strategy for youth and the European objectives for youth. The European pillar of social rights stipulates that "***the Union, in defining and implementing its policies and activities, shall take into***

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account requirements linked to the promotion of a high level of employment, the guarantee of adequate social protection, the fight against social exclusion and a high level of education, training and protection of human health". This is also in agreement with the 2030 Agenda for a Sustainable Development of the UNO, which in Article 25 clearly stipulates that "*We commit to providing inclusive and equitable quality education at all levels – early childhood, primary, secondary, tertiary, technical and vocational training. All people, irrespective of sex, age, race, ethnicity, and persons with disabilities, migrants, indigenous peoples, children and youth, especially those in vulnerable situations, should have access to life-long learning opportunities that help them acquire the knowledge and skills needed to exploit opportunities and to participate fully in society*".

In this context, the European Council underlined that "*Education and culture are key to building inclusive and cohesive societies, and to sustaining our competitiveness. In Gothenburg we expressed a willingness to do more in these areas, in which the EU plays an important supplementing and supporting role.*" and called on its Member States, the Council and the Commission, in line with their respective competences, to take work forward with a view to increase awareness of the social and economic importance of culture and cultural heritage so as to "*boost the share of people in the EU benefiting from a learning period abroad, and to increase the share of people with fewer opportunities, including disabled persons, in learning mobility*".

In this political context and taking into account the contributions of each interested part, the principle warranting equitable and equal access to everybody, regardless the person's barriers, is the underlying principle of all opportunities available to people inside or outside the EU, so as nobody is left behind and reaching the supreme goal of having pro-inclusion, just, green and digital-friendly societies.

b) The social context

From several points of view (culture, skills, social groups, types of sexuality, identities, education, training, levels of literacy, etc.) societies become more and more diversified. This leads to a greater need of being able to navigate through diversity and to create societal systems based on cohesion and promoting inclusion, using formal, informal and non-formal educational activities. The European vision is to offer people the necessary support to face the challenges they might encounter during this process. Modern societies and political systems are based on inclusion and on the active participation of their citizens to the democratic process and to public life, regardless their original background or their circumstances. In this sense, participating in a programme can contribute to the development of a sense of joint citizenship and to stimulating a greater involvement in society, as proven by the results of the Erasmus programme and other research activities.

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3. <u>Objectives of the strategy</u>

➤ The present strategy aims at ***creating equal access opportunities*** to these programmes for everybody. This objective should be achieved by approaching the barriers faced by various target-groups (described below) when trying to access such opportunities in Europe or worldwide. This strategy provides an appropriate framework for all the projects based on inclusion and diversity supported by the European Solidarity Corps and the Erasmus+ programme.

➤ At the same time, the strategy aims at ***promoting diversity in all its forms*** as a valuable learning source, and we strive to facilitate the interaction between all the interested parts and encourage positive relationships between persons coming from different backgrounds.

➤ One of the objectives of the new working plan of the university is to increase student mobility in study or traineeship activities at partner universities or healthcare facilities, in order to promote social cohesion and active citizenship.

The strategy will achieve the desired results through the following **methods**:

1. establishing a common interpretation of the concept of disadvantaged persons and setting up a coherent frame to include these persons in the programmes;
2. increasing the university's commitment to inclusion and diversity through the involvement of all the parties, as well as through a positive approach of diversity in all its aspects;
3. supporting beneficiary organisations to produce high-quality projects which would involve persons with fewer opportunities (for example, providing training programmes, tools, financing, support, etc);
4. reducing barriers which might prevent disadvantaged persons to participate in the programmes and supporting applicants in overcoming these barriers, as well as establishing proper learning, working or voluntary work conditions by providing appropriate support for these persons;
5. promoting the recognition of the acquired knowledge and skills of disadvantaged persons;
6. ensuring that the emphasis laid on inclusion and diversity is observed in all the stages of the programme management and during the life-cycle of these projects: before (promotion, information, support, analysis, etc), during (the selection of the participants, preparation, implementation, results, etc) and after the end of the project (assessment, dissemination and exploitation of the results, monitoring).
7. Increasing the visibility of inclusion and diversity and their role in the implementation of the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes.

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4. Definitions

a) Target groups

The regulations of the Erasmus+ and the European Solidatiry Corps define participants with fewer opportunities as *"People with fewer opportunities means people who, for economic, social, cultural, geographical or health reasons, a migrant background, or for reasons such as disability and educational difficulties or for any other reasons, including those that can 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"*.

Accordingly, the following target groups are identified in order to enable their greater participation in the projects of the Erasmus+ programme. The table below contains detailed information about this, and it can be updated in accordance with the changes during the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme 2021–2027.

No.	Target groups for inclusion	Accompanying documents
1.	Serious chronic diseases (systemic diseases, cancer, dyslexia, dysgraphia, etc.)	A document issued by the National Employment Service or another state authority which confirms the health condition. If not applicable, one needs to provide findings of a specialist (a doctor, psychologist, etc.) which confirm the health condition.
2.	A person with social assistance/a person whose family has social assistance	A confirmation of the Social Welfare Centre or another state authority which confirms social assistance receipt during the mobility preparation period, after a person had been selected in the call
3.	A person who lives in underdeveloped, devastated, the most underdeveloped municipalities of the Republic of Serbia[1]	A personal ID copy with the residence address; a copy of a passport if a person is a minor
4.	Fewer opportunities – economical disadvantage [2]	A certificate on the average monthly income per household member issued by a municipality where a person has a residence address, given in the ID or any other document issued by authorities, which testifies to the residence address of a person. For citizens of the Republic of Serbia, this certificate is issued by the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Serbia. In case a person is a foreign citizen and they go abroad on a mobility from an institution/organisation from Serbia, it is necessary that they provide an equivalent document issued by a state administration authority in the country of residence.
5.	A person is a single parent (a single-parent family)	A death certificate for another parent or a declaration of a missing person dead; A birth certificate for children of undetermined paternity, a confirmation that another parent has been in prison for more than six months; Alternatively, an institution/organisation which is a coordinator of a

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		project has a possibility to issue a confirmation on the status of a person which will be good evidence to justify additional funding. In this case, it is up to an institution/organisation to define how persons will justify their status and to keep that documentation.
6.	A person is a parent to three or more children	Proof of receiving child allowance for the 3rd, 4th or any subsequent child
7.	A person is without both parents and under 26	Death certificates for both parents; A copy of an ID for insight into age for adults Alternatively, an institution/organisation which is a coordinator of a project has a possibility to issue a confirmation on the status of a person which will be good evidence to justify additional funding. In this case, it is up to an institution/organisation to define how persons will justify their status and to keep that documentation.
8.	A person is in a foster/guardian family or an institution of social welfare and under 26	A certified copy of a Decision on guardianship issued by a Social Welfare Centre; An Agreement on guardianship or a certified copy of a Decision on foster accommodation issued by a Social Welfare Centre; Alternatively, an institution/organisation which is a coordinator of a project has a possibility to issue a confirmation on the status of a person which will be good evidence to justify additional funding. In this case, it is up to an institution/organisation to define how persons will justify their status and to keep that documentation.
9.	A person lives in a family with three or more children	Birth certificates for all children; A confirmation from a municipality that children live on the same address or a copy of an ID where one can see the address (if children have an ID)
10.	A person is supported by a single parent (a single-parent family) and under 26	A death certificate for another parent or declaration of a missing person dead; Birth certificates for children of undetermined paternity, a confirmation that another parent has been in prison for more than six months
11.	A person belongs to a Roma national minority	A declaration on Roma national minority affiliation signed by a person who goes on a mobility or a parent/guardian or a confirmation issued by the National Council of the Roma National Minority
12.	A person is a refugee/an internally displaced person	A copy of a refugee legitimation/legitimation of an internally displaced person or a confirmation issued by the Commissariat for Refugees that obtaining a legitimation is underway
13.	All other target groups listed in individual project applications in accordance with the Programme Guide	One needs to consult their project officer to define ways of justifying their affiliation to individual categories listed in project applications

As seen from the table above, the main target groups of this strategy are people with fewer opportunities, which automatically puts them in a disadvantage compared to their colleagues, as far as the possibilities of participating in a programme and/or education and training systems

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is concerned. These persons might be in a disadvantaged position due to one or more exclusion factors, mentioned below.

These factors may hinder the access to opportunities offered by the programme, mainly in correlation with certain structures and information practices, with the way in which the projects are conceived and disseminated, which might turn into actual barriers. Context and the involved qualified staff have to consider the feedback and the contribution of the participant and offer extra support meant to stimulate and foster inclusion and diversity.

b) Barriers to accessibility and information

Our previous experience helps to identify the main barriers which might prevent persons with fewer opportunities from participating in the existing programmes. The list of potential barriers, presented below, is not an exhaustive one but is meant to serve as a framework to take further measures which would increase the accessibility and inclusion of persons with fewer opportunities. These barriers might prevent the participation of these persons, both as independent factors and as any possible combination of factors.

We could sum up the barriers hindering people's access to these programmes, as follows:

- **Disabilities**: This includes physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder someone's full and effective participation in society on the same footing as others.
- **Health problems**: Barriers may result from health issues including severe illnesses, chronic diseases, or any other physical or mental health-related situation that prevents someone from participating in the programme.
- **Barriers linked to education and training systems**: Individuals struggling to perform in education and training systems for various reasons, early school-leavers, NEETs (people not in education, employment or training) and low-skilled adults may face barriers. Although other factors may play a role, these educational difficulties, while possibly linked to personal circumstances, mostly result from educational systems which create structural limitations and/or do not fully take into account the individual's particular needs. Individuals can also face barriers to participation when the structure of curricula makes it difficult to undertake a learning or training mobility abroad as part of their studies.
- **Cultural differences**: While cultural differences may be perceived as barriers by people from any background, they can particularly affect people with fewer opportunities. Such differences may represent significant barriers to learning in general, all the more for people with a migrant or refugee background – including but not limited to newly-arrived migrants, people belonging to a national or ethnic minority, sign language users, or people with linguistic adaptation and cultural inclusion difficulties. Being exposed to foreign languages and cultural differences when taking part in any kind of programme activities may put some individuals off and in a way limit the benefits from their participation. Such cultural differences may even prevent potential participants from applying for support through the programme, thereby representing an entry barrier altogether.
- **Social barriers**: Social adjustment difficulties, such as limited social competences, anti-social or high-risk behaviours; (former) offenders, (former) drug or alcohol

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abusers, or social marginalisation may represent a barrier. Other social barriers can stem from family circumstances - for instance, being the first in the family to access higher education or being a parent (especially a single parent), a caregiver, a breadwinner or an orphan, or having lived or currently living in institutional care.

- **Economic barriers**: Economic disadvantage, for instance a low living standard, low income, learners who need to work to support themselves, dependence on the social welfare system, long-term unemployment, precarious situations or poverty, being homeless, in debt or with financial problems, may represent a barrier. Other difficulties may derive from the limited transferability of services (in particular support to people with fewer opportunities) that need to be "mobile" together with the participant participating in activities away from their place of residence or, all the more, abroad.
- **Barriers linked to discrimination**: Barriers can occur as a result of discrimination linked to gender, age, ethnicity, religion, beliefs, sexual orientation, disability, or intersectional factors (a combination of two or several of the mentioned kinds of discrimination).
- **Geographical barriers**: Living in, for example, remote or rural areas, on small islands or in peripheral/outermost regions, in urban suburbs, in less serviced areas (limited public transport, poor facilities) or less developed areas in third countries, may constitute a barrier.

5. Support mechanisms for inclusion and diversity

The way in which the various activities have been designed create either face-to-face or online interactions between persons from various backgrounds (cultures, abilities, opinions, etc). The programmes offer the methodology, the structures and the networks meant to encourage and facilitate personal meetings during these activities. The acquired skills help people navigate through diversity on their return and contribute to social cohesion. During all types of activities, we should encourage the dialogue between persons who are not marginalized and persons with fewer opportunities, in order to make the latter feel less stigmatized due to their original background.

The programmes have the following characteristics and support mechanisms for inclusion and diversity:

a) Inclusion and diversity as priorities in the assessment process
b) Easy access and user-friendly programmes
c) Preparatory visits
d) Consolidated mentoring
e) Specific financial aid
f) Smaller activities, easier to access
g) Step-by-step skill consolidation methods
h) The format of the project and the duration of the mobility
i) European activities implemented locally
j) Online exchanges
k) Support for learning foreign languages

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6. The role of the university in preparing, implementing and monitoring projects

The University approaches inclusion and diversity in all its projects. The University oplays an essential role in actually practising inclusion, mainly insofar as its organisational structure is concerned (reaching a higher ability to manage inclusion and disemination projects at organisational level, as well as strengthening this capacity), together with informing and interacting with the participants before, during and after the project. The following guidelines support the outline and implementation of these activities and projects:

a) Networking and strengthening inclusion and diversity skills – the university should develop its skills and abilities through lifelong learning, through assessing and developing its own capacity of consolidating social inclusion and promoting diversity. There are various support methods that can be used, such as training sessions, mutual learning experiences, and opportunities for job shadowing, all aiming at increasing the participants' skills and abilities.

As far as mobility activities are concerned, the university strives to ensure reciprocity in hosting disadvantaged participants and to properly plan its projects with its partners. This will increase the opportunity to enhance trust and expertise within partnerships. The organisations which manage mobility projects should promote intra-institutional cooperation among the staff with expertise in the field of inclusion and diversity.

b) Equitable and transparent selection of the candidates – the selection procedures of the university are based on cinlusion and diversity and globally assess the qualities and the motivation of the candidates. The university strives to ensure an equitable access to existing opportunities so as to offer participants personalised support according to their needs. The selection interview focuses primarily not only on objective criteria but also on transparency, the entire process taking place openly, with all the applicants being continually informed about the available places, the registered applicants and the selected candidates.

c) Sensitizing and information – Information activities are of utmost importance for the Erasmus+ programme, in order to ensure that all the opportunities are known, and in order to reach all target groups which might face difficulties to access such programmes.

d) Preparing and supporting participants in all the stages of the project – The university makes sure that participants are prepared for their participation in the project in all its stages, before, during and after the end of the mobility. The needs and the contributions of the participants are assessed and observed throughout the project, mainly regarding the type of activities and their suitability for the participant and the way in which they are implemented.

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7. <u>Learning from successful experiences and good practices</u>

The European Commission identified a series of experiences and good practices from preceding projects, which are publicized on the online platforms. Thus, the university grants access to good practices, materials and documents about inclusion by presenting the **results of the Erasmus+ projects,** accessible on our website as success stories of former participants, which serve as actual testimonials about each participant's own experience with positive and negative aspects.

Besides, the university actively presents inspiring examples of good practices in the field of inclusion and diversity in the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps projects. These activities can be disseminated via various channels, either online, written form, peer-to-peer information or the help of former participants who act as ambassadors and multipliers.

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