

**STRATEGY FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY  
POLISH NATIONAL AGENCY FOR ERASMUS+ PROGRAMME AND EUROPEAN  
SOLIDARITY CORPS  
FOR THE PERIOD 2022-2027**

## **MISSION AND VISION**

### The European context

In recent years, equal access to education has been a major policy issue raised at the highest levels within the European Union. European Heads of State and Government discussed the importance of education for the future of Europe during the Gothenburg Social Summit for Fair Jobs and Growth in November 2017. The summit called on countries to work towards the goal of "fair employment and growth" in Europe and established the European Pillar of Social Rights<sup>1</sup>. Equality in education is the key element of this pillar.

### The national context<sup>2</sup>

In Poland, **the education system** ensures the implementation of every citizen's right to education and the right of children and young people to upbringing and appropriate to their age and level of development. Learners benefit from adapting the content, methods and organisation of teaching to their psychophysical capabilities, they can also have psychological and pedagogical assistance and special forms of didactic work.

On the other hand, the organisation and implementation of the didactic process at **higher education level** should be adapted to the special needs of students with disabilities.

### Mission and vision of the Polish NA

The Polish National Agency for the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps (hereinafter: NA), implementing the program agreements outlined in the legal basis and strategic documents of the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps (hereinafter: ESC), will work for social inclusion and diversity. Providing specific support to people with limited opportunities and in need of particular educational support has always been part of NA's code of conduct as an institution and a standard for all of its staff. Given the priorities set for the Erasmus+ and ESC programmes for 2021-2027, activities related to the promotion and implementation of the objectives of inclusion and diversity will be pursued with even greater determination and awareness.

NA operates within the legal system of the Republic of Poland, where the Constitution grants personal freedoms and rights to citizens and upholds their equal treatment. Poland is the Member

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<sup>1</sup> Interinstitutional Proclamation on the European Pillar of Social Rights (OJ C 428, 13.12.2017, p.10-15), signed by the European Parliament, Council and Commission on the 17 November 2017 in Gothenburg in Sweden.

<sup>2</sup> Based on European Commission publication National Education Systems, chapter 12: description of the Polish education system "Educational support and guidance" [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/educational-support-and-guidance-50\\_pl](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/educational-support-and-guidance-50_pl) [Polish version, accessed 1 September 2021]).

State of the European Union and thus fully respects the provisions of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union<sup>3</sup>.

Erasmus+ and ESC programmes for institutions, organisations and educational establishments working in the fields of formal, non-formal and informal education are and will continue to be an invaluable tool for achieving the objectives of social inclusion and fostering diversity. The pandemic has fundamentally changed the context in which educational programmes operate by limiting mobility and engendering the necessity to carry out online projects, which has put certain target groups at an even greater disadvantage.

In the process of implementation of the Social Inclusion and Diversity Strategy, NA fully embraces the Erasmus+ and ESC priority: inclusion and diversity, which means that it will promote equal opportunities and equal access, social inclusion, diversity and equality in all activities. Organisations working for people with limited opportunities, as well as with those with limited opportunities participating in project activities themselves, will be given due care and support. NA will ensure that this is the case in terms of implementation of its own promotional activities, its support for applicants and beneficiaries and the activities within the framework of NA-funded projects. Efforts will be made to facilitate full access to the programme for the widest possible range of organisations and to enable more people with limited opportunities to benefit from the programmes.

## DEFINITIONS

Authorities in almost all European education systems define or refer to concepts related to equal opportunities in education in their official documents. In addition to the term the provision of equal opportunities, other relevant terms include: equality, levelling opportunities, equality/equal treatment, disadvantage, non-discrimination, vulnerable groups, groups at risk and early school leaving (Eurydice 2020).

NA fully accepts the spectrum of situations that make a person less likely to participate in the Erasmus+ and ESC programmes - we are not aware of more complete definitions than those that have been developed in the mutual dialogue of experts and politicians involved in educational, cultural and social policy and are presented in the programme documents. These are:

- **Disabilities:** This includes physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, when in interaction with various barriers, may hinder someone's full and effective participation in society on the same level as other citizens;
- **Health problems:** Barriers may result from health issues including severe illnesses, chronic diseases, or any other physical or mental health-related situation that prevents one from participating in the programme.
- **Barriers linked to education and training systems:** Individuals struggling to perform within education and training systems for various reasons, early school-leavers, NEETs (people not in education, employment or training) and low-skilled adults may encounter barriers. Although other factors may play a role, these educational difficulties, while also linked to personal circumstances, mostly result from an educational system which

<sup>3</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/PL/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:12016P/TXT&from=DE> [accessed 1 September 2021 r]

creates structural limitations and/or does not fully take into account the individual's particular needs. Individuals can also face barriers to participation when the structure of the 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 representing any background, they can particularly affect people with limited opportunities. Such differences may represent significant barriers to learning in general, for people with a migrant or refugee experience – especially newly-arrived migrants –, people belonging to a national or ethnic minority, sign language users, people with linguistic adaptation and cultural inclusion difficulties, etc. Being exposed to foreign languages and cultural differences when taking part in any kind of programme activities may put off individuals and somehow limit the participation benefits. And such cultural differences may even prevent potential participants from applying for support via the programme, thereby representing an entry barrier altogether.
- **Social barriers:** Social adjustment difficulties such as limited social competences, anti-social or high-risk behaviours, (former) offenders, (former) drug or alcohol abusers, or social marginalisation may constitute 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 under institutional care.
- **Economic barriers:** Economic disadvantage such as low standard of living, 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 experiencing financial problems, etc., may represent a barrier. Other difficulties may derive from limited transferability of services (in particular support to people with limited opportunities).
- **Barriers linked to discrimination:** Barriers can occur as a result of discriminations based on gender, age, ethnicity, religion, beliefs, sexual orientation, disability, or intersectional factors (a combination of two or several of the mentioned discrimination barriers).
- **Geographical barriers:** Living in remote or rural areas, on small islands or in peripheral/outermost regions, in urban suburbs, in less serviced areas (limited public transport, poor facilities) or less developed areas within third countries, etc., may constitute a barrier.

## OBJECTIVES

Erasmus+ and ESC NA has set up the following long-term goals for 2027:

1. To raise further staff awareness on issues of inclusion and diversity and to increase their competences in supporting the implementation of projects involving people with limited opportunities, in order to ensure that actions taken on behalf of the programme beneficiaries are relevant and of high quality



2. To strengthen the image of Erasmus+ and ESC as inclusive programmes, reducing barriers in access to education and training through consistent implementation of inclusion and diversity activities.
3. To increase the number of participants with limited opportunities in funded projects, in particular those that have inclusion and diversity as their main objective.
4. To improve the quality of project activities through systemic support activities offered to applicants and beneficiaries of projects implemented under the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes.

## STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION – GENERAL ASSUMPTIONS

In pursuing its mission, NA will always be guided by the commitment to establish a dialogue with all groups, having constructive discussions with stakeholders and lowering the risk of any kind of radicalism. NA will collaborate with national, regional and local institutions and organisations working on behalf of people with limited opportunities in order to develop maximum synergies of action and support individuals and organisations in an optimal way.

NA will continue its outreach to less experienced organisations applying for funding (in particular those that have not benefited from the programmes' offer yet) and to individuals who are afraid to participate in mobility and international projects, in order to strengthen the brand of Erasmus+ and ESC programmes as accessible to everyone.

Activities for people with limited opportunities will be tailored to the specificity of the forms of education (formal, non-formal) or informal learning, the sector of education (school education, vocational education and training, adult education, higher education, education for young people) and the target group (pupils, students, youth, adults, teachers, academics, trainers, institutional and local government staff, etc.).

### IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTIONS UNDERTAKEN BY NA

In pursuit of the objectives defined above, NA will implement the following activities:

#### Staff induction

Each newly recruited employee will be required to familiarise themselves with the NA's Social Inclusion and Diversity Strategy and endeavour to implement it in their daily work.

Each staff member will update their knowledge by attending the Inclusion and Diversity Thematic Seminar provided as part of NA training activities or as part of TCA/NET Inclusion and Diversity Activities.

Team coordinators and department directors will monitor the progress of their staff in learning about inclusion and diversity assumptions and, recommend remedial actions, if necessary.

#### NA cross-sectoral working group on inclusion and diversity

A cross-sector working group on inclusion and diversity will be important for implementing and updating NA strategy. The group was established in the first half of 2021. The coordinator of the



group's activities is the person acting as the coordinator of the TCA (Training and Cooperation Activities) team. The group includes representatives of each Erasmus+ sector and ESC, as well as the Promotion Office. The members of the group will have an advisory role to colleagues in their sectors (they will be the Inclusion Officers for each sector) and will support the TCA Team Coordinator who is also the TCA Inclusion Officer for the whole NA.

#### Preparation of experts cooperating with NA

The experts cooperating with NA on the assessment of grant applications and project reports will be trained (also as preparation for the specific call for proposals and action) in topics related to the inclusion and diversity priority in order to assess accordingly both the project activities planned by the applicants taking into account the needs of people with limited opportunities and the correct application of the principle of proportionality with regard to small, inexperienced organisations working locally for the benefit of such people.

Experts cooperating with NA as lecturers, speakers, trainers, coaches (events, support, monitoring and dissemination of the results) will be selected with due care from among persons working in the institutions and organisations professionally dealing with the topic of inclusion and diversity or in open call for proposals announced by NA.

In addition, systemic training for external experts evaluating project proposals will aim to standardise the experts' approach to evaluating proposals in compliance with inclusion and diversity standards in all submitted project applications.

#### Support to beneficiaries in implementation of project activities

Inclusion and diversity is one of the four core principles of the new 2021-2027 programme listed in the Erasmus Quality Standards that must be respected by the accredited and non-accredited organisations implementing learning mobility activities. Under these Standards, organisations are obliged to be open to participants from different backgrounds and with different abilities and to actively involve participants with limited opportunities.

NA will provide systemic support to new applicants in order to open the programmes as widely as possible to smaller and less experienced organisations and to reach as many people with limited opportunities as possible.

Appropriately prepared training offer for the above mentioned applicants and beneficiaries will encourage project applications and improve management competences of project leaders and their professional knowledge, which will enable these organisations to operate independently.

The topics of inclusion and diversity will be adequately discussed during meetings with beneficiaries organised before or at the beginning of the implementation of the projects (kick-off meetings) and in every monitoring and advisory activity carried out by NA.

This should lead to inclusion and diversity measures being taken into account (as far as possible) in the implementation of the activities of each funded project.



In addition, NA will discuss inclusion and diversity issues as part of its monitoring activities. If necessary, NA will encourage the beneficiaries to create remedial actions to address the needs of people with limited opportunities in their projects better.

NA will work to network and integrate organisations working for people with limited opportunities in order to strengthen their organisational and development capacities.

#### Information and promotion activities

NA will continue to apply solutions suitable for persons with motor disabilities and the visually impaired (the NA headquarters building is fully adapted to the needs of persons with mobility barriers, the NA website has solutions suitable for the visually impaired, hearing impaired and deaf persons - e.g. sign translation is provided during events organized by NA. The selection of venues for information and promotion events will take into account the needs of persons with disabilities).

NA will organise thematic seminars on inclusion and diversity both as cross-sectoral events and as events addressed to the audience of a specific sector, in order to respond more fully to its needs.

The Polish NA will prepare appropriate and accessible information material and will use various outreach activities and communication channels, actively reaching out to and engaging with organisations working in the fields of inclusion and diversity in collaboration with the Regional Info Points.

Attention and respect shown during one-to-one meetings, seminars, training, workshops and other events to people with limited opportunities is a standard, and adequate preparation for this will be ensured as part of NA staff training and by appropriate selection of presenters for the events.

NA will promote the theme of inclusion and diversity through public awareness campaigns and dissemination of examples of Erasmus+ and ESC projects on inclusion.

## **SPECIAL/SPECIFIC ARRANGEMENTS FOR PARTICULAR SECTORS AND ESC ACTIONS**

The above provisions apply to all sectors, actions and activities implemented by NA. However, due to the specific conditions in some sectors and the need for NA to guarantee the principles of transparency of the selection of organisations and participants as well as the principles of equal treatment, NA accepts certain restrictions as described below.

**Mobility projects in the higher education sector** - the definition of situations causing a person to have a lower chance of participating in a project for the calls organised in the years 2021-2023 has been narrowed down to:

- disability: (students or staff) belonging to this group will be determined by having a disability certificate issued by an authorised body. Detailed application procedure for persons with certified disability is described on the NA website (higher education sector documents);

- economic barriers (only for students): membership in this group will be determined by the fact of receiving social grants at the home university, which is the proof of low income per one member of the scholarship holder's family.

The fact that the group is narrowed down results from the need to clearly define the belonging criteria in order to eliminate unequal treatment of participants. NA will engage in a dialogue with university Erasmus+ coordinators and persons dealing with inclusion and diversity issues at universities in order to possibly broaden the target group from 2024 onwards (this will be possible if unambiguous criteria for belonging to the defined target group are developed).

The implementation of the Strategy for Inclusion and Diversity will be supported by the activities of the **National Office of the Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe (EPALE)**, which offers specific solutions for people with limited opportunities. EPALE is a European, multilingual, open to the entire community of adult education professionals, funded by the Erasmus+ programme. The platform not only supports the adult education sector, but also promotes inclusive education through blog or news posts, downloadable materials, organisation and promotion of events on the issue. EPALE presents innovative, effective solutions and tools that can help to provide education to people at risk of social exclusion and to reduce social inequalities.

EPALE thematic website has been created, and it collects articles on equal opportunities education, activation of people at risk of exclusion and social inclusion activities:

<https://epale.ec.europa.eu/pl/blog/edukacja-doroslych-na-rzecz-wlaczania-spolecznego>



## IMPLEMENTATION OF LONG-TERM STRATEGIC ASSUMPTIONS - OVERVIEW

Objective	Activities	Responsible staff	Indicators
Strong social skills of NA staff and trainers working with NA to implement activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adequate induction of new employees and trainers and training for staff and trainers.</li> <li>Activities of the internal working group.</li> <li>Inter-agency collaboration within the <i>NA Strategic Partnership on Inclusions</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NA Director</li> <li>HR Coordinator</li> <li>Heads of Departments</li> <li>TCA Coordinator</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Every employee trained in an online course on "Inclusion and Diversity"</li> <li>Each trainer trained prior to the first assignment.</li> </ul>
Image, attractiveness of the programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Website</li> <li>Dissemination activities</li> <li>Cooperation with: national, local and regional administration institutions, organizations, including NGOs (e.g. Ministry of Education and Science, regional education offices, Government Plenipotentiary for Disabled People, etc.).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promotion Office</li> <li>NA Director</li> <li>Heads of Departments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A special tab/subpage on <a href="http://www.erasmusplus.org.pl">www.erasmusplus.org.pl</a> and <a href="http://www.eks.org.pl">www.eks.org.pl</a> dedicated to this topic, with Commission and national materials and information about NA events on the topic.</li> <li>At least one meeting with external institutions every two years</li> </ul>
Effective support for applicants and beneficiaries, including those working for different target groups of people with limited opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promotional activities.</li> <li>Support to applicants, individual consultation meetings</li> <li>Kick-off meetings</li> <li>Monitoring visits</li> <li>TCA/NET seminars</li> <li>Sectoral and cross-sectoral seminars/workshops</li> <li>Website maintenance</li> <li>Meetings for beneficiaries representing similar organizations.</li> <li>Cooperation of NA inclusion officers in working groups facilitated by SALTO Inclusion &amp; Diversity - participation in group meetings and co-organization of events, training, study visits and networking meetings.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Team coordinators</li> <li>Heads of Departments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minimum one cross-sectoral voluntary seminar per year on the theme "Inclusion and Diversity" for applicants/beneficiaries.</li> <li>Each sector obligatorily includes this topic in all meetings with beneficiaries and applicants.</li> <li>More participants with limited opportunities and more projects implementing the priority - Data on mobility participants and projects generated from the IT systems to prepare annual reports.</li> </ul>
Improving the quality of project activities through systemic support activities offered to applicants and beneficiaries of projects implemented under the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The EduInspirations competition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promotion Office</li> <li>Team coordinators</li> <li>Heads of Directors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The EduInspirations competition will have a separate category: inclusion and diversity, where high quality projects will be selected annually - examples of good practice that successfully implement activities in the field of inclusion and diversity.</li> </ul>