



Inclusive mobility: barriers and needs from young people with disabilities

International Mobility with Disabilities report



**INTERNATIONAL
MOBILITY
WITH DISABILITIES**



Acknowledgment

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I. Introduction

According to the World Health Organization, around 785 million of people older than 15 are living with a sensory, intellectual or mental health impairment in the world and 95 million of children (WHO, 2011). In Europe, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (2000) “recognises and respects the right of persons with disabilities to benefit from measures designed to ensure their independence, social and occupational integration and participation in the life of the community”. However, the majority of them struggle to take their place and are faced with persistent discrimination. By ignoring their very presence, the world is forgoing some of the available wealth essential to global development.

International mobility is part of the European education scheme. However, accessibility of both national education systems and international mobility programmes is at stakes. Traditionally neither secondary, vocational training, higher education nor non-formal education organizations have the infrastructure or the culture to include young people with disabilities who are still facing additional barriers compared to their non-disabled peers making it difficult to go abroad. As reports from the Erasmus+ 2014-2020 programme show: less than 1% of young people are receiving special support to cover their costs related to disability which is the most solid way to measure how many young people with disabilities are going to international mobility. Moreover, if few studies investigate the place of students with disabilities into international mobility, even less is known about young people with disabilities and international mobility. However, the EU and its member States are becoming more aware of these challenges, contributing to an increased responsibility on organizations to engage with the issue of supporting young people with disabilities in all aspects of their life, including the opportunity to have at least one experience abroad.

This report aims to better understand what are the challenges faced by young people with disabilities while going abroad and to raise awareness about the general barriers encountered.

This is a general overview and precise information about whether any type of disability or type of mobility programme should allow in the future to have deeper knowledge of interactions between disability and mobility sectors. Moreover, a European wide research should be done to complement this report as we have chosen to focus only on 3 countries.

The International Mobility with Disabilities (IMD) project is delivered by Erasmus Student Network France (ESN France) in cooperation with the Association of Higher Education Access and Disability (AHEAD) in Ireland, Droit au Savoir in France, Austrian Youth Information Centres, Udruga Zamisli in Croatia and SV-Bildungswerk in Germany. Partners from various sectors of activities (youth work, disability and international mobility) gathered to create an online platform compiling all information about international mobility dedicated to young people with disabilities. It also addresses practical information and online training to youth workers and other mobility professionals on how to support young people with disabilities at all stages of their mobility (preparation, on-site, back home). The final objective is to create a community sharing good practices and testimonials in which young people with disabilities are the core.

To learn more about the project, please find information about it at the end of this report.

This report represents the first stage of the project's outputs, focusing on young people with disabilities and how they envision international mobility. To get a good insight of international mobility and how young people with disabilities are going abroad, we have conducted a range of research activities, with both quantitative and qualitative aspects to measure obstacles and incentives for international mobility with disabilities. The results of desk research, survey and focus groups have been analysed and compiled into this report. It also helped the project's partners to create needs-based content for young people with disabilities within our online platform.

II. Methodology

The report focuses on two main objectives and research questions:

- **have a better understanding of barriers of international mobility experienced by young people with disabilities: who do they consider or not to go abroad?**
- **have a better understanding of the needs for young people with disabilities to have a good mobility experience: what would support them to go abroad?**

To produce this report, we collected information from young people with disabilities from Austria, France and Ireland using different methods:

- **Desk research:** to provide an insight of already existing literature, knowledge and theoretical framework about disability and international mobility. It is important to note however that if we have found literature about mobility of students with disabilities, there was very little about young people with disabilities other than students. Regarding data collection based on Eurostat and other statistics resources, our reader must stay cautious because different methods of data collection are used by different resources, as well as the definitions of disability and young people. However, we have chosen to present some key definitions gathering a common agreement among the community.
- **Survey** was conducted to collect data through an online short questionnaire to provide quantitative information about how young people with disabilities informed themselves about international mobility, why they choose to go or not, what supported them and what type of support was lacking. The survey was designed to investigate the experiences of young people with disabilities whether they have been abroad or not. A set of questions was developed to investigate barriers and enablers of international mobility, focusing on the preparation stage. The survey was administered in German, French and English to prevent the language barrier and targeted people between 15 and 30 years old.

Accessibility was taken into account in the survey in order to accommodate the access needs of those willing to respond. Analysis of 136 answers was made in two stages. The first one was a country-based analysis to raise specific information about each target country because cohorts of respondents did not allow us to conduct a cross analysis between nationalities. The second one was a cross-analysis in order to highlight common points and extract main findings.



- **Focus groups** were led in the three target countries to dig into personal experiences of young people with disabilities based on voluntary participation. In total, focus groups gathered 13 young people between 15 and 30 years old. They represent different profiles: students, interns, without any occupation, enrolled in high school, graduated, employed and unemployed. Additionally, we also used information collected during a training led in Croatia with 15 young people with disabilities in order to ensure a broad representation in the report. Every participant who volunteered for the focus group and met eligibility criteria was selected in order to ensure diversity of experience reported during the focus groups. Thanks to these, it provided deeper insights for this report and was also used to improve the IMD platform. All the focus groups were transcribed with the full permission of the 28 participants. Also, participants to focus groups included the following categories of disabilities: physical impairment, blind or visually impaired, deaf or hearing impaired, health issues, mental conditions and intellectual difficulties.

Throughout our work, several key themes emerged from the investigation:

Legislation, standard definition of disability, youth and international mobility, barriers experienced by young people with disabilities, the benefits of international mobility, the special issue of personal assistants.

Our target group was young people with disabilities. As the IMD platform does not address any particular form of disability because it aims at providing practical information for all, our participants represented a diverse range of disability situations.

However, people with intellectual impairments remained under-represented in the research and further work must be done to further include them into the international mobility environment.

Based on the primary findings from the surveys and focus groups, it was clear that common obstacles and incentives were shared by young people with disabilities despite their various profiles (age, status, disability, country, etc.). Nevertheless, interesting outputs came out regarding countries where the study has taken place: Austria, France and Ireland.

In order to present quantitative information directly related to each country, we have created factsheets based on results found in each country. Main findings with common obstacles and incentives are then presented and discussed to provide an overview of what international mobility means to young people with disabilities at the European level.

Based on feedback from young people with disabilities, personal assistants and disability associations, we also have chosen to show a focus on personal assistants. People with disabilities sometimes need assistance, whether on a few particular tasks or on a daily life basis. However, when talking about international mobility, those personal assistants are not really taken into account. They face several challenges such as cost of support, availability during mobility, well-being, how to answer young people's needs and many others that are not well understood and documented, especially when it comes to international mobility.

This report is an opportunity to raise awareness about these challenges and contribute to a better inclusion of personal assistants as important actors for international mobility of young people with disabilities.



Hypothesis

- **Young people with disabilities are keen to have an experience abroad, and many of them have already experienced it** thus being able to share their feedback and provide recommendations on how to improve the inclusion of people with disabilities in international mobility.
- **Even as a specific population within the international mobility framework, student with disabilities share the same barriers and enablers as young people with disabilities** though solutions may vary depending on the mobility programme as well as the sending and hosting structure.
- **Issue of personal assistants have been poorly addressed so far** while they represent one important cornerstone of a successful support to young people with disabilities going abroad.
- **Only a needs-based approach will allow sending and hosting structure to adapt their activities and support to young people with disabilities.**

Thus, knowing barriers and enablers of international mobility is essential.

III. Young people with disabilities participation in international mobility programmes

A. What do we know about disability, youth and international mobility? Theoretical framework

Before going deeper into the knowledge of barriers on international mobility for young people with disabilities, it seems important to go back to define the terms: disability, youth and international mobility as their understanding varies from country to country and comprises a various range of sub-concepts.

1. Disability

The understanding of disability has evolved through times. We distinguish 4 chronological models:

- the moral model: people with disabilities were seen as victims and only subject of charity without being asked.
- the medical model: from the 19th century and until the 70s, disability is only viewed as a pathology and lies down on the individual, making people with disabilities forced to adapt to society. The objective by then was to find a cure and placed people with disabilities as passive beneficiaries of medical care.
- the social model: from the 80s, society is responsible for creating barriers against people with disabilities because of how it is organized. Thus, people with disabilities cannot fully participate in society.
- the human rights approach or model recognizes rights to people with disabilities who cannot be discriminated against.

To talk about disabilities nowadays we use both the social model and human right approach. This allows to identify factors of discrimination, making collective responsibility of including people with disabilities in all aspects of life and

considering them as active participants of society. Following this logic, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons (UNCPRD) adopted in 2006 is considered as a reference (European Disability Forum, etc.), especially when to define disabilities, stating in its article 1 that “persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interactions with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others”. The UNCPRD highlights that disability is an “evolving concept” resulting from “the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others”.

Thus, a common definition of disability is difficult to find as different publications may have different criteria as to what disability entails. Aside from the United Nations definition, there are some others that can be used. The World Health Organization in 2001 makes a distinction between:

- impairment as “any loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological or anatomical structure or function”.
- disability as “any restriction or lack resulting from an impairment of ability, to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being” (European Disability Forum, 2009).

Another definition is important as shown by the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, a person with a disability is someone with a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.

An individual is considered to be a person with a disability if he or she currently has the disability, has a record of having a disability, or is regarded as having the disability (Jarow, 1992). This definition demonstrates that disability can be defined differently depending on the circumstance.

However, Hartley in Australian Higher Education Policy and Inclusion of People with Disabilities states that the definition of disability in more modern laws has been left deliberately vague and ambiguous to ensure that all disabilities were covered both physical and mental (Hartley, 2012).

In any case, understanding disability today means that “people with disabilities must not be viewed as a single, homogeneous subset of society defined exclusively by their impairment” and that “intersectional identities of people should be valued, respected and celebrated for the richness and diversity they bring to society” (Fazekas, 2013).

Several articles from the UNCRPD set out minimum standards States have to follow to ensure that young people with disabilities are ensured all their rights:

- article 3 remembers the principle of “Respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities and respect for the right (...) to preserve their identity”.
- article 24 stating that young people with disabilities have the right to choose their education. This considers all kinds of education: tertiary, vocational training, adult education and lifelong learning.
- article 27 stating that people with disabilities are entitled to adequate support and correct wages in employment.
- article 30 showcasing the right to access culture and leisure.



Thus, it is a matter of law and states that people with disabilities must be able to access all aspect of life without any discrimination and on an equal basis with others.

It took a long time for the European Union to get involved in making a disability policy. Efforts started in the late 80s and resulted firstly to the Helios programme and the creation of the European Disability Forum in 1997 (Council of Europe). With the Treaty of Amsterdam (1999), the right of non-discrimination is established and serves as a basis for people with disabilities thank to article 13 and the EU Directive on Equal Treatment in Employment and Occupation.

This policy has been reinforced by the EU Charter on Fundamental Rights in its article 21 prohibiting any discrimination based on any ground, including disability. Moreover, its article 26 “recognises and respects the right of persons with disabilities to benefit from measures designed to ensure their independence, social and occupational integration and participation in the life of the

community”. In 2010, the Commission adopted the European Disability Strategy (2010-2020) and ratified in 2011 the UNCRPD.

At the European level, numbers of people with disabilities vary between sources because they do not have the same definition of disability and do not use the same methodology to survey the population. Between 43 million (according to Eurostat) and 80 million (according to the Council of Europe) Europeans have a disability or an impairment, but it is difficult to extract proportion on young people with disabilities because statistics about this part of the population are difficult to find because young people are a less visible group as well as people with disabilities (Council of Europe)¹.

Moreover, the understanding of disabilities varies from country to country and many definitions exist as we have seen above.

Besides, the European Disability Strategy leaves to member states the choice of definition of disability and the type of national disability to follow based on this national definition.

¹ Note that women are more likely to report a disability than men (Eurostat).

2. Youth

According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), as “youth is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood’s independence”, it is “often referred to a person between the ages of leaving compulsory education and finding their first job” (UNDESA, 2013).

Taking into account this definition, we cannot talk about a specific age group. However, “the UN Secretariat uses the terms youth and young people interchangeably to mean age 15-24 with the understanding that member States and other entities use different definitions” (UNDESA, 2013). For the purpose of this report, we are referring to the Council of Europe and the European Commission definition seeing young people as persons 13-30 years old (Council of Europe and EC, 2004).

Note however that there is no definition of “young people” in the EU Youth Strategy except from this age range, same applies to the Erasmus+ programme. Moreover, Youth Goals are part of the annexes of the EU Youth Strategy and should serve as inspiration for the EU, its member states and other stakeholders to implement policies at the different levels. It is highly important to recognize, as the European Youth Forum does, that “young people are not a homogeneous group and youth from disempowered backgrounds and

vulnerable groups face additional barriers to social and economic inclusion” (EYF, 2019).

So far, the transition between childhood and adulthood has been quite forgotten from policies regarding people with disabilities but this tends to be more taken into account nowadays with a focus between all forms of education and employment. For example, in 2009, the Council of Europe set up recommendations on the social inclusion of children and young people with autism spectrum disorders. This was followed by recommendations about women and girls with disabilities, adopted in 2012 (Council of Europe).

As presented above, when talking about young people it often comes to talk about education. Education is a fundamental right indeed. Nevertheless, “in 2011, 30.7% of people aged 15-34 having a basic activity difficulty were neither in employment nor in any education or training in the EU-28. This is 15 percentage points higher than those in this age group without basic activity difficulty” (Eurostat)². Young people with disabilities (which include more people than those having basic activity difficulty) are still facing incredible challenges to pursue their educational cursus. Moreover, the right to formal education also applies to the right to non-formal education as complementary to the formal education system. Mobility programmes cover both formal and non-formal education and represent a very interesting opportunity for young people.

² Eurostat defines basic activity difficulties for an individual considered disabled but there is no mention of long standing health problems or how it affects his/her participation in areas of life.



3. International mobility



Photo of the group that assisted the IMD Training in Zagreb, Croatia, standing in front the Tehnički Muzej

We can find 6 types of international mobility on the European Youth Portal:

- **volunteering:** many programmes allow young people to freely participate in solidarity activities in their native country or in another country, often in a strong relationship with the local community. For example, the European Solidarity Corps offers different models of engagement abroad through volunteering opportunities.
- **traineeship:** a period of learning in a structure (e.g.: a company) to get the skills needed in a job.
- **working:** the European Youth Portal refers to programmes supporting young people to find employment abroad.
- **studying:** every mobility programme targeting young people enrolled into higher education.
- **school and youth exchanges:** primary and secondary education programmes offer opportunities to go abroad through the formal education system while youth exchanges target any young people willing to engage and discover a new culture through non-formal education.
- **tourism and travelling:** spending time away from home, often during holidays, for recreational purposes and visiting a new place. We can consider DiscoverEu as a way to encourage conscious tourism among young people as it gives candidates mainly train tickets to discover European places.

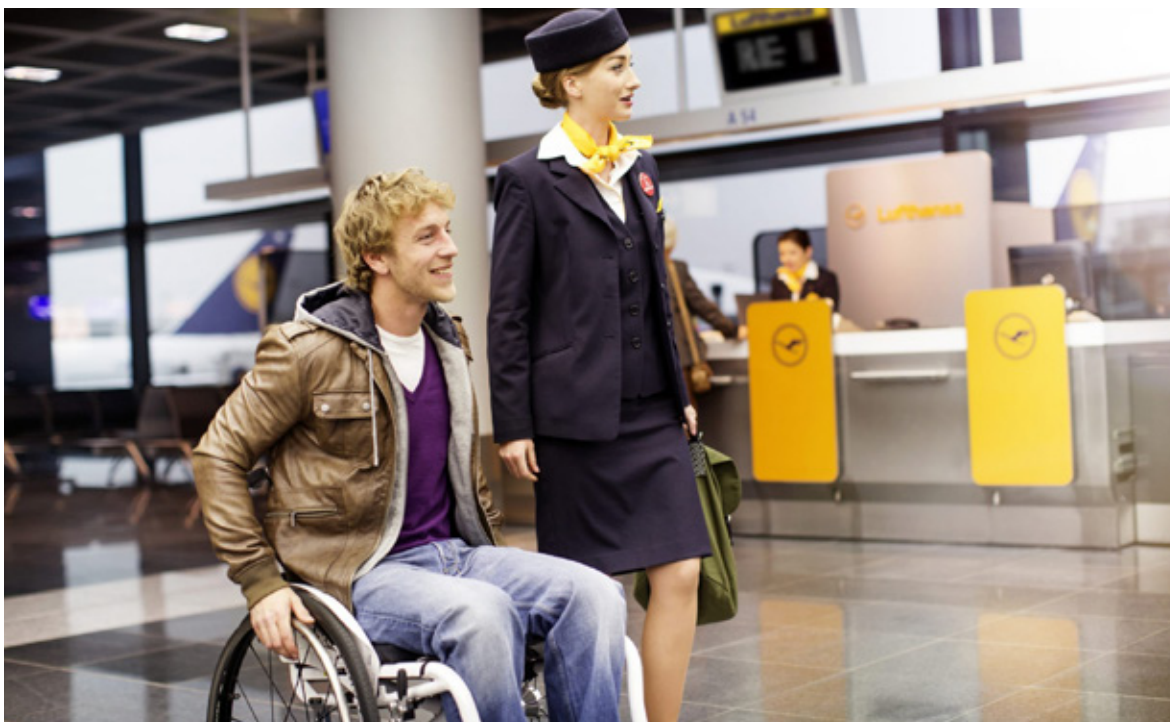
Note that Erasmus+ covers many types of mobilities including studying, training, working, school and youth exchanges.

However, there are also other popular opportunities to go abroad, such as au pair, language trips and language schools, work & travel, etc.

As seen above, the legal framework for the inclusion of young people with disabilities in all aspects of education is in place across the EU and the responsibility for inclusion is with the mobility programme such as Erasmus+ and upon education institutions to ensure that young people with disabilities can access and take part in all activities.

Andersen, Hougaard, Nindl and Hill-Dixon define formal and non-formal education as follow:

- **formal learning** takes place in identified learning venues (such as schools), leading to recognized qualifications and led by qualified teaching staff.
- **non-formal learning** has an educative purpose but is voluntary based. It takes place in various environments for which teaching, training and learning is not necessarily the main objective. Professional (facilitators) or non-professional people (such as youth leaders and volunteers) can deliver such activities taking place during work, leisure or in the community.



Thus, programmes of international mobility can apply to formal and non-formal education.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to assess the number of young people with disabilities who has experienced international mobility. This is mainly due to the non-declaration of disability, the diversity of young people themselves, and various programmes of international mobility existing led by as many actors as programmes, both at the European, national and local levels.

What we know about students with disabilities can help understand the larger international mobility framework. Indeed, when talking about students with disabilities, the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) has a target that **20% graduates will have undertaken a period of study or training abroad** and this target applies to all students including those from under-represented groups such as disability.

During its 2014-2020 programme, Erasmus only counted between 0.11% to 0.15% of students and trainees receiving special support (or access needs as we prefer to call it) (V. Van Hees, D. Montagnese, 2020).

Students with disabilities have traditionally been and continue to be underrepresented in study abroad programmes.

In the article “Strategies and challenges for creating an inclusive study abroad program”, **Link found that “remarkably, only 5% (or 2,786) of students who studied abroad in 2011/12 reported any disability at all. Of those, 43.4% had a learning disability, 28% a mental disability, 7.6% physical disability, 3.8% a sensory disability and 17.2% fell into an “other disability” category.**

While the overall participation of students with disabilities is steadily increasing” (Link, 2016).

While working on the International Mobility with Disabilities project, partners gave high value to the concept of Inclusive Mobility, defined as: «creating adequate conditions to learn, work or volunteer abroad for people with fewer opportunities, by addressing their diverse support needs. It is a needs-based approach to what the individual beneficiary needs to ensure a safe and exciting mobility period abroad. (...) What the beneficiary says he/she needs is what they should receive.

It is not only about academic mobility but also about the social aspects that play an important role in the experience abroad and the potential link to connect with the local community” (V. Van Hees, D. Montagnese, 2020).

B. Barriers and enablers on young people with disabilities to do an international mobility

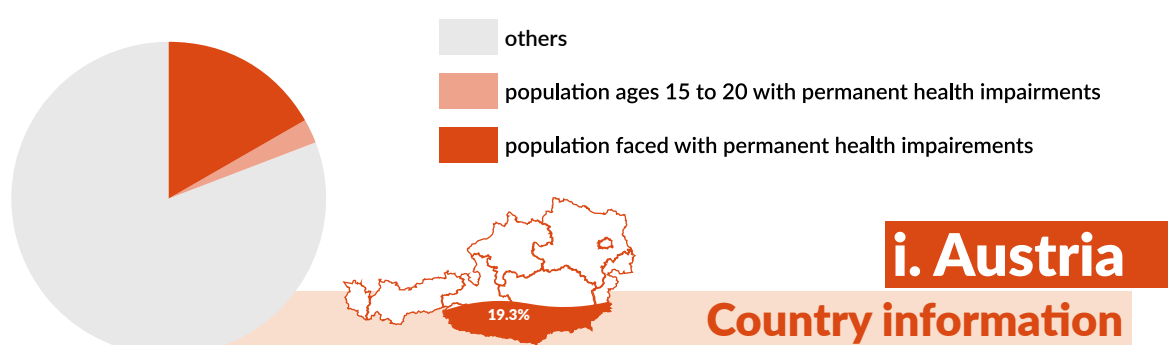
The study has targeted two groups:

- young people with disabilities who went abroad and those who have not.

The objective was to understand what were the main factors leading to the decision to go or not to go abroad. Three countries were investigated: Austria, France and Ireland, gathering a total number of 164 participants (both from the national surveys and focus groups).

Results are first presented in country sheets to raise specificities of each country investigated. Then, common findings are shared in a second part.

1. Country sheets



11.5% (Eurostat).
Prevalence of disabilities in total population

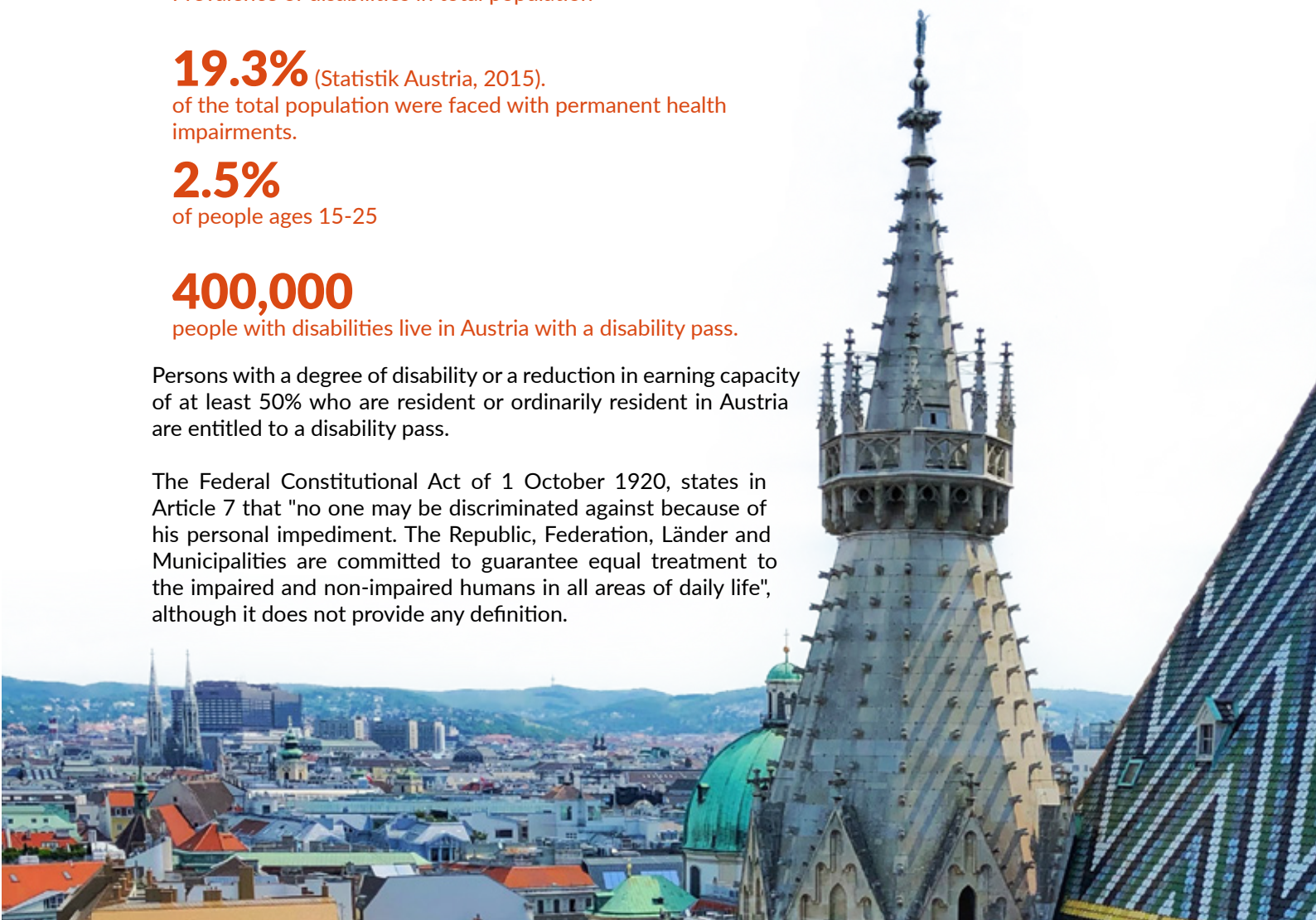
19.3% (Statistik Austria, 2015).
of the total population were faced with permanent health impairments.

2.5%
of people ages 15-25

400,000
people with disabilities live in Austria with a disability pass.

Persons with a degree of disability or a reduction in earning capacity of at least 50% who are resident or ordinarily resident in Austria are entitled to a disability pass.

The Federal Constitutional Act of 1 October 1920, states in Article 7 that "no one may be discriminated against because of his personal impediment. The Republic, Federation, Länder and Municipalities are committed to guarantee equal treatment to the impaired and non-impaired humans in all areas of daily life", although it does not provide any definition.



In 2008, Austria ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Alongside the EU Disability Strategy, this accounted for new standards in dealing with people with disabilities. In implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Austria has adopted a comprehensive national strategy:


The National Action Plan on Disability 2012-2020 contained long-term disability policy objectives and measures. Austrian sign language was recognized in 2005 and is now part of Article 8 of the Constitutional Act. To this must be added several regional laws making clear legislation about people with disabilities difficult to adopt at the national level.

Participants who did an international mobility: 32%



Duration of the mobility:

- less than 2 months **27%**
- 2-6 months **36%**
- more than 6 months **18%**

What influenced them to go abroad: 

- availability of information **63%**
- availability of financial support **36%**
- availability of support service and assistance **27%**

What information was investigated:

- local public transportation **80%**
- costs, overall accessibility, and leisure time activities: **73%**
- local support organizations **45%**

Regarding support organizations, respondents indicated various stakeholders, but it seems to be very individual or case-related which type of support organization is more relevant. It depends on the mobility programme undertaken and the type of disability and thus access needs.

Participants who did not have gone abroad: 68%



Reasons not to go abroad:

- personal reasons (e.g., family reasons) **45%**
- lack of time **32%**
- lack of interest **23%**
- lack of information **19%**
- other reasons **19%**

What would influence them to go abroad: 

- availability of financial support **58%**
- availability of information **42%**
- added value for the professional career **42%**
- availability of accommodation option **30%**
- availability of support services and assistance **30%**
- accessibility of the venue **18%**

It seems that the decision to go abroad is mostly influenced by the availability of financial support and of information. If you compare percentages between respondents who did not go abroad and those who did, it seems like both factors become even more important once there is an express will or a certain plan to live abroad.

“ A waiter from a pizza restaurant in Graz, the most accessible city I have ever been in, did not want to charge me the coffee I had because he thought he had humiliated me with the fact that the toilets were upstairs, and I needed help to get there. Incredible!”

Total participants : 47

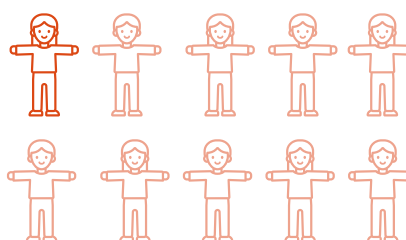
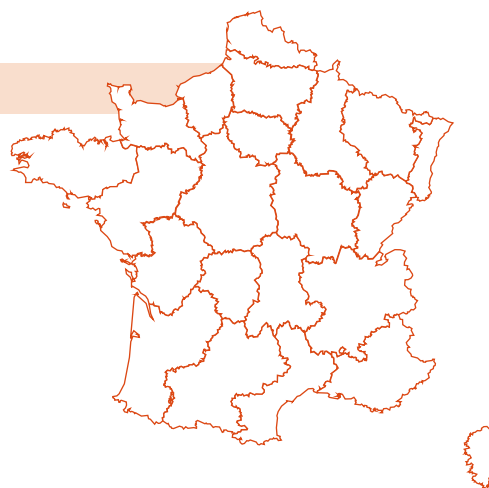
Incredible!

Austria

ii. France

Country information

The law n° 2005-102 (11 February 2005) on equal rights and opportunities, participation and citizenship for persons with disabilities, brought fundamental evolutions. For the first time in French law, its article 2 gives a definition of disability: «constitutes a disability, within the meaning of this law, any limitation of activity or restriction of participation in society suffered in his environment by a person because of a substantial, lasting or permanent impairment of one or more physical, sensory, psychic, cognitive or mental functions, a multiple disability or a disabling health disorder». A lot of work still needs to be done to correctly implement this law and new efforts are taken about housing, transportation and personal assistants for instance.



11% (Eurostat).

Prevalence of disabilities in total population


**Total participants : 17 to the survey
and 5 to the focus group**

Participants who did an international mobility: 47%



Duration of the mobility:

- less than 2 months **44%**
- 2-6 months **33%**
- more than 6 months **22%**

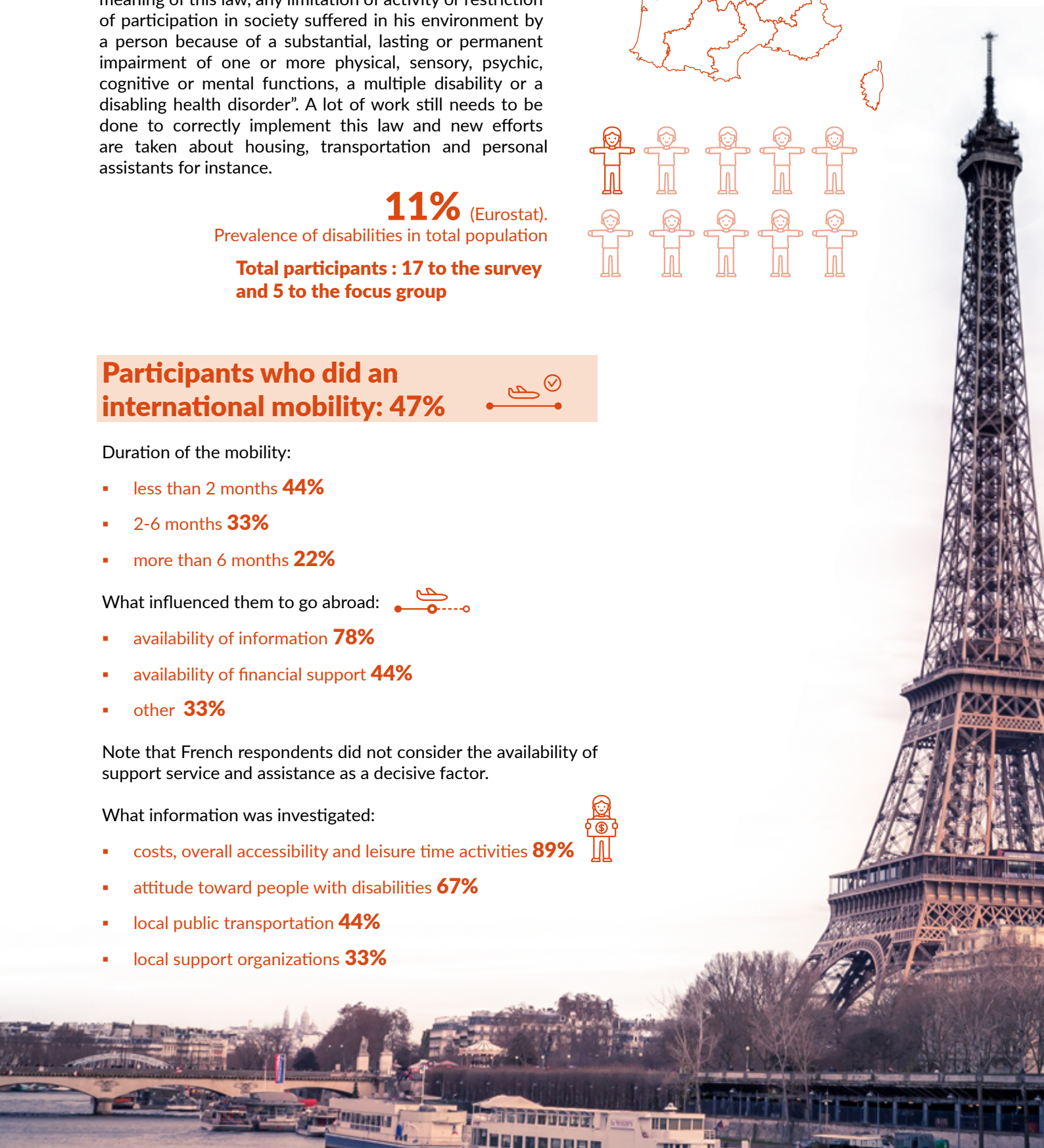
What influenced them to go abroad: 

- availability of information **78%**
- availability of financial support **44%**
- other **33%**

Note that French respondents did not consider the availability of support service and assistance as a decisive factor.

What information was investigated:

- costs, overall accessibility and leisure time activities **89%**
- attitude toward people with disabilities **67%**
- local public transportation **44%**
- local support organizations **33%**



Participants who did not have gone abroad: 53%



Reasons not to go abroad:

- lack of information **75%**
- other reasons **34%**
- personal reasons (e.g., family reasons) **25%**
- lack of time **25%**

Note that no respondent was lacking interest in international mobility. Among other reasons for not going abroad was the disability itself who was seen as an obstacle to international mobility.

For example, one respondent is hearing-impaired and has a lot of difficulties in hearing and speaking foreign language. Other respondents felt concerned about dealing with all the changes induced by an international mobility.

What would influence them to go abroad:



- availability of information **62%**
- added value for the professional career **50%**
- availability of support services and assistance **50%**
- availability of accommodation option **37%**
- accessibility of the venue **37%**
- availability of financial support **25%**

“My family

My family told me to wait because they thought I could not be independent enough”.

told me to wait...

“The risk was

I was afraid of being all alone once abroad, so I chose not to go. The risk was too high”.

too high.

France



iii. Ireland

Country information

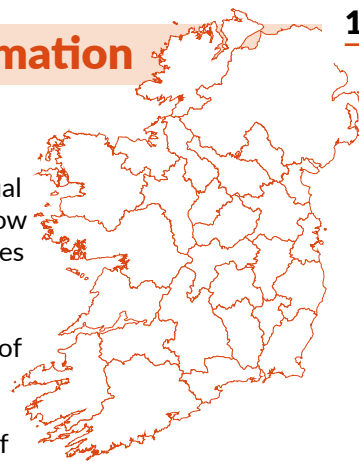
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There is no data available in Eurostat about the prevalence of disabilities.

However, 5,3% of the population were having basic activity difficulties (meaning: individual is considered disabled but there is no mention of long-standing health problems or how it affects his/her participation to areas of life) and 7,7% having employment difficulties (meaning: disability restricting individuals only in their professional life) (Eurostat).

In 2005, Ireland adopted the Disability Act to promote and improve participation of people with disabilities in society.

The Equal status Acts 2000-2011 prohibits discrimination on nine grounds, one of which is disability.



Participants who did an international mobility: 48%

Duration of the mobility:

- less than 2 months **24%**
- 2-6 months **28%**
- more than 6 months **48%**

Note that most of those Irish respondents went abroad through Erasmus+ for students programmes that are generally of 6-months duration or more. However, we can see that other durations of less than 6 months are well represented, giving a clue that short-termed mobility programmes are of interest for young people with disabilities.

What influenced them to go abroad:



- availability of financial support **33%**
- availability of information **23%**
- availability of support service and assistance **20%**

Other factors were mentioned: the importance of having good language skills before leaving, having good doctors and health insurance, and being sure to navigate through a safe new environment while abroad. Thus, security seems like a very important factor when going abroad. Though not all participants mentioned the availability of support services and assistance as a priority in their investigation, one insisted that the preparation stage remains essential. Having information earlier about what support services were available at her hosting structure could have allowed her to avoid going back and forth the first week with disability services.

What information was investigated:

- costs, overall accessibility, and leisure time activities **81%**
- local public transportation **80%**
- local support organizations **50%**

5.3% (Eurostat)
population with basic activity difficulties

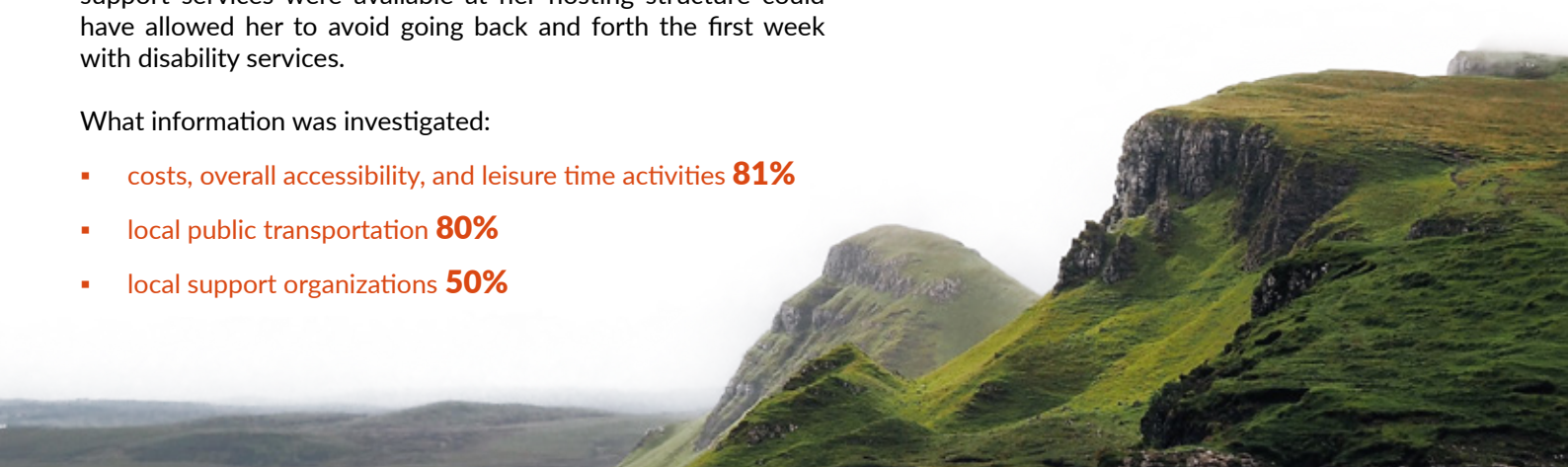
7.7% (Eurostat)
population with employment difficulties

**Total participants : 72 to the survey
and 8 to the focus group**

Regarding the housing offers, participants agreed that discrepancies between two countries in accessible accommodation regulation does not help in gathering information about housing, as they have to first understand how accessibility is considered in the destination country before finding the accommodation suiting them.

The same occurred for support services and assistance. For example, a participant, who was a student, explained differences between her home university (in Scotland) and her host university (in Ireland).

At home she had dictation softwares available for free whereas in her host university these were not available and when she tried to bring her own, she was not even permitted. Knowing that information before going would maybe have changed her mind or she would have prepared differently. Note that respondents also gave importance to the country culture and attitudes toward disability.



Participants who did not have gone abroad: 52%



Reasons not to go abroad:

- personal reasons (e.g., family reasons) **42%**
- lack of information **35%**
- other reasons **31%**
- lack of time **19%**
- lack of interest **5%**

Combined altogether, these reasons are producing a strong self-censored feeling about international mobility. As one participant stated "It was never on my radar, I never considered it".

**“I never
It was never on my radar,
I never considered it”.
considered it.”**

As the opportunities are not visible enough, not directly addressed to young people with disabilities and personal reasons are important barriers, young people with disabilities do not think international mobility is for them.

What would influence them to go abroad:



- availability of information **62%**
- added value for the professional career **50%**
- availability of support services and assistance **50%**
- availability of accommodation option **37%**
- accessibility of the venue **37%**
- availability of financial support **25%**

More precisely on support services and assistance, respondents highlighted their ongoing medical care and/or uncertainty in their healthcare continuation abroad as a factor not to go on international mobility.



2. Barriers to international mobility for young people with disabilities

As the results from Austria, France and Ireland show: it is everything about the preparation stage of international mobility. The decision to go abroad is influenced by several factors for any young person but to take this decision, young people with disabilities have to take into account much more factors than their non-disabled peers. Young people with disabilities who went abroad reported having difficulties during the mobility itself, but a good preparation stage allowed them to decrease the risks.

According to the OECD, access to all aspects of education is an integral part of the right to education. However, it states that “unlike other young adults, young people with disabilities encounter bottlenecks and blockages in their pathway that may hinder their progress or impose detours that may overexpose them to unemployment and exclusion” (OECD, 2013). The Council of Europe also highlights several barriers to people with disabilities in general, having an important impact on young people with disabilities:

- few information about the direct impact of EU policies on people with disabilities
- people with disabilities are absent from political discussions.
- high level of poverty among people with disabilities
- lifelong learning still limited.
- extremely low representation of women with disabilities in all aspects of life and political discussions
- children and young people with severe disability have big difficulties in attending mainstream education.
- young people with disabilities are less likely by far than their non-disabled peers to attend or stay in school (Council of Europe).

Such barriers also impact young people with disabilities when they want to go on international mobility. As Fazekas states: “Participating in international mobility is challenging for everyone,

but people with disabilities face additional barriers. Such challenges include stereotypes, discrimination, financial constraints, inaccessible environments, as well as a lack of adequate policy implementation, support mechanisms, information or sufficient cooperation” (Fazekas, 2018).

As stated above, barriers to international mobility are crucial at the preparation stage. If there are too many obstacles directly at the beginning and even before going to the host country, it is most likely that the young person with disabilities gives up his/her project.

“ Participating in international mobility is challenging for everyone, but people with disabilities face additional barriers. Such challenges include stereotypes, discrimination, financial constraints, inaccessible environments, as well as a lack of adequate policy implementation, support mechanisms, information or sufficient cooperation” – (Fazekas, 2018).

Barriers to international mobility can be classified into 6 categories.

- Lack of awareness about international mobility for disadvantaged young people:

If you are a young person with less opportunities (which include young people with disabilities), then you simply do not consider international mobility as an option for you. You do not know anyone who has gone, and it is never mentioned in your living environment. The opportunities are not visible or they do not seem as something everyone is entitled to. Taking the example of students: “Students with disabilities might be opting out of the change to studying abroad simply because study abroad does not feature in their mental maps because they feel that their disability will not be catered for. In this sense, some barriers are perceived barriers and consequently are self-imposed by students rather than existing in reality” (V. Van Hees, D. Montagnese, 2020). This lack of awareness can be explained by the following barrier: lack of information.



- **Lack of accessible information:**

The absence of clear, accessible information at all stages of life (school, studying, working of others) about international mobility programmes and process to go abroad, especially regarding finance, supports and information about disability in the host country can be off putting for young people with disabilities and may result with a young person not engaging with the program.

All European mobility programmes seemed to be equally interesting for surveyed young people with disabilities. However, they stated being most interested by Erasmus+ for students (in contrast to interns, apprentices or youth exchanges). Few other participants showed interest in the European Solidarity Corps.

This ranking of priorities between European programmes can be explained by the lack of information about all mobility programmes. Erasmus+ for students is vastly promoted and generally young people tend to know less about other opportunities within Erasmus+ programme and other European opportunities. Moreover,

even less is known about national programs on international mobility though they exist in several countries. During one focus group led by the project, participants were less aware of those and some of them did not even know any. It is highly possible that in each country mobility programs exist, but information does not reach young people with disabilities (if not young people at all). In conclusion, information is also important about the programmes themselves. If not, all young people know about the diversity of opportunities, it is likely that these less-known programmes are less inclusive because they do not reach all young people. This is also true for other young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, not only young people with disabilities.

Lack of information also varies depending on which supports are available regarding mobilities and how young people with disabilities can access it following several steps (who the contact person is, what administrative requirements are from your sending structure but also for your hosting structure), about eligibility criteria for each mobility program, about healthcare facilities in the host structure. This is paramount to many people with disabilities and may be one reason people are reluctant to move from their native country. Many information about support to people with disabilities are left to the young people to find out and increase the drop-out rate.

Moreover, information is also about how sending and hosting structure are communicating between each other. Often, young people's needs are misunderstood or not complete. Further investigation must be done to understand how sending and hosting structures are dealing with disabilities during a mobility. These results will be presented in a later report.

- **Finances:**

The most prevalent barriers are identified as insufficient finance. Inadequate financing creates even bigger problems for young people with disabilities as the impact of their disability incur additional expenses. There is also a lack of information on the range of funding streams that may be available and also if their already used grants and support services can be transportable abroad. Too many young people still don't know all the support granted by Erasmus+ and especially the Erasmus+ Special Needs Support. As presented later in this report, "the coverage for the cost of support persons, such as sign language interpreters or personal assistants is mentioned as the most challenging process for mobile students with disabilities" (V. Van Hees, D. Montagnese, 2020).

- **Lack of accessible transportation (both local and international):**

In the preparation stage, it must be provided detailed information about how to travel with a disability. Not only at the international level (from one country to another) but also inside a country and even a city as there is very little common transportation system between these levels. However, regarding accessibility of a city for example, written information is often not enough as it may be subjective. It also depends on the needs of each individual. For example, a blind person and wheelchair user may not have the same needs about transportation for example.

- **Negative attitudes and lack of respect:**

The lack of a deep understanding by staff in structures of the impact of disability and how to support young people creates difficulties. Students who have support in their sending structure and have their needs already assessed have to go through the process all over again in the host structure. Participants to focus groups reported to have been asked to submit their medical evidence and proof of disability all over again in their host structure. As this information was not requested beforehand, they were not expecting to have it nor did they bring it, causing huge delays in getting support and a lot of stress. Another participant, who is deaf, was faced with laughter by other young people during a youth exchange because she had trouble understanding their accent when speaking in English. This fear of negative attitude (often verified with different degrees) sometimes leads young people not to disclose their disability because (they have not been asked or because they didn't think it was important or because they didn't want to be labelled) (V. Van Hees, D. Montagnese, 2020).

- **Lack of systems for putting supports in place:**

Surveyed young people with disabilities often reported that the international office and disability office of the university as a main source to get support and information. It shows that students with disabilities have a little bit more support than other young people. This statement must be taken cautiously though as a lot still must be done by universities to better include students with disabilities into international mobility programmes and it does not assess the quality



of support given by other organizations to young people. Indeed, participants also said that they often ask youth centres and youth associations for information and support.

Unfortunately, responsibility for getting support is still put on the young people. Too much onus is placed on the young one to sort out their own support. It is often that the hosting structure has no information to provide to the young person with a disability who has to find a solution on his/her own. For example, an Irish student going to the Netherlands needed interpreters because he is deaf. His hosting university did not know how to find interpreters and he got in touch with the Deaf community in the Netherlands thanks to some local friends. He was also responsible for arranging the timetables of his interpreters and also for funding them. Regarding specifically universities, there are often no agreements to link with others regarding disability needs. There is also a lack of information about differences in available accommodation in different countries because accessible accommodations are not following the same standards all over Europe.

Moreover, young people with disabilities are most likely to choose a programme, a destination and a hosting structure based on the availability of appropriate supports available to them rather than the most interesting learning activities. One participant to a focus group confirmed she abandoned a mobility programme before leaving because she had no clue about the planning of activities and thus could not prepare for each day.

Indeed, young people with disabilities need more information to plan ways in advance their daily activities as it can take more time to get dressed for the day or it takes more time to move from a place to another for example.

So, when the hosting structure does not provide a planning, it can be very complex to handle everything. “It is always relieving when everything is provided in advance”. As another participant stated: “Although I trusted my high school teachers, there was some misunderstanding in Budapest. My sister and I spent a lot of money on taxis because we didn’t know the schedule in advance. It seemed to me that stairs were everywhere we went. I was stubborn and I didn’t want to grumble but I was exhausted and, because of that, avoided sightseeing. Instead, I used all my free time to sleep. I could hardly wait to come home”.

There has been debate between participants about the duration of mobility programmes. It is clear that the one size fits all approach to the duration of international programmes presents difficulties for many young people with disabilities. On one hand, participants in surveys and focus groups say that the ideal duration is between 2 to 6 months (36% in Austria, 33% in France and 28% in Ireland).

Only Irish participants showed a preference for 6 months international mobility (48% of respondents who have been abroad in Ireland) while French participants preferred less than 2 months mobility (44% of French respondents who have been abroad). The duration of mobility appears to be strongly influenced by the support in the preparation stage. If little information or support is provided beforehand, short-termed mobility is favoured because it may appear as less risky for young people with disabilities.

It is also interesting to note that young people with disabilities who would benefit from the option of structured short-termed programmes or before-hand on-site visits may be keener to later go on longer term programmes. Study made by UUKI shows that any type of mobility programme, regardless of length, has a positive impact.

It is interesting to note that “short-term mobility options of four weeks or less now account for 21% of all reported mobility, or 1 in 5 mobilities” which is an increase compared to previous years (V. Van Hees, D. Montagnese, 2020). Indeed, short-term mobility can be viewed as more flexible by young people with disabilities.



3. Benefits from international mobility for young people with disabilities

A solid common agreement among surveyed people recognizes several benefits from young people with disabilities from going abroad. This has been verified by several studies, including one from Teichler and Janson in 2007 and more recently by the European Commission in 2019. It is also said that those benefits are even more important and have a bigger impact on young people with less opportunities such as young people with disabilities (Engel, 2017, UK International 2019).



- **Employability:**

There is a clear connection between going abroad (and especially studying abroad) and the 21st century job skills required, especially language skills to quote only one. For students with disabilities the opportunity to gain these skills on study abroad programmes or other programmes is critical, given that these students on graduation find themselves at the bottom of the employment queue.

- **Acquisition of soft skills:**

The significant benefits to employability from going abroad are due to the acquisition of soft skills employers seek (adaptation, communication, self-management, curiosity). For young people

with disabilities, it provides a crucial pathway to employment as it enables them to acquire demonstrable independence, resilience and coping skills along with leadership and adaptability, all vital in challenging the negative attitude towards the employment of people with disabilities.

- **Intercultural skills:**

Young people learn to cooperate and communicate with people of different cultures, backgrounds and languages even on short term programmes.

- **Personal skills:**

International mobility can boost self-esteem and sense of adventure through travel and intercultural experiences. International mobility proves young people with disabilities that they are capable and can do anything they want to do, because they have learnt to flourish outside of their comfort zone, thus granting them self-knowledge, confidence and independence.

On a positive note, participants from focus groups have recognized improvements at the European level.



Most institutions are now getting elevators. People are getting more aware about disabilities and more open-minded. It was great to discover another country”.



One time was really memorable to me. It happened in Ghent when we got on the train to Namur. While entering our train compartment, I met a lady who asked me if I needed any help. I said yes. Although she seemed to have heard me, she didn't move at all. After half a minute of confusion, I asked her if she could help me, and she replied: “Could you please tell me how to do that?”. That was the most correct approach possible but this time it surprised me so much that neither I was ready for it myself”.

For more information on benefits from international mobilities, the RAY network has developed three factsheets on personal development, key competences and active citizenship. Find more about it in the references section.

C. Focus on personal assistants



During our investigations, it soon appeared clear that we could not talk about international mobility with disabilities if we do not take into account the personal assistant, or carer, who care and live daily with young people with disabilities who need such support. However, this issue is still poorly addressed.

International mobility of young people with disabilities should be encouraged but without forgetting the importance of quality support. As stated above, this qualitative support is defined depending on the type of disability, the duration of the mobility activity and the payment of the support required. And it should be provided in all aspects of daily life: transportation, healthcare, housing, leisure, education, professional activities, etc. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, signed in New York on 30 March 2007 states in Article 20 that “States Parties shall take effective measures to ensure personal mobility with the greatest possible independence for persons with disabilities”.

Among the measures proposed to implement this right to personal mobility, regardless of the reason, distance, means of transport or place of destination, one in particular attracts attention and concerns «access by persons with disabilities to quality mobility aids, devices, assistive technologies and forms of live assistances and intermediaries, including by making them available at affordable cost”. On reading this article, the promotion of the profession of personal assistant also appears to be one of the keys, not only to meet the expectations of a growing and demanding demand, but also to promote the development of an adapted offer.

There are multiple challenges for a personal assistant to a young person going abroad: remuneration, working hours, training and well-being of personal assistant.

The personal assistant helps the person with a disability throughout the day (or part of it depending on the needs) and is available to him/her for 24 hours, which is very intense and exceeds the limit of the average of 8 working hours and, depending on the needs, requires meeting different and specific actions. A personal assistant can provide care for dependent people following these missions (one or several): Home care and medical assistance, transportation, catering, personal activities (leisure and others), professional activities, trips or academic/ professional exchanges abroad.

During these interventions, any opportunity will be seized to stimulate an initiative of taking autonomy. Generally speaking, the personal assistant must be able to deal objectively with different situations or pathologies; but he/she must also have human qualities, by combining personal skills, discretion and respect for others, empathy being judged here on the performance of useful gestures.

In the context of international mobility, the personal assistant must make an additional effort to adapt. This type of support requires new rules to be established between the personal assistant and the person being supported. However, it is important to ensure that these agreements are flexible enough to ensure that the discovery of a new country is a pleasure to be shared equally by the pair.

The personal assistant appears to be the cornerstone of any system of international mobility because he/she deals with daily challenges faced by the young person with a disability that may be recognized as insurmountable if not assisted by a qualified personal assistant. “I had a shower in my room with a tub that was too high for me and the alternative was a narrow shower cabin that had to be closed during taking shower. Luckily, I had my personal assistant to help me have a shower, but I don’t even want to think what could have happened if I had been there alone”.



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So far, our research has not led to dedicated literature about personal assistants during international mobility. This challenge was issued by participants to the International Mobility with Disabilities project and their personal assistants willing to raise awareness about their own situation. Indeed, for some young people with disabilities, accompaniment is the key to travel abroad. Nowadays, personal assistants are often relatives as one participant explained taking for example a school trip she made: “My mum was there officially as one the teachers and my sister as my personal assistant. We had planned everything in detail before the trip”.

During focus groups, we have assessed 4 key elements on how to engage a personal assistant within an international mobility project so he/she fully supports the young person:

- **Assessing the needs:**

Different needs of persons with disabilities must be taken into consideration. Not all people with disabilities have the same needs and the same rule cannot be applied to, for example, people with visual impairment, people with physical impairment who have difficulty moving and people with other types of disability. The enumeration of these needs can be like an endless inventory: from scratching the eyes or the chin, make-up or shaving, repositioning in a wheelchair to eating and sleeping. Every detail is important, day or night. Everything must be told (including what can and cannot be done: ability to express oneself, manage one’s schedule, choose one’s meals, carry out the essential actions of life; or inability, for

example, to wash oneself, drink without a straw, or clean oneself up after using the toilet) to the person(s) who may offer their services. Their ability to fulfil these requirements must be fully determined beyond a generous endorsement, or there will be future disappointments. The success of the trip and of a tandem is based on an asymmetrical relationship, the vigilance of one and the well-being of the other. Especially since a stay abroad requires an additional effort of adaptation and sometimes requires opting for alternative solutions. In the case of travelling while participating in the activity, it is necessary to provide an assistant during the trip and to make sure that one person can satisfy all travel needs so the young person with a disability and luggage can reach the destination safely. Often, these are longer trips that require more luggage (and the personal assistant has also his/her own luggage to carry) so the personal assistant can hardly help the young person and carry luggage at the same time. It is necessary to plan the trip in detail and to realistically assess the number of assistants needed.

- **Finding the personal assistant(s):**

The next step is to identify the ideal profile of personal assistant. The best way to do this is to systematically apply a procedure. After having identified the needs, it is advisable to consider whether or not it is necessary to have a personal assistant present at the start of the trip or to wait to use one once at the place of residence. Once this decision is made, several sites can be consulted depending on the destination, usually national and local institutions dedicated to people with disabilities (e.g.: the German Association for the Deaf based in Berlin, AUXI’life in France, etc.). The challenge is then to know these institutions exist and to access information when you are not native from the country.

- **Training the personal assistant (s):**

It is essential to prepare the trip with the personal assistant(s) in order to anticipate any unforeseen events and to provide the personal assistant with the essential information needed to ensure that the trip goes smoothly. Again, it is advisable to tell the personal assistant what you are suffering from, what you can and cannot do, and to show him/her all your treatments - especially if he/she is responsible for administering them -, medical devices, materials and various equipment - especially if he/she is responsible for operating them. Participants have reported organized trials for a day, an evening or a night with potential personal assistant (s) so both see how to deal with caring and if the two people get along well together.

It is important to train the person who will soon accompany the young person with disabilities abroad and who will be his/her arms, legs, eyes, etc. The handling of medical and vital equipment needs extra attention and should be tested several times in the presence, if possible, of a person already experienced in this task. The same applies to the administration of treatments and it is important that the personal assistant understands why each medication is for and how much to give etc... The assistant must also know how to react in case of a medical emergency and what measures to take and who to contact.

To do such time-consuming training, here are few suggestions: several telephone or Skype interviews before going on-site abroad to show essential gestures and equipment used by the young person with disabilities, sending a list of needs, photos of equipment and instructions about necessary cares, sending a medical report or any relevant medical certificate as well as the emergency contact information both from the country of origin and of destination. Note that all of these actions must be anticipated sometimes 3 to 4 months before the departure if not more depending on the needs of the young person with disabilities and the country of destination.

- **Identify funding to pay for a personal assistant:**

The help of a personal assistant involves a significant additional cost to afford his/her travel, cost of living (such as housing and food expenses) and salary. It is often impossible to face sums that are close to thousands of euros. Several public (e.g.: ministries) and private (e.g.: foundations) structures offer funding though young people with disabilities are faced again with the extreme lack of information about them. For example, the Erasmus+ Special Needs Support cover all disability-related costs such as personal assistants.

However, it is very hard to evaluate how much money such support represents for all the reasons stated above. This also drastically extends the preparation phase of an international mobility program because it increases the administrative paperwork and delays in asking for additional funding. Moreover, most grants did not foresee more than one personal assistant per young person with disabilities. But given needs and length of international mobility, the supporting tasks cannot humanly be provided by only one personal assistant.

If one support is not enough, it is better to leave accompanied by a trained personal assistant who already knows the young person with disabilities, and to pay a second personal assistant domiciled in the destination country. Though this solution may be really expensive and time-consuming and demands a lot of energy, patience and pedagogy from the young person with disabilities.

Because of the various international mobility programs existing and different needs according to disabilities, the job of personal assistant cannot be left without minimum standards for their security and commitment to the young person they are working with.



- Personal assistants should have the same conditions of work prescribed by the Labour Act and not work as volunteers, regardless of the basis on which labour costs are paid. It is necessary to define the cost of the working hour of the personal assistant. They should also be provided with shift work if the activity is longer than 8 hours, as with an increased hourly rate for second shifts and night work.
- For activities lasting up to 8 hours, one assistant is sufficient for a person with a disability for whom the assistant requirement is assessed regardless of the type and degree of impairment.
- For activities lasting longer than 8 hours, which is often the case when the length of international mobility is of a week minimum, it is necessary to provide as many personal assistants as there are necessary working hours and availability for work, keeping in mind the hours of rest of the personal assistant.
- During the stay for an activity lasting longer than 8 hours and up to 3 days with travel, the person with the most severe form of disability should be assisted by 3 cares who are scheduled in shifts according to the activity planning. And when the activity is longer than 3 days, 4 personal assistants are needed. This is necessary because of the work schedule, night work and rest time that personal assistants need to be provided. No matter the number of activity hours, days and travel, a blind person should be provided with 2 assistants.



Personal assistant's situation is often lacking recognition and such experience, especially abroad, may be draining. On the side of the dependent person, it is necessary to avoid any risk of infantilization, transfer or substitution. Of course, the affective will be invited because the personal assistant has to intrude in the intimacy of the young person with disabilities. The establishment of physical borders depends imperatively on doing things in the place of the other without imposing his/her own way. This will be the challenge of the training phase.

A good psychological distance must always be maintained. The objective is to establish a fair balance and a careful balance between excessive invasion and attachment, esteem, trust, dignity and respect. This will be the challenge of a unique daily relationship.

In any case, this may be the start of a fulfilling experience and relationship, complementary to international mobility itself, if all things go smoothly and well prepared.

IV. Conclusion

Preventing young people with disabilities from taking on mobility programmes deprives them of tremendous learning opportunities and leaves them even more deprived in the long run and unequipped for the global workplace. The international mobility environment does not avoid such challenges. Young people often report experiencing barriers regarding their access to information, knowledge of existing mobility programmes, finances, accessible transportation, adequate support based on their needs and sometimes face lack of respect. Thus, needs are mostly encountered during the preparation stage of international mobility. If this stage is not fully complete, it is likely that it will have a negative impact on the experience abroad in addition with on-site issues. The report also highlights interactions between young people with disabilities and their personal assistants (when they need them). When talking about qualitative support provided to young people with disabilities, a greater attention should be taken to caregivers so they could be included as well in terms of financial support and well-being.

Identifying what works and what needs to change in the system in order to encourage more young people from under-represented groups including young people with disabilities to want to engage with mobility programmes must be the priority for the next decade.

Young people with disabilities participation in international mobility programmes depends upon the extent to which the institution has developed an openness to disability and a culture which respects accessibility to all activities across the institution. An inclusive ethos means that the entire institution welcomes all young people and ensures that all of them participate equally and enjoy all aspects of life in the institution. Inclusion on mobility is increasingly important in the global world so it is imperative to ensure that all young people have the opportunity to acquire the global skills they need to succeed in a multicultural workforce.

As some mobility programs involve sending and hosting organizations (youth exchanges, Erasmus for students etc.), it is very important to create more effective coordination between organisations and young people with disability doing their international mobility. It is essential to give the young one an active and central part in the process as he/she better knows his/her needs. Sending and hosting organizations must not assume needs and expectations.

On the other hand, sending and hosting structures must be clear about what kind of support they can offer to young people with disabilities willing to engage with them. If the structure cannot provide support, it is essential it has contacts for the young person to get in touch with and receive necessary support.

Do not forget that international mobility is not only about administrative and logistic issues. Socializing is essential to such experience. Thus, support must also be thought of in this matter. Hosting structure must provide accessible and inclusive activities with a mixed public of non-disabled and disabled young people so that the intercultural exchange also contributes to breaking up stereotypes and prejudices against young people with disabilities.

In short words, success of an international mobility for a young person with disabilities can be summarized by four key behaviours:

- raise awareness of a person with a disability about his/her real needs.
- empower a person with a disability to identify challenges alone and to actively participate in finding a solution needed.
- open communication with all participants of international training
- ensure flexibility in planning activities, as well as plan in advance these activities so it can better adapt to the young people's needs.

Concrete actions taken up by mobility structures are presented in a dedicated report about recommendations and guidelines to support a young person with disabilities to have an international mobility experience.

Acting in favour of people with disabilities means promoting social integration and thus directing our actions towards a more inclusive society where open-mindedness and tolerance are universal values. Inclusion is also a source of wealth, thanks to dialogue, common values and solidarity. Mobility must be effective for the greatest number. It is acting for a society that promotes well-being, sharing, discovery and that gives meaning to our individual and collective actions.

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More about International Mobility with Disabilities

Youth with disabilities who benefit from the Erasmus + programmes represent between 0.17% to 2.8% of all Erasmus + recipients. In light of this observation, several disability and international mobility actors gathered their expertise.

Raising awareness about international mobility among youth with disabilities is a challenge. Our answer started in 2015 with MappED (<https://www.mapped.eu/>). The objective was to provide students with disabilities equal opportunities for their participation in the Erasmus + programme. It gives students an interactive map to be informed about accessibility in different universities in Europe. Nevertheless, many young people with disabilities do not have access to higher education while international mobility is not only for students. To make international mobility more accessible to all, it is important to focus on youth in general.

This is why the International Mobility with Disabilities project has been launched.

The project

This 2-year project is funded by the Erasmus + Youth and Sports Agency from February 2019 to May 2021.

It aims at providing accessible information for youth with disabilities about all stages of the mobility path (pre-departure, on-site, return). The project also allows youth structures and youth workers to better understand the challenges faced by youth with disabilities while travelling abroad. It also brings together actors of disability and those of international mobility by involving young people with disabilities, their families and personal assistants, youth workers and youth associations.

The main result is an online and accessible platform to inform young people and youth workers about all steps of international mobility, programmes available, and how to deal with it as a disabled person. Part of the platform is dedicated to youth workers to better understand disability issues and how they affect young people wishing to go abroad. The idea is to support young people while preparing their international mobility but also to welcome them upon their arrival in a new country.



Project objectives

The consortium is developing several tools and activities to reach its objectives:

- Lead a study on barriers and incentives expressed by young people with disabilities toward European mobility. Study results will be used as recommendations on how to better include youth with disabilities in international exchange programmes.
- Create guidelines of best practices by sending and hosting organization in Europe, by investigating on how to support youth with disabilities when they prepare and live during their international mobility. The results will help the consortium to build up recommendations for youth workers on how to welcome and support youth with disabilities.
- Develop a toolbox for youth workers to help them better understand challenges faced by youth with disabilities going abroad, how to support them while preparing their journey and during their stay abroad, etc.
- These studies and tools are going to be integrated into an online and accessible platform. This platform contains testimonials from young people with disabilities, information about international mobility and a blog raising expert's voices, showcasing different European countries and cities from an accessible perspective and practical advice to go abroad.

Project partners (consortium)



Ahead (Ireland) is the national centre for Inclusive Education. It works with the higher education sector to improve the transition for students with disabilities into education and employment.



Droit au Savoir (France) is an inter-associative and cross-disability collective promoting the pursuit of studies of young people with disabilities over 16 years old until their professional integration.



Erasmus Student Network France is a student association network to welcome international students and raise awareness about international mobility.



Österreichische Jugendinfos (Austria) is the National Network of Austrian Youth Information Centres coordinating national youth information projects and training youth information workers. The network is also the Austrian ERYICA member and the national coordinator for EURODESK.



SV-Bildungswerk (Germany) was founded by former student representatives. The objective is fostering skills upgrading and knowledge sharing between high school unions, thus focusing on peer-learning and democratic education.



Udruga Zamisli (Croatia) is an association promoting quality education for young people with disabilities. It is a support and information centre for young people with disabilities.

