**Transcript from webinar SIHO: Making Mobility Pogramme more Inclusive for students with disabilities.**

MAGALIE SOENEN:
good afternoon everyone. Before we start I would like to take you through some house keeping rules.. We will keep microphones off for all participants, and also for the speakers when you are not speaking. Cameras will be turned on only for speakers and for sign language interpretation. And we will use the Q&A box for participants to share your questions. We will not use the hand's function, the raising hands function, because we have so many participants in the room and it is not possible to use that.

I would also like to inform you that we will be live streaming this webinar, which will be put on the YouTube support centre for inclusive higher education. You can see the link here. Also the recordings will be placed on the website after finishing this webinar.

OK, so as this webinar touches upon inclusive mobility, especially for disabled students, we wanted to offer this webinar as well in a very inclusive way, making it accessible for all participants. Therefore, we have live captioning and sign language interpretation during the webinar.

To activate the live captioning, you should click on the button mentioning CC live transcript on the bottom of your screen. It is probably next to the Q&A or the chat button. If you click on this button you will also see some settings, where you can change the size and colour to adapt to your needs and preferences. Furthermore, there is also the possibility for full page captioning, using the link mentioned in the chat.

If you choose this option, then a separate window will open. For participants who want to make use of the sign interpretation you can use your mouse over the picture of the sign interpreter. Please then use the button with three dots and pin the video. If you have any difficulties please use the chat and my colleagues will help you.

Now, let's move to the content part of this webinar. I'm extremely happy to welcome you all. We have more than 600 participants registered for this event. This is much higher than our initial expectations. However, it does give us a very b signal, it shows that the topic we are dealing with in the EPFIME project at the international, national level as well as students are very interested.

The EPFIME project works as a coordinator together with its partners, the Irish Universities Association,, Ahead, Association for higher education and access and disability in Ireland, finally but not least the Erasmus student program. From the site of Flanders, inclusive mobility is high on our agenda. At the moment we are coordinating two European projects on this topic.

In 2019 we started the EPFIME project, on which we want to enhance a thought-out policy framework on inclusive mobility across Europe. This project was specifically focused on students with disabilities. We examine in depth the needs and expectations on inclusive mobility, of national authorities, students with disabilities, and higher education institutions across Europe.

We have now finished the first phase of the project, and we are ready to share with you the research report and booklet of policy recommendations and good practices. The second phase will consist of creating a self-assessment tool for higher education institutions, national agencies and ministries, guidelines for higher education institutions, and an online platform on inclusive mobility.

These deliverables will be presented spring 2021. Next to the EPFIME project we started our second project, PLA R, focusing on activities and resources for social inclusive mobility programs. The new project has a broader scope taking into account all students from underrepresented groups.

The number of countries within the project has been selected to join us in two activities of which one already took place in September. The second one will be organised in spring of 2021. Next to this we will work on an online platform on inclusive mobility, we will take the guidelines of EPFIME more broadly.

We will also design a communication package for addressing students underrepresented groups.

Now, let us go back to the EPFIME project and this webinar. After the presentation of the research results we have a panel ready for you. They will reflect on the research and the booklet we present, and share their thoughts from different points of view.

Let me introduce myself, I am at Magalie Soenen, have more than 20 years experience in higher education, first an institutional level with a university Ghent University. After that with the Erasmus agency, and finally at national policy level within the Ministry where I still work today. I am the coordinator of this and many other European projects for the moment, and next of this I also represent Belgium Flemish community in the Bologna process and the Asem process.

Next to me you see the picture of Elena, she is team leader of higher education at the European commission and the director-general of education and culture. She is today replacing Harpa Sif-Arnarsdottir, who is unfortunately ill. We are very happy that the commission on such short notice could replace Harpa, we wish her a quick recovery and very happy that Elena can join us.

We are also very privileged to have with us Els Titeca, Council on higher education, internationalisation in Europe, and for the Cabinet of Vice Prime Minister Ben Weytes. Previously, Els worked at the Flemish University Council as policy officer. She has an education background and political sciences, data protection and public finance.

To add some gender balance in our panel we have Dominique Montagnese, an expert on inclusive mobility for SIHO. He has been working with mobility programs for more than 10 years, and social inclusion and mobility for more than six years. He is the initiator of several projects linking inclusion at the Erasmus+ and mobilities, such as MapAbility, and the inclusive ability alliance which currently chairs. He contributes to inclusivemobility.eu which will be the site for the European Higher Education Area.

Last but not least we have Valérie Van Hees joining us. She is the coordinator of the Support Centre Inclusive Higher Education in Flanders and I am very proud to have her next me as project manager of the EPFIME project. She is doing a marvellous job building of over 20 years of experience in policy for minority groups in higher education.

So now you know about us, the speakers and the panellists. But I would also like to know who you are. Dominique, can you please open the poll. So now we invite all participants to join our Zoom poll. We want to know who you are. A screen should open on your screen and you can vote in the poll and let you know if you are a higher education opposite of, so it from an agency, a ministry, a student, or someone else. I will give you some time to fill out the poll.

DOMINIQUE MONTAGNESE:
Answers are coming in but it is slowing down now. OK we will share the results now.

MAGALIE SOENEN:
Thank you. So 46% higher education institutions, 13% people coming from a national agency, 3% from a ministry, and also 8% of students and others. Now this is interesting, we would like to know where you're from. So those of you who voted for other, maybe you can let us know through the chat which kind of organisation you are from. It is quite interesting for us to know.

Thank you. National organisations, Student's Union, see a lot of answers coming in. And also a lot of higher education institutions OK. Very interesting. Thank you for that.

At this moment we still have a second question for you. Now we will go to the second poll. What in your opinion are the most difficult aspects regarding mobility abroad for student with a disability? And you can click on multiple options. So we will give you some time to fill that out.

The first is a lack of motivation of students with disabilities to go abroad. Finding accurate information about the accessibility and support services at the host university or host city or host organisation. Knowing how to support the student. Finding the right financial support for the student. In the last option is, I don't really know because I've never been involved in such mobility.

So we are waiting for your votes. Are we almost there, Dominique?

DOMINIQUE MONTAGNESE:
Yes, some people are still voting, let's give it five more seconds and then I will share the results. OK, it is slowing down now. Share results.

MAGALIE SOENEN:
The winner is finding accurate information about the accessibility and support services in the host university and city. This is an interesting one I am sure that Dominique and Valérie will also touch upon this when they present the study and the deliverables of this project because we are working on this topic.

In second place we see knowing how to support the students. In our projects we are working on the communication package that will hopefully also guide and help and give tools to higher education institutions how to support their students.

In the third place we have lack of motivation in students, and fourth is finding the right financial support for the student. 20% does not really know because they have not been involved in such a mobility.

We also see some other comments coming in in the chat. This is quite interesting. Now you know about us, now we know more about you. Let's see what the results are of the research that has been undertaken within the project. I invite Dominique and Valérie to take the floor now.

VALÉRIE VAN HEES:
Thank you, Magalie, for the nice introduction bringing us to the topic of the work done with Dominique and ourselves. Were very pleased to present the key findings of this results.

This slide touches on the methodology we have used for this study, the definition we have used, and highlights research results by touching on testimonials, key findings, good practices, and also policy recommendations. We would also like to focus on the next steps we will take in this inclusive mobility project.

The aim of this project was to mind in depth the students’ needs with disabilities in higher education institutions on the topic of inclusion, inclusive mobility, for students specifically with disabilities.

If you can see we reach out to a large sample of students with disabilities, 1134 students from disabilities from 30 countries took part, and all kinds of disabilities are represented in our sample. We also reached out to 114 universities from 22 countries and are also happy to have 23 ministries from 22 countries that participated were surveys to difficulties with students with disabilities in higher education.

We also focus on a focus group of students with disabilities and experts in the field of inclusive mobility, and we also did some desk research on the topic of inclusive mobility.

We took the definition that was made by the inclusive mobility which Magaly was talking about Dominique is currently chairing. Inclusive mobility means creating and ensuring adequate conditions to learn, work, or volunteer for people with fewer opportunities by addressing their diverse support needs.

Very important for us, we focus on a needs-based approach on what students with disabilities need to ensure a safe and exciting mobility role.

I was also mentioned in the questionnaires for each of the stakeholders. Based on those surveys we have analysed them in depth in a research report in which we reported on each question of the questionnaire and took the main findings in the policy booklet for recommendation and good practice.

In the research report you will have all the research results and we would like you to read as well. In the policy booklet you can see more recommendations could practices and key testimonials of students with disabilities and of higher education institutions in ministry representative.

That is the approach we took in the research, and Dominique will not talk about the approach.

DOMINIQUE MONTAGNESE:
Before we start looking in detail at the results of our research, let's go with some general information and generalities. Why should we aim for inclusive mobility?

One thing we found from our research that we were expecting to find that we now have data to back it, like all students with mobility programmes want to take projects abroad. We will get back to that in more detail the minute, but we also found the main motivators to go abroad on mobility are very similar to other students such as the opportunity to live abroad, the opportunity to improve careers prospects, to expand the social network of the student.

Back the first two claims I just made, here are some results. We asked the students who answered our survey if they had a mobility experience. 22% of the students said they did go abroad for their studies or a trainee ship. 27% did not go abroad but were not interested.

SPEAKER:
Can you please slow down because you're saying a lot of numbers and no one will be able to follow.

DOMINIQUE MONTAGNESE:
I will slow down a little bit and just sum up by saying that 41% and 22%, that is 63% in total of students who either have been abroad already for their studies over a trainee ship or are planning to go abroad that's quite a lot of students who have either been abroad or planning to go abroad.

In our sample we have all types of disabilities represented, as you can see on the graph on the right side from dyslexia, chronic illness, to ADHD, autism, etc. In the majority of students who have been abroad have declared having dyslexia, chronic illness, or physical disability.

When we put this in perspective with the official data from the European commission and the Erasmus programme, we see that it is an interesting reciprocity between the two. Students who receive a specialist support from the European commission are the moment between .11 and .15% of all the harassment students who receive specialist support.

This is a very stable for the last few years and is still more or less at the same level.

For the actual results of our report, we have divided the results into six different areas. The first is inclusion, and mobility strategies. The Nexus information provision and promotion of mobility. Then we have grants funding and application, support services, student life, and awareness and cooperation.

We will go through all of them using the following scheme. We have testimonial for respondents, key finding, good practice identified, and some key recommendations. And Valérie will start with the first one.

VALÉRIE VAN HEES:
The first area that we identified is inclusion in the mobility strategies and here you see a quote from one of the Ministry of education representatives mentioning that there is a lack of quantitative and qualitative targets in the national policy separate dissipation of students with disabilities and also proper data management tools.

Only 14% have mobility targets for students with disabilities. An institutional level only 32% have inclusive mobility included in their strategic plan. It highlights again, we are in the starting place of inclusion in mobility strategies. On the next light you can see for example the definitions are varied across the country. Inclusion measures and targets to ensure social inclusion and an mobility towards students with disabilities are really existent both at the country level and at the institutional level.

That means that a lot of work still has to be done on the topic of inclusive mobility. But also it highlights that there is work done, so it's important to focus on step-by-step on progression on that.

On the slide
you see for example 1 of our Flemish universities of applied sciences. Vives Artevelde University of Applied Sciences. There you see they already have an internationalisation strategy plan that addresses inclusion, it ensures even necessary structures so that all students but also staff can gain an international experience by removing all possible barriers.

So they are focusing on financial, physical, mental barriers, that students or staff may encounter. They are also engaged to offer qualitative support before, during and after the mobility.

So that's a very good approach, a very sustainable approach, it's also highlighted both in the research report and we will find out more about it in the policy booklet and a good practice booklet. Furthermore, we can see some of the recommendation in those fields, we think it's important that higher education and national authority should focus on inclusion strategies in their internationalisation strategies, and also collect information about the participation of students with disabilities.

We noticed that setting targets and monitoring the participation in different mobility programs, so that most institutions and focus only on Erasmus participation. We have seen that students with disabilities also participate in other mobility programs, it's important to monitor the situation and have an overall picture of comprehensive monitoring of participation of students with disabilities.

We will not highlight all the recommendations, otherwise we will not have enough time to also have a discussion about the results. Dominic will now focus on information promotion.

DOMINIQUE MONTAGNESE:
Yes, when it comes to secondary, information provision and promotion, we have some quotes from our student respondents. One of them says "I have not heard any information about an Erasmus program for disabled students".

Another student said "Much of the information on foreign exchange programs was given via public talks without captioning, interpreters or video recordings, questions were taken generally verbally or over the phone." So it was inaccessible for him as a deaf person.

When we look at the results from different surveys, from the Ministry and country surveys, we asked if specific information was provided for students abilities. More or less half of the countries surveyed at the moment provide such information for student disabilities, about going abroad.

When we look more in detail about which country is actively encouraging the students to go abroad or actively encouraging students to come to their country, we see that only 21% of the countries are actively encouraging the students with disabilities to go abroad.

In very interesting results, 0% of countries are currently trying to attract to their countries students with disabilities. So there is no initiative taken on that site, which can be one of the issues to be tackled.

At the institutional level, for higher education institution, we also asked how they provide information for going abroad on mobility. We see that we have very little universities that actually at the moment provide information, print -- for example with subtitles or brochures in Braille.

So the main key findings that we have is that information provision for promotion of mobility abroad is lacking. Campaigns are limited and do not reach students with disabilities. One of the good practices we found though it comes from Greece, at the National agency for Erasmus plus in Greece, it instructs higher education institutions to give priority to students with special needs whenever it is possible. They have also published and created leaflets in Braille language for their institutions, we believe this is a good practice that could be streamlined a little more.

When we look at the recommendation that we have made, higher education and institutions and national authorities should provide clear information on mobility programs, and use targeted campaigns for resources. For example sign language videos, videos with subtitles, pressures in Braille, documents and so on and so forth.

Valérie, you can take over the next one.

VALÉRIE VAN HEES:
Thank you Dominique. When we look at the topic of funding, grants and applications, we see that a great barrier for institutions and high energy education institutions makes it difficult for them to cater with disability needs. Erasmus plus is a good example of reimbursing access needs, but in other national programs there is often no additional funding for the access needs of students with disability.

Also a mark of higher education institutions across Europe is that some forms of financial support for example sign interpreters or pedagogical help, that can in principle can be deployed abroad but some regulations are very complicated and so there's a lot of administrative work on the topic of administration it means that some higher education institutions do not have the effort to inform students in the right way.

That's a -- in some important barrier to mention. If we look at the next light we see about 67% of the ministries of education provide additional specific mobility grants, and support for students with disabilities going on mobility abroad. 33% do not offer additional specific mobility grants.

Also important is that half of the countries more or less indicate that national grants and support services are transportable abroad, that means also that a lot of support services and grants are not transferable abroad. Which means this hinders students with disabilities to go abroad and to take opportunities to study or go abroad.

So that's an important topic that was mentioned, also by different stakeholders, really we see now in the results of the survey.

If you look at the next slide the key findings that we have, the biggest lack is the transportability of grants and support systems. It is really hindering the participation of students with disabilities in undertaking a mobility abroad program. These are the topics that have to be mentioned, we have also found good practices. Some countries are really taking initiatives to also prepare students to go abroad with preparatory visits, these are a valued as extremely helpful for students with disabilities and also for home institutions.

We have seen the institution said how this would help them to take care and to organise all the support for the students abroad.

If we look at the next slide, we see for example the good practice of our national agencies, they have really developed and easy funding application process for preparatory visits. It allows students an easy way and higher education institutions to ask for preparatory visits. Also what is good in the procedure is that a trusted person from the institution or even a family member can also go abroad with the student on this preparatory visit.

So that makes sense, everything can be clarified well in advance about reasonable adjustments, and support that will be offered. That's also mentioned as a good practice in the results.

Dominique, you can go now to that next topic on the areas we have identified, support services.

DOMINIQUE MONTAGNESE:
All right, when it comes to support services we were requesting information from various departments, "Responsible person in the international mobility office did not have any supplemental information regarding the international mobility of people with disabilities." That's a little bit of what we have seen in general in our surveys, there is a little bit of lack of information sometimes for international officers to know exactly how to support the students.

When we asked the students about the topic of disclosing their disability to the institutions we asked them if they have disclosed their disability, 32% have disclosed their disability only to their home institution. So to the institution where they are usually studying.

This means they haven't told their host university to which they were going on mobility that they had any type of disability, or any type of support needs. This is of course problematic because of the University doesn't know that the student has specific needs to be addressed maybe they cannot provide this support.

When we asked the reason why they did not disclose the disability, it was quite surprising to find that 39% of students were just not asked. It's as simple as that, they want not asked by an institution, and they did not disclose. 25% did not want to be labelled, 34 percent did not think it was important.

When we asked institutions of they had specific procedures in place, only 41% at the moment to have such procedures in place.

One of the main key findings here is that higher education institutions do not automatically acknowledge the disability status as well as a reasonable adjustments that come with it that could be offered, but as we saw just before also because the disclosing of the disability doesn't happen all the time in an automatic way.

Good practice for this part comes from the University of Lorraine in France. They put Erasmus plus internet situational -- inter institutional agreements in place, the agreement of the University and capacity to welcome incoming students with disabilities. That's quite an important step and we also believe here that this is a good practice.

One of the recommendations that we put forward in our report is the need for creating a needs assessment application. Having a clear needs assessment carried out before the application of the students by the institution, and creating together with the students a support mobility plan. This is of course needed for them. This is something that would help a lot with the transfer of support services from one university to another.

VALÉRIE VAN HEES:
On student life we have asked students and hired institutions what are the barriers in student life, we also found some good practices and some students were testifying that student housing is sometimes very well arranged.

For example you see here "My student dorm was managed by the office of equal opportunities, which has specialised support where I need in my student life" so that's an example of a good practice but when we also look at the key findings and results we can see on the next slide that students really point out the lack of available information regarding the accessibility of the destination, transport, housing and the campus. So students really need more information and testify that the institutions should inform them more about those opportunities and the best places to go socially. Also they need more support in everyday life such as medical support, cooking when they are at their student house. So that is an attention point that we have seen some lack of available information on support and accessibility.

If you look at the next slide we see very good practice from the University of Trento which is cooperating with ESN to welcome and integrate their incoming students with disabilities. This cooperation focuses mostly on organizing campus tours with the international students but also for searching for bodies to support students with disabilities to overcome everyday challenges.

This was valued is good practice by many universities so they deposit ESN and was mentioned here in the webinar for the good job they're doing to support students.

When we look at for the recommendations is also very important that higher education institutions should provide more information on the accessibility of a destination, transport, housing, and campus a set of only focusing on reasonable adjustments in academic life.

When we look further we see that it is important to take initiatives with student support, peer support, and support in assisted living facilities. I think, Dominique, we can go to the next area of barriers.

DOMINIQUE MONTAGNESE:
For awareness and cooperation, which is the last area, one minister of education representative told us that specific barriers could be to the lack of translators for a particular sign language or lack of court Nader's for student support such as disability and inclusion officers. The improvement of cooperation between the support court nature and international officers is crucial here. It might be challenging sometimes, but it is crucial.

One of the key findings is this testimony that we just saw about communication and collaboration between the different services at the University but also outside the University, working with NGOs which is definitely something to be tackled.

Good practice comes from Ireland, where the higher education Authority organizes audit and monitoring visits to different universities in the country. They actively engage with the disability officers at the different universities to make sure that they know a little bit about the opportunities available to students with disabilities to take part for example in Erasmus plus and also the support that comes with it.

One of our recommendations in broad dialogue and cooperation between different services needs to take place and necessary structures need to be put into place. Defining the roles of each of the services, dividing clear roles and supporting the student as much as possible.

You will find those recommendations but many more as well we have instructed a couple here for today, in our reports. We were publishing these reports today and will tell you at the end of this webinar the link to access them.

Valérie, will you go on for the next steps?

VALÉRIE VAN HEES:
Briefly, the next step we will take with this inclusive mobility project, if you look at the next slide, we will make a framework for this project. Magalie already touched on this. We have constructed a framework on the objectives for each stakeholder on higher education institutions and engagement on the different areas that we have identified in this project. We have assessed some quality standards for each area that institutions should reach and those objectives are also related to some action points to reach those objectives.

These are digital framework so it will be easy for each stakeholder to navigate and explore the different strategies and objectives which are important to install inclusive mobility. This is a question area for each of the stakeholders, higher education institutions, ministries, will each have a questionnaire focusing on the objectives.

They go to a questionnaire with questions "does your institution already have support from leadership", for example. It is very easy assessment that each stakeholder can go through and after that assessment you receive some feedback on how far are you already in the different areas and which actions can you undertake to improve your strategy.

We will also develop in that framework a toolbox with resources that could support you to undertake that action and not be to install that objective of inclusive mobility.

More important as well, is the great work that ESN is doing in the centre for higher education, and as Magalie mentioned it is a topic that Dominique is working on, a platform where all the information about inclusive mobility will be gathered. You see here a screenshot of the website on which their actions for institutions of higher education but also countries and national agencies.

Each stakeholder will be able to register on an institutional page the inclusion measures that it takes with support measures offered and so on and also the national policies of inclusion. We think that that will bring clarity on the needs of information that each stakeholder needs on the topic of inclusive mobility.

It will also contain information at the cities and so on.

To give you an impression on this, the guideline that our partners in Ireland are also making to install the action points at the institutional level for higher education institutions and The Platform will be launched in March or April for the EPFIME project.

We've also been working on the PLAR-4-SIMP project. Working with stakeholders with more disadvantaged backgrounds and training packages to train different stakeholders to organize more inclusive mobility's. At Flemish level if also organize international staff training with colleagues of the University of applied sciences and we will reach out in 2021 with international stock trades were we will integrate the resources we have made in those projects.

Also, it is important to mention that we are now focusing on not just in inclusive mobility's but will be highlighting that should be seen in a broad vision of inclusion in universities. So it is important to focus on a whole holistic approach of inclusion.

We are happy to inform you that we are launching next month a series of webinars on inclusive universities and international classes will be one of the topics on inclusive universities. On the website you can find more about the initiatives and you can already register for the webinars on inclusive universities.

You can stay tuned to the website on SIHO and you can sub scribe to the newsletter to be updated on all the projects of inclusive mobility and also the inclusive universities webinar. You can reach out through email and have all the updated information on the project side on inclusive mobility.eu.

We will also be publishing the recording of today and the reports on our website and ESN will update on their website as well.

So those are the next steps that we are using to stay connected with all of you on this important topic. Those are the main findings in a nutshell.

MAGALIE SOENEN:
Thank you very much Valérie and Dominique. So let's move to the reactions from our panel to these results. First I would like to give the floor to Elena.

From European level, what do you think is the most striking result or outcome from this research. Are there still things that can be done to improve the current situation?

ELENA TEGOVSKA:
Thanks a lot Magalie, and hello to everyone, I'm very happy to be here. The work you're doing with your partners in the framework of this project is just amazing.

What you have here in terms of the results of the survey that you have conducted is a gold mine. There are many very, very interesting results. I picked up a few of them, notably the difference between the countries and the institutions when it comes to including in mobility.

We saw that only 14% of the countries have that inclusion in terms of mobility strategies where is that number is higher for universities. It is 32%, it is better but we still think from a European perspective we can do better. This is why, in the next programme, we will be supporting universities to really put inclusion at the centre of their mobility's and this will do through different ways.

Firstly we have reinforced the principle of inclusion and including students with disabilities and with special needs within the next Erasmus charter for higher education. We will also be having a specific strategy for diversity and inclusion within the next programme which will help us collectively have a similar terminology when it comes to inclusion and what exactly we mean by students with special needs, students with disabilities, this is why were also broadening these definitions in the next programme.

Then we are also going to include in this inclusion and diversity strategy the promotion of good practices. We already saw some of them during your presentation. These are, for example, having inclusion officers at higher education institutions but also fostering better communication and cooperation between international and university offices. That is to make it easier for students with disabilities to access. We also saw in the results of your study that this was still an obstacle.

Finally we are promoting a better visibility and promotion mobility of students and helping universities to really have a clearer strategy or more straightforward strategy to really reach those kinds of students.

MAGALIE SOENEN:
Thank you Elena, it looks very promising.

I know that you have to leave at 3 o'clock, so one last question for you, what is maybe the most inspiring good practice that you heard in the presentation?

ELENA TEGOVSKA:
The inspiring practice that I like very much as the one from the University of Lorraine. They included in their inter-institutional agreement really good information on how they are supporting students with disabilities. I would also like to link this to the future institutional agreements we are setting up for the next program, where we will have a specific dedicated field for universities to inform and to indicate whether they have specific infrastructure, specific support services for students with disabilities.

This will also be visible through the Erasmus+ app, for the future Erasmus students. They will be able to see in a very visible and easy to access way which universities are having specific infrastructure and support services, so they can also make an informed decision when they are selecting which university they want to do their mobility in.

MAGALIE SOENEN:
OK, thank you. Yes, it would be very interesting to also link this information to the inclusive mobility platform that we are producing now within the project.

ELENA TEGOVSKA:
Absolutely, and if I can just mention also the support we are going to be putting in place in terms of funding. So here we will provide more support for universities to really put in place a structured mobility for students with special needs.

So universities will be receiving an additional top up for organisational support when they are organising mobility for a student with disabilities or special needs. This is also for us a way to give more incentives to universities to really develop this kind of support for students with special needs.

And then we are going to increase in parallel the top up for students with special needs. So even though we see funding is not the main obstacle, however it is an important element to have in mind. So we are putting it in place as you see, parallel ways and parallel concrete elements to really make inclusion at the heart of the Future program, and to really collectively have this inclusion become the sole of the next Erasmus program. It is absolutely important for us.

MAGALIE SOENEN:
Thank you very much Elena, it all sounds very promising. We hope we will be able to collaborate and compliment to the new activities and actions you are taking, from our side within the project. Thank you very much.

Now from European level, let's go to national level. I would like to ask Els Titeca what did you find out today that you were not expecting? What's the most striking outcome from your side?

ELS TITECA:
So what I was saying, there is still a lack of awareness about barriers students face and room for improvement in communication and collaboration between different stakeholders. So I am happy this project has found place and there will be a booklet of policy recommendations and good practices. As well as that framework, self-assessment, and guidelines on how to install sustainable strategies and cooperation for different stake holders will be developed.

It's important we keep working together and focus on open communication.

DOMINIQUE MONTAGNESE:
I think Magalie has had technical issues. She is back now.

MAGALIE SOENEN:
Sorry, I lost connection.

ELS TITECA:
I think you can ask me the next question.

MAGALIE SOENEN:
OK because -- sorry about that! I don't know what you answered, so with regards to how the Flemish Community and the national agency and higher education institutions collaborate and work together in Belgium and Flemish community.

ELS TITECA:
So what is important is commitment, we have a clear commitment to develop a strategy in which inclusion is given a central place. This strategy has been developed in dialogue and cooperation between the different stakeholders, also the students were involved. That's one of the great things that worked well, but the strategy contains goals for 2020.

So we will work on a new strategy for the future where we will use the lessons learned and build on a new strategy. In the current programs we installed a rule that at least 25% of the Flemish outward mobility grants have to be awarded to students from underrepresented groups. The implication is that in order to use the full budget for mobility actions they have to be enough applications from students from up – like underrepresented groups.

So opportunities for all students and those of underrepresented groups are connected with each other. This compels higher education institutions to identify these groups of students and encourage them to apply for a mobility grant.

As this strategy has been placed since 2013, we have generated five years of comparable data on this issue. This is fairly unique in that European Higher Education Area. Statistics show that in the academic year 2018/19, that 22% of all initial mobile degrees are attributed to students from underrepresented groups.

Using the focus on these, a fully inclusive higher education area the need to register students with or without disabilities will be less, it should be open for all students. So it is not only important to focus on policies, but also to learn institutions on how they can improve their practices and recommendations.

At Flanders we support higher education institutions to improve their strategies through our Support Centre for Inclusive Higher Education. They developed a self-assessment tool and staff training for higher education students and include a learning network for inclusion and international officers where they can exchange on practices and challenges.

This way we support and enable staff to work professionally with a diverse student body and staff. We support them in creating inclusive learning environments and mobility experiences. In which each student feels connected.

This is essential not only for mental well-being but also for the study success and exchange opportunities of students. So I would say those elements are quite crucial.

MAGALIE SOENEN:
Thank you. And what do you still see as the main challenges for Flanders? What can be further improved?

ELS TITECA:
As pointed out in the research, the transportability of support services, at this moment we missed information on how support services were organised abroad. So we were very happy with the platform that partners are developing. It's clear all stakeholders missed the clear overview of transparent information, with the platform inclusive mobility built we will be able to act more proactively and clear the path for all students to go abroad.

Maybe I could tell you some more about things I found out today that were not expected. There were two things actually, I learned there are more and more countries who collect data, but the definition of disabilities is so scattered amongst different countries and even within countries that it is difficult to cover.

Countries do not systematically collect data on the mobility programs, only 14% of the countries have set a target for the participation of students with disabilities and mobility programs. Measuring is not the most important thing, but I think it would be good if different countries would use the same definitions.

It would also help to recognise the disability status automatically. It is striking and disappointing to find out universities do not automatically take the disability status of incoming students, and some students even have to undertake much effort to provide new documentation about their disability.

Second, I learnt that although the satisfaction regarding student hosting was rather positive, students pointed out the lack of available information regarding accessibility of the destination, transport, housing and compass, and where to go socially, students pointed out support for everyday life activities like medical needs or cooking. With the opportunities we have today, digitalisation, internet, smartphones, this is quite unexpected for me.

Making an app nowadays that makes housing opportunities visible is not rocket science. So I'm wondering if the lack of information exists because buildings of higher education institutions and the cities they are settled in our not so accessible.

To change this it will take some time and collaboration with also local governments, I think architects are playing a crucial part. But it is still important that higher education institutions are aware of the needs of students and provide them where possible the necessary information.

The access guide of KU Leuven for example is mentioned in the report, the guide is an online tool that gives information on physical accessibility of rooms and buildings and the accessibility information is not only very supportive for students with disabilities, but the information is beneficial for all students and staff.

It is good that the platform inclusivemobility.eu that SIHO and the Erasmus Student Network are developing through this project, they will contain information about these. It will be very supportive to all students.

But in the short term, the students can help all students by giving them information onto the local way of life, good places to go et cetera, and support them in their daily life. The European network and the Erasmus network are both important partners in this challenge.

For example, ESN developed the exchange mobility project to make their organisation accessible to students with disabilities and remove obstacles to participation, and exchange and promote opportunities available. They also partnered up with two booking programs, to provide international students and trainees with suitable housing options for their time abroad.

Both platforms give information about accessibility. Earlier we also heard the example of university.

MAGALIE SOENEN:
Thank you Els, thank you very much. You touched upon very important aspects I think. Certainly making sure that we need to collaborate more on a national level between institutions, ministries, and all other stakeholder information is. But there is still work to be done in collaboration with other countries, I think we can certainly learn much more about the other countries and the policies and implemented ocean that they have their.

Now I like to go over and ask Valérie to focus on more of an institutional level. What recommendations do you have for staff of higher education institutions who organize and coordinate mobility on a daily basis? How can they make mobility more inclusive?

VALÉRIE VAN HEES:
I think one step will be in April, they can go to the self-assessment tool and look in depth at their own context. That would be good to improve.

What I learned from this research at the Flemish level when we launched the surveys, it was a long survey focusing on disabilities and focusing on the regulations on international organisations, and what we saw even at Flemish level but also at European level reported from other higher education institutions, the different departments did not connect enough. It was, for some institutions, the first time that they came together to fill out the survey and to reflect on what they were doing on inclusion and mobility.

I think one of the important recommendations institutional level is to bring the stakeholders together. In the guidelines that are partners developing, there will be concrete action points on how you can improve cooperation added institutional level between the departments.

I also liked the highlight that Els Titeca mentioned, about inclusion in universities, so it is really important to reach the different stakeholders and bring them together at different levels. We'll be happy to provide very concrete action points through the framework and self-assessment tool of the guideline. But in the survey as mentioned it was quite striking for me that all the parties are saying that. Not only the students with disabilities but also higher education institution, ministries, and those involved in the surveys together with the ministries of education.

MAGALIE SOENEN:
Thank you very much Valérie. I would like to go to Dominique more related to the student level. What recommendation or tips do you have for students with disabilities who are attending today or would like to study or do an internship abroad?

DOMINIQUE MONTAGNESE:
Thank you Magalie, I was dealing with the spotlight as well. The recommendations that I have for students with disabilities who want to go abroad, I think what we are trying to do with this webinar is to pass the message that mobility and international exchanges for everyone. That means passing the message as well that this is also for you.

We are trying to pass this message, we hope to see that done by the stakeholders we spoke about today. Also, maybe a concrete tip that I give to students is firstly that this is for you secondly to contact your international officers at University and your inclusion officers as well. They can probably help you understand a bit better what can be done for you to support you.

Most importantly, I'm going to preach to my own choir here, we are raising a platform inclusive mobility.eu which will provide a lot of information about how to go abroad. This is not avail yet fortunately, it will be available in March or April 2021, but check this platform and hopefully you will find a lot of information there about different universities, different support services that universities offer, and support services offered by the country that you want to go to.

You might be surprised by how many support services exist that are not often easily found. So check The Platform because I think that is the best tip we can give to students at the moment.

MAGALIE SOENEN:
Thank you Dominique, that sounds very promising.

I see they were not many questions in the Q&A box until now, and some have been answered already. So I suggest, Dominique, that we go into the zoom polls with the audience now.

There is the first one, we would like to ask all participants to share their thoughts about the results of the survey in the research study that we presented today. Which result was the most striking for you?

First option is students with disabilities wanting to go abroad, second one is the low number of countries or higher education institutions who have specific targets and measures, the low amount of inclusive communication methods used to promote mobility, the lack of transportability of other support abroad, or any other issue not mentioned here. You can type that into the chat.

Let's see what results this gives. Dominique, I wait for you.

DOMINIQUE MONTAGNESE:
There slowing down, I will stop now ensure the results.

MAGALIE SOENEN:
The first place goes to the low number of countries and higher education institutions who have targets and measures for inclusion. It's really a message to people who are developing policy at national and institutional level, I think.

As we have seen also from our site in Flanders, really putting targets on the national level also inspires the higher education institutions to take further efforts trying to reach those benchmarks on one hand and on the other hand create their own strategies on these topics. So it can really be a stimulus to have targets on national level.

In second place we see the low amount of inclusive communication methods used to promote mobility. As mentioned before, we will work on these projects and communication tools. We will be able to help you further with that in the near future, I hope.

And then we also see 15% for the lack of transportability of support abroad, and finally students that want to go abroad, only 7%.

So let's go to the second poll, Dominique.

Here we go. Which stakeholder do you think could or should do more to support students with disabilities to go abroad? Here we have a multiple-choice, national ministries of education, national ministries for Erasmus, European commission, they promise already quite a few new actions. The higher education institution themselves, and the student organisations.

DOMINIQUE MONTAGNESE:
Some people are still voting.

MAGALIE SOENEN:
Which stakeholders in your country need to do more.

DOMINIQUE MONTAGNESE:
Is slowing down now.

MAGALIE SOENEN:
Here we go. Higher education institutions is the most favourite one. The higher education institution themselves need to do more, take more measures, and should support students better. We see in second place the national ministries of education, this is also a signal to policy level. And followed quite closely by the national agencies for Erasmus plus in the different countries.

It shows that, as already mentioned by the panellists, it is a combination of different stakeholders in the countries that have to work together to support students with disabilities better and more in the future.

So thank you very much everyone for your activity here during the polls. We are almost at the end.

Today we have discovered what the situation is for students with disabilities to take part in mobility programmes. Also about their own willingness to go abroad and the many barriers they face. We have also seen that professionals working in higher education but also beyond needed to collaborate more closely and that there are solutions and good practices out there.

We will share those results, those good practices with all of you in the research report and in the booklet that will be shared on the website. We think that those results and good practices can also be easily replicated in other countries and that we can really learn from each other.

Therefore, we hope that this webinar, our discussions, and the good practices shared have managed to give you some concrete inputs and especially also inspiration on how to tackle the topic of inclusive mobility for students with disabilities.

Inclusion is also taken up as one of the main topics in the Rome Communiqué that will be adopted by the European commission in a few weeks. Ministers will commit to building and inclusive, and of it, and interconnected European higher education area by 2030. And be able to underpin a sustainable, cohesive, and peaceful Europe.

Inclusion is mentioned there because every learner should have equitable access to higher education and should be fully supported in completing their studies and training. Including being part of mobility programmes.

So we hope that the ongoing work in this and in other projects on inclusion will contribute both on policy but also on implementation level within the European higher education area.

We would like to think our guest speakers of today, Elena, Els, Dominique, and Valérie very much. They give her much for your contributions and taking part in our webinar, and thank you as well, our participants, for your active engagement and for the questions that came our way.

We unfortunately could not answer all the questions mentioned in the chat, but we do hope that the release of the report and the booklet will help answer some of them.

The documents will be available online from today onwards. And especially we would also like to thank our sign interpreters for being with us today, and also for the live captioning. We know that there has been some problems during the webinar, for us it was also the first time that we tried out these tools during an online webinar, but despite the technical issues we still hope that it was an added value for all of you.

So please stay connected with us, join us for our final conference in April at which we will launch the online platform self-assessment tool and the guidelines and feel free to contact us anytime if you have any questions that were not answered today.

Thank you very much all of you, and bye-bye.