Theoretical Guide AllinErasmus

ALLinErasmus

Promoting participation in Erasmus for students at risk of social exclusion

Co-funded by the European Union

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Introduction: AllinErasmus

Project presentation

ALLinErasmus is a project funded by the **Erasmus+ program** of the European Union, which aims to increase the participation of VET students at risk of social exclusion in Erasmus+ mobilities, by providing training content and tools to the VET professionals managing Erasmus+ mobilities.

The project targets VET educators in charge of managing Erasmus+ mobilities, helping them learn how to reach and integrate students at risk of social exclusion in the different stages of Erasmus+ mobilities.

ALLinErasmus has, therefore, the following **objectives**:

1. Providing VET professionals with training on "social exclusion"
2. Increasing the interest in Erasmus+ mobilities of students at risk of social exclusion
3. Facilitating the access to mobility opportunities among students at risk of social exclusion
4. Increasing participation of students at risk of social exclusion in Erasmus+ mobilities
5. Assisting VET professionals in charge of managing Erasmus+ mobilities in their centres

The AllinErasmus Consortium

MEDI TERRA NEO International Center	Mediterraneo Erasmus International Center, from Spain.
KTT	KULDIGAS TEHNOLOGIJU UN TURISMA TEHNIKUMS, from Latvia.
AKMI	AKMI ANONIMI EKPAIDEFTIKI ETAIRIA, from Greece.

Introduction: AllinErasmus

The AllinErasmus Toolkit

The ALLinErasmus Toolkit is a product created by the ALLinErasmus consortium, providing the necessary knowledge for VET educators to work in the integration of students at risk of social exclusion in Erasmus+ mobilities. The Toolkit has three parts:

- **Part 1** covers the theoretical content regarding the meaning of social exclusion, giving VET educators background and a base.
- **Part 2** encloses a series of practical tools and tricks to reach students at risk of social exclusion and trigger their interest in Erasmus+ mobilities.
- **Part 3** covers real-life Success Stories and Best Practices from all over Europe, either showing the experience of VET students at risk of social exclusion participating in Erasmus+, or the experience of VET educators involving students at risk of social exclusion in mobilities.

Part 1: Theory

Part 2: Practical tools

Part 3: Success Stories

PART 1

Theoretical Guide

Part 1: Theoretical Guide

The first part of this Toolkit has been designed to help VET trainers understand the meaning of social exclusion, its different components, and how it affects the behaviour of VET students.

In the following sub-areas, a theoretical explanation of the most relevant terms linked to social inclusion will be provided. A Glossary with definitions of the key concepts used can also be found at the end of the Toolkit.

1.1. Meaning of social exclusion and social inclusion

To effectively discuss social exclusion, it is necessary to understand the term.

Social exclusion was defined by the European Commission in 1992 as "mechanisms whereby individuals and groups are excluded from taking part in the social exchanges, from the component practices and rights of social integration and of identity. Social exclusion goes beyond participation in working life; it is felt and shown in the fields of housing, education, health, and access to services" (Communities & Communities, 1992).

Translating this into simpler words, people facing social exclusions find themselves unable to participate in social activities, or to benefit from social rights that other people can.

To reach the level of social exclusion, the person needs to be excluded at several levels. And what does this mean? It means social exclusion is not only suffered in one area of a person's life. For example, feeling excluded only in one's workplace, but not in class or when applying for a loan, means the person is probably not suffering social exclusion, but discrimination in the workplace.

Therefore, social exclusion is faced by individuals who see in their life a combination of problems such as: unemployment, discrimination, poor skills, low income, poor housing, high crime, ill-health, and family breakdown. When dealing with all this at the same time, the person faces increasingly complex problems that affect themselves, their families, their environment and finally the entire society. (Social Exclusion, n.d.)

Now that the concept "social exclusion" is clearer, let's move to what could be considered its opposite… what does "social inclusion" mean?

According to the United Nations, "**Social inclusion** is the process by which efforts are made to ensure equal opportunities – that everyone, regardless of their background, can achieve their full potential in life. Such efforts include policies and actions that promote equal access to (public) services as well as enable citizen's participation in the decision-making processes that affect their lives." (Social Inclusion | Poverty Eradication, n.d.)

How does this definition match the one presented for social exclusion? It shows that social inclusion does not mean "hiding" the reasons leading to social exclusion. Social inclusion means openly understanding and seeing the background problems a person is facing, and looking for a key to ensure that the person can still access to the same opportunities as the one who is not facing said problems.

1.2.   Aspects that determine social exclusion

According to the information gathered by the United Nations on social exclusion, there are different factors determining social exclusion. In the following figure, a series of examples for each factor are presented:

Economic
- Income lower than average cost of living
- Impossibility to pay invoices
- No access to adequate housing due to economic constraints
- Unstable employment or unemployment

Political
- Constraints to participate in political life
- Lack of opportunity to vote
- Facing barriers or constrains due to political ideology
- Not being politically represented
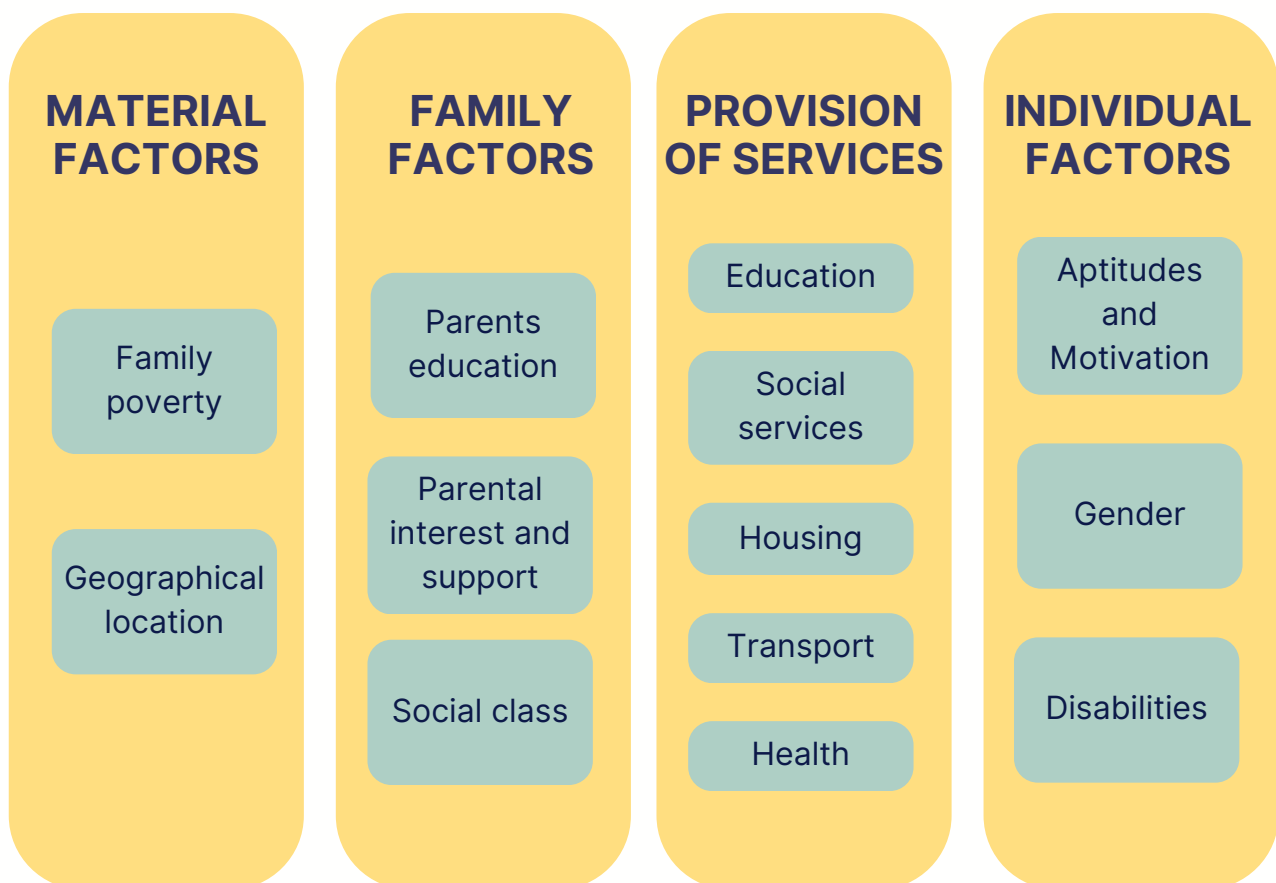
Cultural
- Belonging to a minoritary ethnical group
- Belonging to a different culture
- LGTBIQ+ discrimination

Social life
- Being discriminated due to gender
- Constrains to participate due to disabilities
- Facing barriers to access education
- Facing barriers to access social services
- Facing barriers to access health services
- Facing barriers accessing to transport

However, from the view of a VET teacher this division may sometimes be a bit abstract, as it does not provide specific checklists to verify when thinking on a particular case. For this reason, another option to describe the factors behind social exclusion can be the one provided by the paper "Risks and outcomes of social exclusion. Insights from longitudinal data" from John Bynner, available in the OECD library. This list was produced to establish the causes of social exclusion in children, so it can be easily applicable to a VET student.

MATERIAL FACTORS

- Family poverty
- Geographical location

FAMILY FACTORS

- Parents education
- Parental interest and support
- Social class

PROVISION OF SERVICES

- Education
- Social services
- Housing
- Transport
- Health

INDIVIDUAL FACTORS

- Aptitudes and Motivation
- Gender
- Disabilities

Part 1: Theoretical Guide

1.3. Groups at risk of social exclusion

The following sub-area covers some of the most common groups at risk of social exclusion found in VET education. These groups have been selected from the data gathered in each of the VET centres participating in ALLinErasmus. For each of the groups, a definition will be provided, together with the key aspects determining that the group is at risk of social exclusion.

Why referring to these groups as "at risk of social exclusion"? As explained in the definition of social exclusion, it depends on the combination of a series of factors. Belonging to one of these groups, therefore, does not necessarily contribute to a person suffering social exclusion. However, it increases their possibilities of also suffering other relevant factors, hence actually feeling social exclusion.

Bearing this in mind, it is relevant to monitor the VET students belonging to any of these groups, to identify whether they are suffering social exclusion.

Groups at risk of social exclusion

- LGTBIQ+ community
- Students from low socio-economic backgrounds
- Students with special needs
- Students from migrant backgrounds
- Students not studying in their mother tongue
- Students from rural areas
- Women
- Refugees, including war refugees from Ukraine
- Orphans/Students with no stable family support
- Ethnic minorities

Students from low socio-economic backgrounds

Students coming from low-income backgrounds or from families below the poverty level are at risk of social exclusion due to the direct relation that economy has with many factors of social exclusion. In fact, economic factors are one of the areas established by the UN in their definition of social exclusion.

A low income can lead to other sources of exclusion, such as:

- Difficulties in accessing high quality education. This can be due to the inability of paying education fees, or due to time constrains. Many students from low-income families need to find part-time jobs to contribute to the family income and subsistence, and sometimes they end up having to apply for full time jobs, with no time left to studying.
- Difficulties in accessing to healthcare. Specific healthcare areas (for example, dentist services) are in many countries private or really difficult to access through public healthcare.
- Difficulties in accessing to specific leisure activities. Social bonds are formed when participating in leisure activities such as sports, art classes... but most times, these are private activities that require paying a fee. Students from low-income families may be unable to attend, complicating their integration with other peers.

Students from migrant backgrounds

When talking about students from migrant backgrounds, we refer to immigrant students (students who were born in a different country), but also to students who, although were born in the country, come from immigrant families.

Students from migrant backgrounds

A migrant background is not necessarily a cause for social exclusion. However, there are some aspects that lead to said exclusion (Molero et al., 2001):

- Issues with documentation recognition. This issue may take many different forms; the clearest one comes from migrants arriving irregularly to the country. A lack of legal documentation leads to the inability to access to regularised employment or adequate salaries, turning into a lack of access to adequate housing and services. It also complicates or even makes impossible to access to certain education levels, healthcare, and other services. However, even if the person or the family is a "legal migrant", there may still be issues with certain documentation, for example with education degrees. Not being able to validate a degree due to a lack of recognition agreement between the home and destiny country can also lead to migrants not accessing to better employment opportunities.

- Differentiation depending on the nationality. The country the migrant comes from has a lot of importance when talking about social exclusion. To begin with, EU country nationals enjoy benefits and opportunities that differ from other countries' nationals, which makes it less probable for them to suffer social exclusion (at least in theory). Also, immigrants from first-world countries usually receive a "better" treatment compared to immigrants from emerging or third-world countries. This can be due to the cultural and ethnical similarities between the countries, the legal facilities to validate documentation, etc. Therefore, social exclusion due to a migrant background will most likely be faced by emerging of third-world country migrants, to which may exist cultural or ethnic prejudices.

- Cultural and ethnical differences. As mentioned in the previous point, cultural differences with the hosting country can lead to prejudice and conflicts that lead to social exclusion. (Martínez & Fernández, 2006)

Women

Although gender should never be a motive for exclusion, the reality is that women still face discrimination:

- In specific sectors still considered "for men", such as mechanics, engineering, sports...
- When accessing to high level employment opportunities (the commonly known as "glass ceiling").
- When becoming mothers (necessary time to recover and take care of the newborn).

LGTBIQ+ community

Although Europe was declared a LGTBIQ+ Freedom Zone in 2021, this action was actually carried out due to the discrimination acts faced by the community in Poland and Hungary since 2019. (Parliament Declares the European Union an "'LGBTIQ Freedom Zone'" │ News │ European Parliament, 2021).

Since 2021 the EU has continued working to ensure equality and non-discrimination for LGBTIQ+ persons, becoming part of the EU core values (LGBTIQ+ │ EEAS, n.d.). However, there are still social exclusion factors faced by the community:

- Not all EU countries have the same level of equality when it comes to the LGTBIQ+ community. According to Statista, in some EU countries more than half of the queer respondents to their surveys had faced discrimination. (Share of LGBT People in Europe Experiencing Discrimination │ Statista, 2023)
- In a survey carried out in 2022, it was shown that some members of the community still face discrimination in the EU labour market. This leads to less chance of accessing to high level job opportunities. (Do LGBTQIA+ People Face EU Labour Market Discrimination?, 2022)
- There are still many cases in the EU of people facing harassment and violent attacks due to their sexual orientation. This leads to discrimination and social exclusion, as they feel unwelcome to be part of the society.

Ethnic minorities

There is currently no internationally agreed definition on "minority". Considering the aim of this Toolkit, we will use the one from UNHCR: an ethnic, religious, and linguistic group, fewer in number than the rest of the population, whose members share a common identity. Some examples are Roma people (the biggest ethnic minority in Europe), African indigen minorities, American indigen minorities...

Ethnic minorities are not necessarily immigrants or coming from immigrant backgrounds; they just share a common identity that differs from the main identity shared in the country they belong to. This can lead to social exclusion, for example:

- Many ethnic minorities face discrimination in accessing to employment, housing, financial opportunities... due to cultural traditional prejudices.
- Prejudices towards specific ethnic minorities can lead to students facing exclusion in the classroom.

Students from rural areas

As explained in other groups, living in a rural area is not necessarily a factor of social exclusion. However, the combination with other actors can lead to said exclusion, such as:

- Rural areas are sometimes not well connected via public transport. This means that people who have no access to a private transport have less opportunities of benefiting from cultural and social offers that usually are available in cities.
- The access to education in rural areas is also lower, as it is most times necessary to move to urban areas to follow medium or higher education courses. This leads to the need of students to search for accommodation or transport possibilities, which is not always possible due to financial/transport constrains.

Students not studying in their mother tongue

Students studying in a language different than their mother tongue may have difficulties understanding the content taught, but also enhancing in social interactions with their peers. This can lead to social exclusion, for example:

- Not adequately understanding the content taught in class creates a wall in the learning ability of the student, as it impedes their correct understanding of the class, but also their ability to communicate with the teacher. This can lead to worse academic results and less opportunities to access to good jobs.
- Having difficulties in socialising leads to a feeling of exclusion and discrimination.
- Having difficulties with the official language of the country can also difficult the fulfilment of official documents for academic and official purposes (for example, the Erasmus+ necessary paperwork).

Students with special needs

Students with some type of cognitive or physical impairment can be victim of social exclusion, either by not being able to participate in specific activities, or because they are discriminated by their peers.

Orphans/Students with no stable family support

Students who live in an unstructured family (either facing family troubles, not having family support...) are prone to social exclusion as this situation is often accompanied by:

- Economic constrains.
- Lack of educational support.
- Lack of support in social or cultural endeavours (like the Erasmus+ project).
- Suffering physical or psychological violence that leads to a lack of ability to engage in the community.

Refugees, including war refugees from Ukraine

When talking about refugees, there is one point that needs to be highlighted. The definition of refugee, according to the UN, is: someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war or violence. (What Is a Refugee? Definition and Meaning | USA for UNHCR, n.d.)

This means, refugees come from a different country (like migrants do), but they are not the same group, and it is essential to understand the differences in order to understand them and help them. The most important one would be that immigrants decide to leave their home country and move to another country to have a better life. Of course, the decision is not always due to positive factors (many times they leave escaping from long-term unemployment, bad living conditions, etc.). But it is still, up to a point, a choice. Refugees, however, are forced to move to another country. They did not have a choice, may not wish to leave, and are not previously prepared to leave their country. Most times they cannot return to their home country, and they have faced a traumatic event with psychological consequences.

There are many aspects that can lead to social exclusion among refugees:
- They mostly do not speak the local language, which makes very difficult for them to communicate.
- They have not had a previous period of understanding the country they are going to be living in, which increases the possibilities of cultural and religious conflict.
- They have not chosen to move to another country, which can mean they are not willing to integrate. This can lead to conflict and social exclusion.
- They may face economic constrains.
- Their psychological situation can have effects in the working environment.

1.4. How does social exclusion affect VET education?

Up to now, we have created an image of the meaning of social exclusion, and the different aspects that can lead to a person facing social exclusion.

Now, it is time to focus on the specific situation of VET education. How can social exclusion be seen in VET education? Does it affect VET students?

Long story short: yes, social exclusion can be found in VET education. All groups previously mentioned as "at risk of social exclusion" are represented in VET education, which leads to believe there will always be students at risk requiring help from the VET centre. (Klasen, n.d.).

Specifically, the VET environment can promote the appearance of situations which, in turn, lead to social exclusion, such as:

- Students coming from a low economic household can feel a discrimination compared to the options that other students have, such as the possibility of having an international internship experience without the Erasmus+ grant.
- In some countries, the school you attend depends on the neighbourhood you live in. This tends to congregate students at risk of social exclusion in the same centre, leading to underperforming classes that decrease their possibilities of a high-level education.
- Students with special needs can face exclusion when the VET centre is not prepared to assist them in any specific way they may need.
- Gender is a very common source of social exclusion in VET. In many countries there are still practical jobs (which are usually taught in VET) which are seen as "male jobs", incurring in discriminatory actions towards women interested in learning. This can sometimes even be seen in the infrastructure of the school: some centres did not have female toilets until very few years ago, as they did not have female staff or students.

- Students coming from migrant backgrounds or belonging to different ethnicities, which can suffer language barriers, feel differences with their peers, and exclusion.
- Students from the LGTBIQ+ community

Social exclusion has different consequences among VET students, socially but also in their academic life. Suffering social exclusion and feeling discriminated in the classroom is a cause of dropout, which detriments the possibilities of the students to access to high-quality employment. This, in turns, increases the chances of suffering social exclusion during the adulthood.

1.5. How does social exclusion affect participation in Erasmus+ mobilities?

Focusing on the relation between social exclusion and participation in Erasmus+ mobilities, there are some cases in which being part of one of the groups at social exclusion can lead to having difficulties in participation in Erasmus+ mobilities. This, in fact, is an example of social exclusion: not being able or facing difficulties in accessing an academic opportunity.

Students with disabilities can face difficulties in their participation in Erasmus+ mobilities, if it is not possible for the hosting institution to meet the criteria needed for them to move to another country. For example, a student in a wheelchair will need to stay in a hosting family or flat that is prepared for the wheelchair (elevator, doors big enough, adapted bathroom if needed...). Being unable to meet these expectations may mean that the student cannot benefit from an Erasmus+ mobilities. The same happens to students with specific medical requirements; if they cannot be fully met in the host country, they are unable to participate in the mobility.

Students with teaching or training difficulties that require specific assistance or orientation can feel discrimination if the hosting institution complains or difficulties the procurement o said assistance in the internship, or during the preparatory courses carried out by the student. Feeling a "burden" can lead the student to decide not to participate in the Erasmus+ mobility.

Students from a low socioeconomic environment can be affected by several reasons:

- Many times, they need to look for part-time jobs to help their families economically, or to support themselves. This may difficult or even impede the possibility of them going abroad for an Erasmus+ experience, as they need to maintain the job.
- Although the Erasmus+ mobilities offer a grant to cover the expenses, many times students need to incur in additional expenses during the mobility. Students with low income may not be able to cover said expenses, which impedes their participation in the mobility.

Students facing geographical barriers that difficult or impede the travel to the host country can feel discriminated if the VET institution is not able to assist in overcoming said difficulties. Not offering solutions to reach the airport or transport required (for example, a private vehicle to pick the student from their home and reach the closest well-linked location) may mean that students will not be able to participate in Erasmus+ mobilities.

Ethnic, cultural, and racial differences can lead to several levels of difficulty when accessing the Erasmus+ program. The differences go from language barriers (which will be increased if adding the host country language) to conduct barriers. Sometimes they may limit the ability of the potential participants to ask for help when required during the application process, which can end up meaning they will not fulfil the application. It is also important to remember that not all countries react in the same way to these groups; for example, some ethnic groups may not feel exclusion in the home country but have a negative image in the host country. The student should always be supported if this is the case, both by the home and the host tutor.

GLOSSARY

Glossary

TERM	DEFINITION
Erasmus+	**Erasmus+** is the EU's programme to support education, training, youth and sport in Europe.
Mobility	Erasmus+ opportunity to travel to another EU destination for a period of time to participate in learning and training activities.
Social exclusion	Mechanisms whereby individuals and groups are excluded from taking part in social exchanges, It is felt and shown in the fields of housing, education, health, and access to services
Social Inclusion	Process by which efforts are made to ensure equal opportunities – that everyone, regardless of their background, can achieve their full potential in life.
Success Story	Example of a previous participant telling their story and providing feedback for future participants.

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