



Innovative advancement of VET trainers for the social integration of students with disabilities.

Project number: 2023-2-EL01-KA210-VET-000182743

Module 4: Assisting Students with Disabilities During International Experiences

Practical handbook for mobility assistants



E.E.E.EK.
KOZANHS



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Learning goals

- Recognize the importance of a mobility companion in assisting students with disabilities throughout international experiences.
- Acknowledge the different types of disabilities and the obstacles that students might encounter while studying abroad (physical, communication, social, cultural).
- Adopt effective strategies to guarantee accessibility in travel, lodging, educational environments, and everyday activities.
- Enhance communication and problem-solving abilities to assist students with respect and effectiveness in challenging circumstances.
- Encourage autonomy, dignity, and inclusion instead of dependence, allowing students to fully benefit from mobility opportunities.
- comprehensive development and applicable learning outcomes for all students.

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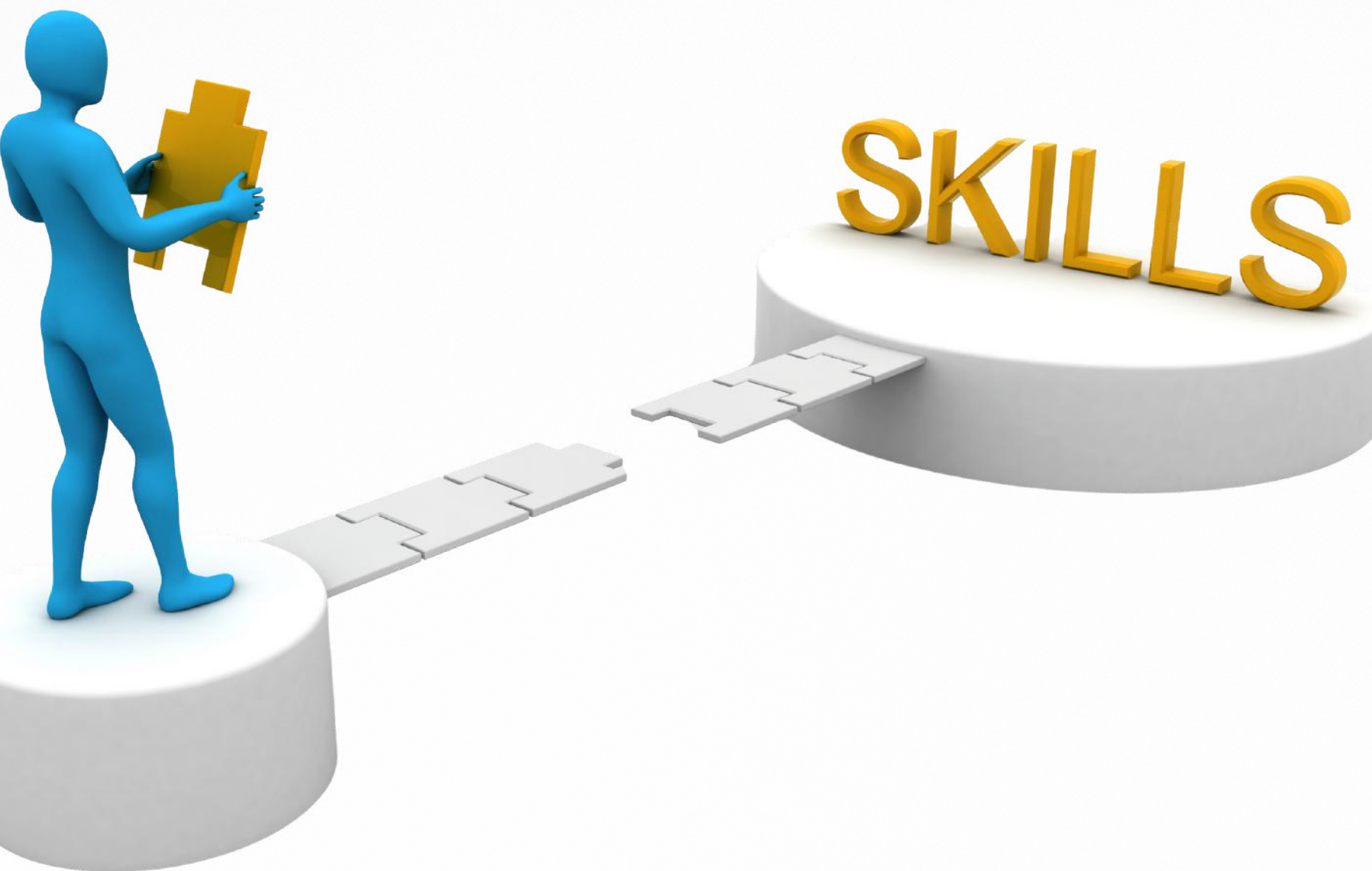
Introduction



This module was designed to educate and empower mobility leaders who support students with disabilities during international learning opportunities, including Erasmus+ and other professional mobility initiatives.

Studying or training abroad provides distinct opportunities for personal development, autonomy, and intercultural education. Nevertheless, students with disabilities may encounter extra obstacles concerning accessibility, communication, and engagement in everyday activities. A well-trained mobility companion can significantly influence whether the experience is challenging or genuinely transformative.

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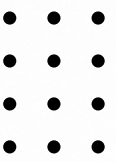
The significance of mobility leaders in promoting inclusion within Erasmus+/VET mobilities.

Mobility chaperones are essential in Erasmus+/VET mobility programmes, as they address accessibility challenges, safeguard the well-being of students with disabilities, and encourage equal participation in both academic and cultural activities. Their responsibilities extend beyond mere practical assistance: chaperones empower students to cultivate independence, surmount obstacles, and fully engage in international learning experiences. Consequently, they play a significant role in diminishing inequalities within mobility programmes, where students with disabilities frequently remain significantly underrepresented, and they help to actualize the European principles of inclusion, equality, and diversity.






Categories of mobility-related disabilities

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- Physical disabilities refer to conditions that impact a person's mobility, dexterity, or endurance, such as spinal cord injuries, muscular dystrophy, and cerebral palsy. Students may need wheelchairs, crutches, or specialized devices. Ensuring accessibility to transportation, buildings, and housing is essential.
 - Sensory impairments: These encompass hearing loss, deafness, blindness, and visual impairment. Students might need sign language interpreters, closed captioning, tactile maps, Braille, or assistive technologies like screen readers. Insufficient communication support can lead to exclusion.



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- Cognitive and intellectual disabilities encompass conditions like dyslexia, ADHD, autism spectrum disorder, and intellectual developmental disorders. Students with these disabilities often thrive with structured routines, explicit instructions, visual supports, and patient guidance. While mobility may pose challenges, it necessitates customized assistance.
 - Invisible disabilities refer to conditions that are not immediately apparent, including epilepsy, diabetes, chronic pain, and mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety. Due to their subtle nature, these disabilities are frequently misunderstood, resulting in stigma or insufficient support. Students may need accommodations, such as flexibility in recovery time or medication schedules.

Rights of students with disabilities in the Erasmus+ program



Erasmus+ identifies inclusion as a fundamental priority for the period from 2021 to 2027. Students with disabilities are entitled to the same rights as all other students, along with supplementary support measures.

- EU Charter of Fundamental Rights: Every individual is entitled to education, training, and freedom from discrimination.
- Inclusion and Diversity Strategy (Erasmus+ 2021-2027): guarantees that individuals with limited opportunities, especially students with disabilities, can engage on an equal footing.

Mobility rights:

- Right to appropriate housing (e.g., suitable accommodation, accessible transport, interpreters).
- Entitlement to supplementary financial assistance via Erasmus+ "inclusion support" (for aides, resources, accessible transportation, etc.).
- The right to engage in all activities on an equal basis.

Myths and realities regarding disability and global mobility

Numerous myths exist regarding disability and international mobility; however, the truth is significantly more positive. Students with disabilities can travel safely and effectively when adequate planning and support are in place. Disability does not necessarily equate to dependence; many students exhibit independence, and caregivers should prioritize fostering this independence instead of undermining it. Cost concerns can be deceptive, as Erasmus+ provides supplementary funding to meet accessibility requirements, facilitating inclusion that is advantageous for everyone. Additionally, not all disabilities are visible; concealed conditions like mental health issues or chronic illnesses can also affect mobility and should be recognized. Disproving these misconceptions aids in diminishing stigma, fosters participation, and advances a more inclusive culture of mobility.



Main responsibilities prior to, during, and following mobility

Before the interpretation

- Offer assistance with preparation (documentation, accessibility provisions, medical requirements).
- Reach out to your host institution to inquire about available support services.
- Assist students in establishing achievable expectations and alleviating anxiety.

During the transition

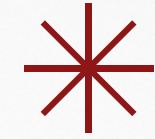
- Offer practical support (navigation, daily tasks, accessible transport).
- Ensure participation in classes, cultural excursions, and social events.
- Be ready to handle issues in emergency situations.



Following the transfer

- Assist students in contemplating their experiences and the lessons they have acquired.
- Assistance for family reintegration and improvement of developed skills.
- Encourage the student to share their story to inspire others.





Emotional assistance, cultural mediation, and enhancement of independence



- Emotional support: Companions provide comfort, motivation, and understanding. They assist in alleviating stress, homesickness, or anxiety in unfamiliar surroundings.
- Cultural mediation involves serving as a bridge between the student and the local culture, addressing misunderstandings and enhancing communication.

- Promote independence: Inspire students to take charge of their own choices and seek out new experiences, intervening only when essential. The objective is self-efficacy, not reliance.



Case scenarios: when to take action, when to withdraw.

Enter:

- A student in a wheelchair is positioned in front of an entrance that is not accessible.
- A student experiencing epilepsy has a seizure and needs immediate medical assistance.
- Communication challenges arise in the classroom due to the lack of an interpreter.

Take a moment to reflect:

- The student plans to order food or request directions on their own.
- The student chooses to engage in an activity with their peers independently.
- The student makes individual decisions concerning leisure activities or social engagements.

Educational point: Striking a balance between support and autonomy is crucial.



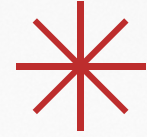


Ethical principles: respect, dignity, and confidentiality.

- Respect: View the student as an equal partner in the learning process, rather than as an individual to be "managed."
- Dignity: Providing care in a respectful and attentive way, ensuring confidentiality while preventing embarrassment or a decrease in self-worth.
- Confidentiality: Safeguard personal and medical information, except when sharing is necessary for security purposes.
- Limitations: Recognize your role: caregivers serve as facilitators, not as parents, doctors, or decision-makers.

Educational conclusion: Upholding ethics cultivates trust and encourages a secure and inclusive atmosphere for mobility.





Pre-departure checklist

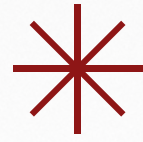
Before you leave, it is crucial to ensure that all your travel documents are properly organized. This encompasses a valid passport, visa (if necessary), health or travel insurance, and Erasmus+ documentation. Preparing these documents ahead of time minimizes last-minute anxiety and helps avoid possible issues during your journey.

Gathering the medical information of students is equally important. Medical prescriptions, vaccination records, and any medical or accessibility certificates should be collected and organized in a readily accessible folder. Additionally, accompanying individuals must be made aware of any specific dietary requirements or medical routines to effectively assist the student during unforeseen circumstances.

Finally, chaperones should aid students in compiling emergency contact information and financial planning. A contact list that includes family members, healthcare providers, the home institution, and the host organization should be readily available. Students should also have access to their finances and bank cards, along with guidance on managing unforeseen expenses. This thorough preparation contributes to minimizing risks and enhancing students' confidence prior to the mobility period.



Managing everyday routines



- Transportation: Guarantee accessible pathways for everyday commuting (public transit, taxis, or campus shuttles). Verify the availability of assistance services (e.g., airport/train station personnel).
- Meals: Address dietary requirements (allergies, diabetes, religious restrictions) by reviewing available cafeterias or restaurants beforehand.
- Academic life: Assist students in gaining access to classrooms, libraries, and laboratories. Guarantee that learning materials are provided in accessible formats (digital, large print, Braille, videos with captions).



Crisis management (health emergencies, misplaced belongings, accessibility challenges)

- Medical emergencies: Recognize the medical needs of students, ensure emergency contact information is accessible, and locate the nearest hospitals. Respond swiftly and calmly to medical emergencies.
- Lost and Found: Assists in replacing lost passports, credit cards, or medical supplies. Maintain both digital and physical copies of important documents.
- Accessibility concerns: In the absence of elevators or ramps, it is crucial to explore alternative pathways, reach out to local authorities, or ask for help from the hosting organization.

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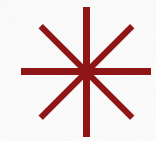


Intercultural challenges and support for adaptation

- Cultural Differences: The understanding of disability differs across nations. In certain contexts, awareness or access to services may be lacking. Chaperones can assist students in navigating cultural misunderstandings.
- Language barriers: Facilitate communication, particularly when local personnel lack training in accessibility practices. Utilize translation applications or interpreters whenever feasible.
- Social adaptation: promoting student involvement in group activities and fostering relationships, thereby diminishing feelings of isolation.



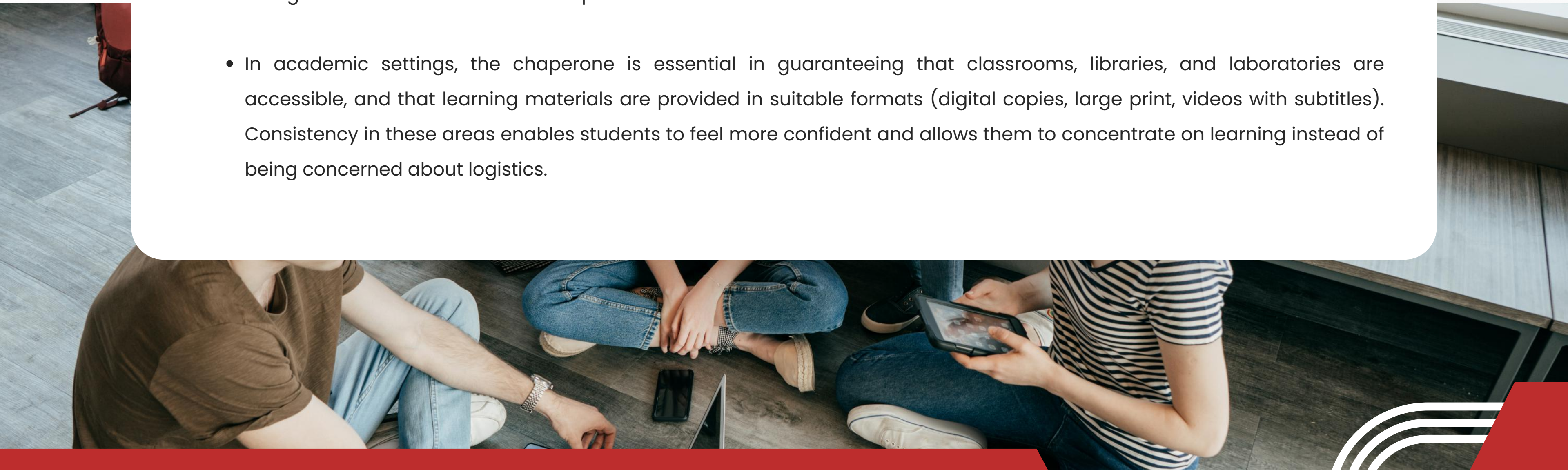
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Management of daily tasks (transportation, meals, school life)



- Daily routines serve as the cornerstone for efficient mobility. Caregivers must guarantee that transportation is both safe and accessible, such as by organizing adapted buses, verifying assistance at stations, or planning dependable routes. Meals also demand consideration: students may have particular dietary needs linked to health, culture, or religion, so caregivers should review available options beforehand.
- In academic settings, the chaperone is essential in guaranteeing that classrooms, libraries, and laboratories are accessible, and that learning materials are provided in suitable formats (digital copies, large print, videos with subtitles). Consistency in these areas enables students to feel more confident and allows them to concentrate on learning instead of being concerned about logistics.



Crisis management (health emergencies, misplaced belongings, accessibility challenges)

- International travel can result in unforeseen circumstances, and chaperones must be ready to react. Health emergencies necessitate awareness of the student's medical requirements, quick access to emergency contacts, and familiarity with local medical facilities. Misplaced items like passports, credit cards, or medications can induce anxiety; therefore, chaperones should maintain both digital and physical copies of vital documents to ease the process of obtaining replacements.
- Accessibility challenges frequently arise, including malfunctioning elevators or routes that are not accessible. In these circumstances, the chaperone should engage actively in problem-solving by identifying alternative pathways, seeking institutional support, or requesting help from local services. A calm and practical approach can reassure the student and contribute to a safe experience.



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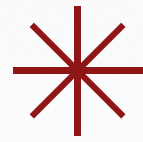
challenges and support for adaptation

Mobility encompasses more than just studying abroad; it also involves immersing oneself in a new culture. Students with disabilities may encounter different levels of awareness or attitudes towards accessibility in their host country. For instance, certain societies may have limited familiarity with inclusive practices, potentially resulting in misunderstandings or feelings of exclusion.

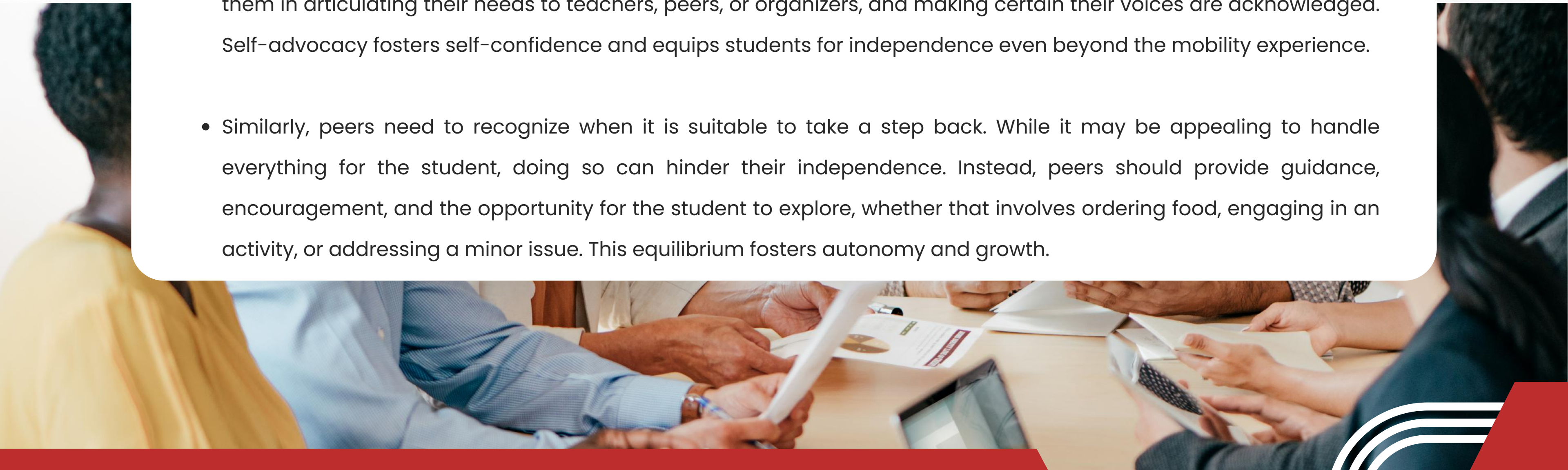
Chaperones serve an essential function as cultural intermediaries. They help students adjust to unfamiliar customs, utilize translation resources, and articulate their needs when language poses a challenge. Additionally, they can promote social engagement, fostering friendships and a feeling of inclusion within the community. This assistance enhances the mobility experience and mitigates feelings of isolation.



Encourage self-defense and independence



- A crucial function of chaperones is to empower students to become their own advocates. This includes assisting them in articulating their needs to teachers, peers, or organizers, and making certain their voices are acknowledged. Self-advocacy fosters self-confidence and equips students for independence even beyond the mobility experience.
- Similarly, peers need to recognize when it is suitable to take a step back. While it may be appealing to handle everything for the student, doing so can hinder their independence. Instead, peers should provide guidance, encouragement, and the opportunity for the student to explore, whether that involves ordering food, engaging in an activity, or addressing a minor issue. This equilibrium fosters autonomy and growth.



Participation in social and extracurricular activities

True inclusion goes beyond the classroom environment. Chaperones should support and empower students with disabilities to engage actively in cultural events, field trips, sports activities, and various extracurricular activities. This may involve evaluating the accessibility of venues, advocating for accommodations, or offering transportation assistance to social events.

→ Engagement in social life enables students to form friendships, discover new cultures, and develop essential life skills such as teamwork and communication. Without involvement in these activities, students may encounter a less fulfilling experience and face the risk of isolation. Peers can play a crucial role, providing access to these opportunities.



assessment and reflection in collaboration with the student.

At the conclusion of a mobility experience, it is essential to allocate time for evaluation and reflection. Counselors can assist students by engaging them in structured discussions or encouraging journaling, which aids in their contemplation of what they have learned and how they have grown throughout the experience. Reflection may encompass both positive results (new skills, friendships, independence) and challenges (accessibility issues, cultural barriers, moments of frustration).

Chaperones can also aid students in offering feedback to both sending and hosting organizations. This feedback is essential for enhancing future mobility and ensuring that inclusion practices continue to evolve. Reflection not only benefits the project but also fosters self-awareness, resilience, and the student's sense of achievement.

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Ensure continuity (recognition of skills, reintegration, sharing → among peers)

The conclusion of mobility should signify a new beginning rather than an end. Leaders can facilitate continuity by assisting students in identifying and documenting the skills they have developed, such as intercultural awareness, autonomy, or digital skills. These can be recorded in tools like Youthpass or Europass, which make the outcomes visible to prospective educators and employers.

Reintegration is essential: returning home can present emotional challenges, particularly if students experience a sense of lost independence or friendships formed while abroad. Counselors can aid this transition by linking students to local opportunities, fostering ongoing engagement in inclusive activities, and encouraging peer sharing. When students recount their mobility experiences to others, especially peers with disabilities, they become role models who inspire increased participation in future mobility.





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Informal activity: simulation of the accessible route

Goals

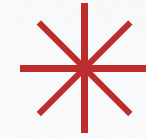
- To increase awareness of the challenges that students with disabilities encounter during international mobility.
- To cultivate problem-solving and collaboration abilities in practical situations.
- To improve empathy and comprehension of the mobility companion's role.
- To enhance the speed of decision-making and promote inclusive thinking.



Overview of the activity (5 minutes)

The trainer presents the concept that students with disabilities might encounter unforeseen challenges while studying abroad, emphasizing that chaperones frequently need to step in quickly to provide assistance. Participants are informed that they will collaborate in groups to "empathize" with a mobility chaperone and devise solutions to practical scenarios.





Necessary materials



Scenario cards (each card depicts a situation that a student with disabilities may face during mobility).



Flip chart or oversized sheets of paper.

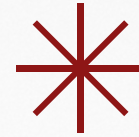


Markers or pens for generating ideas and solutions.



Space designated for group activities and presentations.





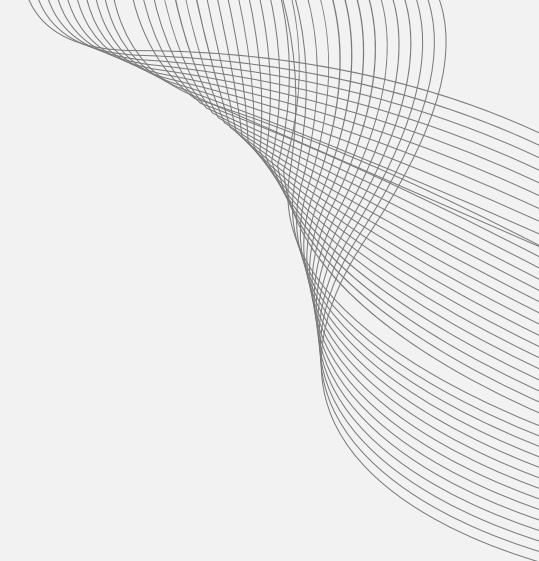
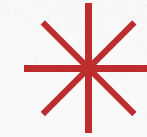
Steps

1. Organize participants into small groups consisting of 3 to 5 individuals each.
2. Distribute a scenario card to every group. Examples:

- A wheelchair user reaches the train station and is unable to locate a functioning elevator.
- A student with hearing impairment participates in a lecture, yet there are no interpreters or subtitles available.
- A student with diabetes left his medication behind during a day trip.
- A student with dyslexia struggles to comprehend exam instructions that are presented in complicated text.

1. Group discussion (15 minutes): Each group examines the issue, recognizes possible challenges, and formulates 2-3 feasible solutions as if they were mobility companions.
2. Presentations (10 minutes): Each group will present their scenario along with the proposed solutions to the entire group.
3. Final reflection (10 minutes): the trainer leads a brief debriefing utilizing guiding questions:

- What were your feelings in that situation?
- Was it simple or difficult to find solutions?
- Which skills or knowledge have you found to be the most beneficial?
- How is all of this connected to the true function of mobility companions?



Debriefing / Educational Outcomes

Objective:

Consider and apply inclusive strategies in professional training settings.

Instructions:

- Step 1: Organize participants into small groups.
- Phase 2: Each group selects a representative VET learning scenario (e.g., laboratory, classroom, practical session).
- Step 3: Recognize possible obstacles to inclusion in this context (physical, social, or educational).
- Phase 4: Consider strategies to address these obstacles by utilizing the tools and methods discussed in the module (e.g., UDL, assistive technologies, peer support, modified assessments).
- Step 5: Share the results with the entire group and engage in a discussion about which strategies are the most practical and effective.

Result:

Participants acquire hands-on experience in identifying barriers, developing solutions, and comprehending the application of inclusive practices within actual vocational training environments.





Conclusion



This module offered a comprehensive overview of the essential role mobility leaders fulfill in assisting students with disabilities during international experiences, including Erasmus+ and VET mobility. Participants gained insights into various types of disabilities, the obstacles students may encounter, and their rights concerning EU inclusion policies. The module underscored the duties of mobility leaders before, during, and after the experience, highlighting the significance of emotional support, ethical behavior, and the promotion of independence. Practical advice on preparation, accessibility, communication, and the application of assistive technologies equips leaders with the necessary tools to foresee challenges and respond effectively. Throughout the mobility, leaders learn to handle daily routines, intercultural adaptation, crises, and social inclusion, while post-mobility reflection guarantees continuity and acknowledgment of skills. Ultimately, the integration of knowledge, practical tools, and experiential activities, such as the "Accessibility Travel Simulation," cultivates empathy, problem-solving abilities, and a proactive mindset to create inclusive and inspiring international mobility experiences for all students.



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