



The voice of blind and partially sighted people in Europe



Recommendations for students with visual impairment participating in international exchange programmes

Author: Comenius University in Bratislava

Reviewed by Elena MENDELOVA, Timea HÓKOVÁ and Krisztina KOVACS

February 2018

CONTENTS

- 1. Introduction..... 3
- 2. International mobility for BPS students / importance 5
- 3. Motivation and personal readiness 6
- 4. Start up early 8
- 5. Study conditions monitoring..... 9
- 6. Disclosure - registration of a student with special needs..... 11
- 7. Reasonable adjustments and support services..... 13
- 8. Access to study material 15
- 9. Assistive technologies (AT)..... 17
- 10. Accommodation – living and travelling..... 19
- 11. Human support 21
- 12. Finances 23
- 13. Checklist..... 26
- 14. Helpful contacts 28
- 15. Information sources 30

1. Introduction

A program of international mobility is a wonderful opportunity for any student to improve his/her education, personal skills and social network. The Erasmus program started in 1987 as an exchange program that offered university students the opportunity to learn and enrich themselves with academic studies abroad. In the 30-year history of this program, 9 million young people were involved. However, the number of students with disabilities participating, including blind and partially sighted (BPS) students has been very low throughout the duration.

With the new Erasmus+ program, students can spend a semester or a year abroad in one of 33 countries. They can combine studying abroad with a traineeship. The Erasmus+ program is one of the few that offer special support for students with disabilities.

Blind and partially sighted students belong to most disadvantaged group, facing many barriers which influence not only the number of actual participants, but the whole process of decision making as to whether to participate or not.

The importance of international experience is considerable for students with disabilities, especially for blind and partially sighted individuals. That's why in recent years many initiatives focused on motivation, systemic changes, universal design and general accessibility took place. One of the measures aimed at encouraging increased BPS student involvement in the Erasmus+ program is the bilateral project implemented by the European Blind Union (EBU) and the International Council for Education and Rehabilitation of People with Visual Impairment, Europe (ICEVI-Europe). Within this project a research group was set up that consisted of a researcher from ELTE University Bárczi Faculty of Special Education, Budapest (Hungary), ICEVI-Europe, EBU and the Slovak Blind and Partially Sighted Union (UNSS).

In 2015 the research group conducted a survey aimed at identifying the situation of student involvement in the Erasmus+ program. The results are analyzed in the report [*State-of-the-art report on the accessibility of exchange programmes for students with visual impairment*](#).

The follow-up activity in the project was to monitor the international experience of BPS students from ELTE University in Budapest, Hungary, and Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia. Their experiences and suggestions were published in the document [*Accessible Universities for Erasmus+ Students with Visual Impairment*](#). The views, suggestions and

experiences of competent university staff are contained in another report the [*Pilot Survey among Erasmus+ and Disability Coordinators*](#).

The aim of this brochure is to motivate blind and partially sighted students to participate in international mobility with the Erasmus+ program and to help them prepare for a successful academic experience and stay abroad. Information, recommendations, questions and messages are mainly drawn from the above-mentioned surveys and project materials. But other resources, recommendations and initiatives pursuing the same goal - promoting engagement, equal opportunities and implementing measures that will ensure the conditions for active participation are also used.

2. International mobility for BPS students / importance

The Erasmus+ program is a great opportunity for personal development, gaining new skills, learning new languages, building new relationships, verifying one's own abilities, experiencing new challenges and opening new doors (not only) to the world of knowledge.

“Being alone in a foreign country gives you the possibility for personal growth.” (Zsófi)

The specificity of this program is that it underlines openness for all, including the offer of special support to disadvantaged groups. The professional and personal contribution to engaging in international mobility is evident. According to actual results:

- Since the start of Erasmus+ (2014), over 2 million people have participated in the program;
- Five years after graduation, the unemployment rate of young people who studied or trained abroad is 23 % lower than that of their non-mobile peers;
- 1 in 3 Erasmus+ trainees are offered a position by the company they trained in;
- 1 in 3 youth mobility participants comes from a disadvantaged background.

Students with disabilities such as a visual impairment would like to have equal opportunities, comparable conditions, the same security and support. Appropriate conditions and support are essential for BPS students. Without them their participation is impossible.

BPS students can find institutional help to different degrees, although the success of attending the mobility program lies mostly in personal experiences, individual readiness and motivation. The most important thing is to be ready for any kind of situation.

“The stay gave me a lot from the language perspective, and also gave me great experiences. If I should give a message to other students who fear it would be difficult and they would not manage – I would tell them they should not worry, they would manage.” (Regina)

3. Motivation and personal readiness

An Erasmus+ program is a big challenge. Most students with disabilities who participated in mobility programs found them really useful, improving their skills and abilities in self-confidence and communication, also making new friends and connections, not to mention the possibilities of foreign language skills. All in all, what you can get from studying abroad lies within you personally. Therefore preparation for studying abroad requires deep consideration.

As the mobility of students with disabilities become a common topic and widely supported issue, you will find some kind of support in every country where go, although in different stages of development. There are many topics to consider in advance.

This situation is all the more complicated as BPS students often have to function in an unfamiliar environment, they have only theoretical information about the scope and reliability of the support mechanisms, they can't assume risks and they are not always ready and able to find alternative solutions. At the same time, they are aware that in a new environment they will be heavily dependent on guidance and reliable support. Their preparation for such a stay is time consuming, depending on solid information. The student's own decision to move from a familiar secure environment to an unknown or little-known world, and their determination to succeed play an important role. Often without being fully aware of the fact that the new environment may not be ready for BPS students.

“Teachers were not prepared to accept a blind student. They did not know at all what to do with me. They did not know how I was able to read -THEY HAVE NEVER HAD ANY BLIND STUDENTS, I GUESS! This was a negative feeling, that I always had to explain what I can do and how. I thought let's teach the teachers on the special needs of the blind, but later it was really tiring and disappointing.” (Bogi)

In terms of personal readiness BPS students identified the most frequently encountered barriers while studying abroad:

- Reliance on help from others in many daily routines,
- Increased need for personal assistance in a new environment, which they did not anticipate,
- Study material was an issue – especially when there was little mutual communication among officials and students had to re-submit one set of information to multiple people or into multiple systems,

- Some participants did not like being repeatedly asked about their disability/special needs, they thought such information should be requested once and then shared among all concerned,
- Language limits.

➡ **Steps recommended**

- Curiosity saves your skin - getting the most information beforehand and also during your stay abroad is the most helpful thing of all.
- Assess your level of in/dependency and decide on the need for personal assistance during your stay abroad.
- Contact the disability coordinator at the host university and ask for personal assistance provision.
- Allow sufficient time for preparation.
- Develop your orientation skills.
- Train your PC skills.

“It was quite unpleasant and complicated, people at the host university were not entirely ready for a student like me. But it was great to realize I can manage through such situations.” (Regína)

4. Start early

➡ **Set your mind to become as self-reliant as possible**

When planning your Erasmus+ study it is useful to start finding new ways of getting information yourself in your own environment without any other help. It is very helpful to start, at home, to go a bit out of your comfort zone, try shopping alone, going to some unknown places without assistance, depend on information from pedestrians on your way. This way you are developing orientation in an unknown place but still in your own language and country. From there it is just a small step to extending it abroad. It is necessary to train in a more or less known environment, to understand that as a BPS you cannot always find your destination easily and that sometimes it takes more effort.

➡ **Orientation**

As a BPS student, you will need to hone your orientation skills to the highest possible level. Getting around in an unknown environment already at home is important not just to increase communication skills, but also to improve orientation skills. Try to contact organizations for blind and partially sighted people in your country or city for possible training or talk with friends about their ways to get around in an unknown environment. Learn to work with directions, recognizing the space around you with echolocation or other assistive devices like smartphones with navigation. Even if there may often be a classmate to help, it is important to not remain helpless if there is no help at hand.

➡ **Develop communication with potential „assistants“**

As you will find out during your studies abroad, many times you will face a situation when you have to just ask whoever is close at hand to help you to get to a specific place. To be ready for this kind of situation, even in a foreign language, wandering through your own city to unknown places asking people on your way for help and directions is very useful. It strengthens your communication skills and helps you overcome the possible fear of unfamiliar situations.

5. Monitoring study conditions

When moving to study abroad BPS students often face a challenging situation. They have to struggle with the problem of not getting the services needed and not getting accessible study material in time. A totally new situation for many is that they are expected to take on a major logistical responsibility to enable their studies to go well. This takes time and focus from the academic work.

“For a low vision girl who used to live with her family who got all support from the family, adopting to a new situation, especially being alone is really a barrier.” (Zsófi)

It is therefore important to spend time on the preparation for a stay and to make a final decision on the basis of verified information. The conditions of study, scope, quality and availability of support services at the host university are crucial for a BPS student. The absence of support services may be a reason to choose another university or initiate the signing of a new bilateral agreement between universities.

“The coordinator and I spent a long time looking for a university that would accept me, and only one agreed in the end. There was no prior bilateral agreement, no one had ever been there before from our university, the agreement was just signed after we initiated.” (Regina)

➡ Essential information about the host university needed

- Accessibility of the curriculum
- Compatibility of study programs, courses
- Language of the study program
- Institutional policy about equal opportunities/general accessibility
- Experience with support for students with disabilities
- Experience with support for BPS students
- Possible risks from the BPS student's point of view
- Availability of information in accessible formats on the host university web-sites

➡ Key questions

- Does the host university have an institutional document or action plan for students with disabilities?

- Does the host university have a dedicated service, office or a contact person for students with disabilities?
- What support services are available for BPS students?
- Are support services available to Erasmus+ students as well? If so, under what conditions?
- If the host university does not provide some services, is there contact to an external service provider available?
- Do they speak a language you speak in the disability office?
- Does the host university offer preparatory language courses?
- Are study materials for preparatory language courses in accessible formats for BPS students?
- Are BPS students supported in e-learning?
- Are the teachers trained in teaching blind students?

➡ **Steps recommended**

- Focus on the system of providing support services at and outside the host university.
- Ask the disability coordinator at the host university for outside services and institutions – agencies, organizations for the blind, organizations for students, libraries...
- Consider the possibility of a personal visit to the host city and university prior to the study period.

“I suggest to the future Erasmus students with VI to be cautious, looking for the real situation at the host university. Searching the university’s webpages is not enough. You have to contact the right person at the host university before actually travelling. I have learnt to be more independent and my everyday skills developed a lot. I also learned quick problem solving.” (Bogi)

6. Disclosure - registration of a student with special needs

Higher education institutions are responsible for creating universally accessible study conditions and providing measures to compensate for the impact of disability and barriers in an academic environment. Appropriate help and support services are provided to students on the basis of a functional evaluation of their special needs that need to be documented. The majority of universities have an institutional policy focused on equal opportunities, which contains the rules for registration, information about what is needed to document student's special needs and how to apply for support.

Some universities do not apply such a procedure. In the context of the developed practice of universal design in tertiary education, all students should be able to benefit from excellent conditions and receive any additional support, individually choose a form and a timetable for study and examinations. This is an ideal example.

In most universities, however, special services are provided for a small group of registered students with disabilities.

A BPS student who wants to use the support when studying abroad, must meet the requirements and give his/her interest of support in sufficient time. In this way he/she can obtain important information about the services provided by the university and the rules of their use.

Advanced information helps decision making about university selection and planning next steps. Sometimes the process of registering, demonstrating eligibility, specifying needs, filling out forms, is very complicated, lengthy and demotivating, do not be dissuaded. In order to ensure the support, this needs to be addressed as soon as possible.

“That administrative part, it was a despair. The system did not communicate internally, I had to send one piece of information to three different departments. We had one course at the school of medicine and another at the IT school and yet another at the language institute, so we had to fill out everything everywhere.”
(Martin)

➡ Key questions

- I'm a student with disabilities and I will need support while studying at your university. How should I proceed? Who should be contacted to register?
- How do I document my special needs? Do I need to submit a medical certificate or should my university confirm that I am a student with special needs along with a list of services provided?
- Where do I find the rules and application forms for appropriate adjustments and support services?

➡ Steps recommended

- It is important to get familiar with the conditions of registration and the system of providing support services at the host university.
- Contact the disability coordinator and discuss the registration process, the timetable and the documents that need to be submitted.
- It is very important to describe your disability and to specify as precisely as possible your special needs so they can organize the required support.
- Be precise - it is not enough to write that you are partially-sighted or blind – you have to describe:
 - what adjustments you need during the study and exams
 - in what format would you like study material provided
 - what compensatory aids and assistive technologies you use
 - what is the level of your independence in orientation and mobility in different situations – rain, snow, day/night...
 - your need for mobility training – orientation training, route training
 - preference of sighted guide in some situations – when you have to travel to unknown places
- If you use a guide dog, it is necessary to find out whether the dog is allowed to enter the lecture rooms and to the student hostel.
- Contact the Erasmus+ coordinator at the host university and find out who will be your study counselor during your stay.

7. Reasonable adjustments and support services

BPS students use different services during their study. Some students are quite independent in many activities linked to their studies and time at university, others need different adjustments and support. Under the term "reasonable adjustments", we understand flexibility in methods of learning and study, forms of study results presentation and exams, as well as time flexibility in fulfilling the study duties and passing exams.

Universities are responsible for creating universally accessible learning conditions and providing measures to compensate for the impact of disability and barriers in an academic environment.

However, universities have considerable autonomy and even if they provide equal opportunities to students with disabilities the way they do so differs to a great extent. There are universities which do not offer support services or disability services, they only offer counselling and guidance. Many universities do not have support centres, they organize all support services outside or recommend a student to an external service provider.

➡ Key questions

- Do you have experience with supporting blind students?
- What support services does the host university provide for BPS students?
- Are these services also available to Erasmus+ students?
- In case the host university does not provide support services, can it recommend a local external provider?
- Under what conditions can a BPS student from abroad use support services? Are they free of charge or paid. Who will provide me with accurate price information?
- Can I have contact with some BPS students from your university?

➡ Steps recommended

- Before applying for a course, find out if the host university has the facilities or support services you need. Universities should publish equality objectives which set out their policies with regard to people with disabilities.
- Contact the disability coordinator at the host university or college to discuss how your needs may be met. It is important to obtain

detailed information on possible appropriate adjustments for study and for examinations.

- You have to be concrete when asking questions about accessibility and support provided for:
 - access to curricula
 - access to study materials
 - access to support services
 - access to assistive technologies
 - accommodation
 - travelling
- You must remember that special requirements concerning study tasks fulfilment and examination arrangements have to be accepted by your teachers.
- Ask the coordinator:
 - who is responsible for informing teachers about your special needs (ask for contact)?
 - who is responsible for arranging the agreed services (ask for contact)?

8. Access to study material

The experience of blind and partially-sighted students shows that one of the most serious problems in studying abroad was the provision of study materials in accessible forms. Universities were often not ready to host blind students and did not directly provide dedicated services, or failed to provide an external service provider.

Unclear rules and lack of experience with accessible study material provision complicate the preparation of BPS students for studying abroad and budgeting planned costs when applying for a special grant.

For this reason, one of the most important recommendations for BPS students who declare the need for accessible study literature is to define what for the particular student “accessible forms” means and to agree the conditions for such provision in advance.

➡ Key questions

- Is it possible to get lecture presentations in advance, to transform them in accessible formats?
- Does the university provide the transformation of study material in accessible forms?
- Are the conditions for the processing of study materials in an accessible form for an Erasmus+ student the same as for a domestic student?
- Is there a digital library at the university? Are online catalogues accessible?
- Are the teachers ready to provide BPS student with lecture materials in an accessible form?
- Is lecture recording allowed?
- Do the teachers provide accessible study material (e.g. available in the academic information system for registered students)?
- Does the academic library have accessible catalogs? Is there somebody in the library who will assist me in finding books?
- Are the library, study rooms, and classrooms equipped with assistive technologies for BPS students?
- Is the e-learning platform accessible?
- Do the academic IT system and university websites meet accessibility requirements for assistive technology users (screen reader)?

- Does your university provide a note-taking and photocopying of notes service?

➡ **Steps recommended**

- Talk with your coordinator about all possible sources of documentation students in your host university can use. Try to get familiar with the library website.
- Try to check the university website for possible information about subjects you plan to attend and look for all books or materials you might need during your studies. Some study materials could be arranged even beforehand, before you start, either buying them and scanning at home, or applying for transformation in home/host country. A suitable source of study materials in an accessible forms may be different portals offering various education magazines and articles for possible usage (e.g. the [Sage publisher website](#)).
- The importance of pre-checking all possibilities about accessible literature is needed as the process of transformation can take a long time. Delayed delivery of accessible study materials may seriously limit the successful fulfillment of study duties when studying abroad.
- Inform the disability coordinator at the host university about your need of accessible materials. It is not enough to write that you need “accessible” study material. You have to define precisely the “form of accessibility” in your individual case, e.g.: regular size print, enlarged print size (specify font and size, contrast, ...), electronic format (specify preferred file type) to be sent via email, on an USB device, Braille print, ...

9. Assistive technologies (AT)

For BPS people technology nowadays provides a huge variety of possibilities to obtain information which was previously unavailable. Computers smartphones or other devices offer people with sight problems access to plenty of useful information. To study abroad developing a skill in looking for information on the internet or specialized applications is crucial and can provide BPS students with a rich variety of knowledge about the environment for both studying and leisure time.

As in local universities, in a foreign education environment good computer skills are a must. Whether we speak about studying various materials from teachers, producing text materials, filling out questionnaires, using the university portal or academic information system and writing exams, advanced computer skills are a tremendous help. They are an important prerequisite for successful study and strengthening student independence.

The effectiveness of technologies depends on their proper composition, and availability, the technical skills of the user and the level of accessible information of the academic environment. Therefore, it is important to get acquainted with information accessibility, technical equipment and technical support availability at the university in advance.

➡ What to consider:

- Individual technical needs
- Own computer/technical skills
- Level of in/dependence in accessing e-information
- What technical equipment needed for studying?
- What technical equipment will he/she bring with?
- Is the student ready to use new technologies?

➡ Key questions

- Are assistive technologies provided within the host university?
- Which technologies does the university provide for BPS students - desktop computer, laptop, or tablet screenreader (which software do you prefer), voice synthesizer (which software do you prefer), magnifying software (which software do you prefer), magnification tools (which tool do you prefer), table CCTV , mobile CCTV, braille line/braille display, braille printer, tactile graphics printer, scanner,

OCR, scanner with voice output, Braille 'n Speak (languages available), voice to speech software/dictation software (language/ which software do you prefer), audio recording device, ...?

- Can students from abroad borrow or rent AT for personal use during the stay?
- Does the host university provide technical support?
- Does the host university provide training on the use of new AT?
- Are these services available to Erasmus+ students?

► **Steps recommended**

- Contact the Support Centre or disability coordinator at the host university and find out what technical equipment is available to BPS students.
- Get contact with a person providing technical assistance.

10. Accommodation – living and travelling

One of the preconditions for successful study abroad is to provide appropriate accommodation and support for orientation, travel, day-to-day activities and leisure activities. The extent of the necessary support depends on the level of BPS independence in different activities and the ability to solve unexpected situations.

In case of studying abroad, we generally have to deal with an unfamiliar environment, perhaps limited support services, or assistance we are not used to. Therefore, it is important to have information in advance and to assess whether the BPS student will be able to work in an unfamiliar environment with the support of the host university alone or will need "bring" their own solutions

➡ What to consider

- Not all universities provide housing for their students. In that case, student needs to look for alternative accommodation, usually in the private sector. Most universities have student's hostels, some have special rooms for Erasmus+ students. Some of the hostels are barrier-free. Student's hostels can be located near the school, but may be very remote with the need for complicated commuting. In that case, it is necessary to consider whether you accept the offered accommodation, or request a more suitable alternative,
- As regards accommodation, it is necessary to know the possibilities of securing the needs for everyday life (kitchen, laundry, dining rooms, shops nearby, medical service, gym, etc.)
- What is your level of daily living skills, do you need help for preparing food, doing the laundry, shopping, banking, cleaning the room, ...
- Obtaining a sufficient amount of information will help identify the risks of going abroad and plan preventive measures in advance.

➡ Key questions

- Does the host university provide a housing service?
- Is there a kitchen, laundry, study rooms, dining rooms, shops, gym nearby ...
- How far is the hostel from the university?
- What kind of public transport can be used to reach the student hostel?

- Do BPS students have to pay the same rate for public transportation as other students? What is the rate for sighted guides?
- First day in the host city - how can I find my hostel? Will somebody wait for me and help me with accommodation administration?
- Will there somebody available who will help me on the day of arrival to get to the hostel, and during the first days will I be able to function in a new environment (orientation in local transport, school buildings, student hostel, find the dining room, library, departments ...)
- Are there options of regular meals in the student's hostel and at university?
- Is there anyone who can help me in the dining room when choosing and supplying meals?
- Is a guide dog accepted in the student's hostel?
- Are there veterinary services for a guide dog?
- Is medical care provided in the student's hostel? Do they speak English?
- Are there opportunities for BPS students to participate in sports at university/outside university
- Are there student clubs and networks?
- Links to websites providing information on local sport, leisure and cultural facilities for BPS people in the Institution's town, city or region?

Steps recommended

- Contact the disability coordinator and ask for assistance during the first days at the host university.
- Ask for contact details for a welcome assistant, if available.
- Ensure contact information for the accommodation service
- In case the university does not provide accommodation, ask for help in securing suitable alternative accommodation.
- In the case of a personal assistant, ask whether the university provides accommodation for a personal assistant of the BPS Erasmus student and under what conditions.

11. Human support

An important role in the process of preparation is to assess your own readiness to manage studying abroad without intensive assistance from another person. If a BPS student is taught to act independently at home, has a high level of independence, can manage different situations, find solutions, or organize the help of another person, it is assumed that they will be able to function abroad as well.

Many universities provide advisory and counselling service, but they does not always provide support services such as personal assistance. Sometimes the offer of assistance is only linked to educational activities (pedagogical assistance, academic assistance), not to providing the student with everyday needs.

If you require assistance with day to day living, the host university may not have a duty to pay for these costs and you may therefore need to have funding for this. However, your university can give advice on local service providers and assist in facilitating communication between you and the service provider.

An alternative solution may be to bring your own assistant or support from home, whether for the whole stay or for the first days/weeks of stay. Such help could be - in the best case - a fellow student who also participates in the Erasmus+ exchange program and is ready to provide the BPS student with an agreed range of assistance. The fellow student should be well-prepared for assistance in advance. He/she should be prepared to explain new routes in a new environment, provide a guide-service, share free time and transform study materials into accessible forms.

However, the host university is generally ready to provide help and assistance for a short time (days after arrival) or for specific activities (leisure events for Erasmus students organized by the university or youth organizations). It is important to use such assistance, it is an opportunity to establish contact with peers, follow students, Erasmus+ ambassadors.

➡ Key questions

- Does the host university provide personal assistance? If yes, under what conditions?
- Is it the personal assistant's responsibility to help me with daily living activities? If not, how can I find a somebody to explain how to use the kitchen and washing machine, etc.

- Will there be somebody available who will help me on the day of arrival to get to the hostel, and during the first days will I be able to function in a new environment (orientation in local transport, school buildings, student hostel, dining room, library, departments ...)
- Is a peer support program available at the host university?
- Is there a possibility to use the buddy system managed by the Erasmus student network? What activities can I do with my buddy?
- Are people assisting BPS familiar with the specifics of visual impairment?
- Is there a trained person available who teaches me basic skills connected with my stay (how to use the kitchen and the laundry, where to shop?)
- Is there a trained person available who teach me new routes in new environment?

➡ **Steps recommended**

- Get information about the human support possibilities at the host university and which activities are supported within this offer.
- Get information about the forms of academic assistance for BPS students provided by the host university. Consider whether you will use such assistance during your stay. Find out if such assistance is available for Erasmus students and how to apply for it.
- Find out if the Erasmus Student Network operates in the host university and what activities it organizes? Get to know their website. Take every offer to participate in non-teaching actions (usually organized by ESN). It is an opportunity to gain new experience, contacts, friends, get acquainted with new places, cultures.

12. Finances

Within the Erasmus+ program, additional funding is available for participants with disabilities via the Erasmus+ special needs support. Erasmus+ special grants may be higher than the regular study grants to offset the specific difficulties faced by the student (such as adapted accommodation, travel assistance, medical attendance, supportive equipment, adaption of learning material, an accompanying person for students with disabilities, etc.).

Incoming students with disabilities have to pay for special services.

➡ Intro / importance

All Erasmus+ students will receive a standard scholarship grant for their stay. The amount of the grant differs from country to country. BPS students can apply for a special grant in addition to a standard scholarship grant. This additional support grant is provided on the basis of a written application and is a contribution based on real costs.

National Agencies for Erasmus+ program each year issue calls for applications for a special grant (March-April). The application can be submitted only by a student who has been approved for Erasmus+ mobility at his/her university.

When requesting a special grant, it is necessary to document a student's disability or special needs and to attach an estimated budget for increased costs, and specify the amount of the financial contribution that the student requests.

If special adjustments and support services are required during a stay abroad, the BPS student must also attach a confirmation from the university that there are aware of his/her disability and special needs and are ready to provide support (letter of acceptance).

When preparing an estimated budget for increased costs, it is very important to know the conditions for use of support services at the host university, to obtain information on what services the university provides free of charge and which must be paid for. In this case, it is necessary to know the price of services.

➡ Key questions

- What kind of support services does the host university offer for BPS students from abroad? Are these services free of charge? If not, where can I receive information about prices?
- What items can be covered by a special grant for a BPS student?
- In the case of deficiency, can be money used also for other residence-related matters that have been approved for a specific grant?
- Do I get the money in advance? Or when exactly?
- Can I use the money to buy food for a guide dog?
- What about insurance? Is it possible to use the money for increased insurance for my stay abroad?

➡ Steps recommended

- Please carefully plan your budget – ask for more money because unexpected situations can occur. Money not spent must be returned.
- Try to collect information about services financed in a very advanced timeframe (2 – 3 months before the deadline of your application for the special grant). What to include:
- Travel conditions for people with disabilities and their guide
 - various student discounts
 - medical service
 - insurance
 - support service prices
 - special accommodation ...
- Make a financial plan, include extra and unexpected costs (e.g. your computer is broken).
- Fill in the form for the application for the extra grant in time (only once accepted as a Erasmus+ student).
- Keep all your documents/bills, organize them systematically so that you know which item belongs to which service. Also keep a digitalized copy.
- After coming back prepare the financial report and attach all original and digitalized bills to it. Prepare the financial report in an excel file and number each bill. Send it in time to the international relation office at your university. If necessary, the Erasmus+ disability coordinator can help you with the report.

- As annexes to the financial report must be attached original documents and their copies such as:
 - travel tickets, boarding passes
 - shop receipts, dining room receipts
 - invoices for services provided
 - personal assistance contracts...

An example of excellent conditions for both domestic and Erasmus+ students, which were particularly friendly to BPS students:

“The host university was forthcoming by charging lower library fees, providing inexpensive cards for city transportation and bicycle rentals, and offering a system for subsidizing meals. The students received free SIM cards for mobile phones which could also be used to get significant student discounts at restaurants. The university used mostly electronic materials and printed text was rare.” (Rastislav)

13. Checklist

The checklist below will help ensure you make the right choice about studying abroad. We recommend that you contact the organization of/for the blind in your own country as well as similar organizations in the host country.

What to do

- choose a subject area and course to study
- choose a university that offers the course
- contact the Erasmus+/ disability coordinator and discuss conditions and individual needs
- discuss with the disability coordinator the support that may be available
- apply for and be accepted on course chosen
- make arrangements to fund the study and stay abroad and have evidence of this funding
- check that you meet the requirements of the immigration rules in order to enter and live in the host country to complete your studies
- improve your language skills
- info about traveling and health insurance
- create a Euro bank account
- be aware of technical equipment at the host university – is training needed?

Outside the university

- Try to look for information about possibilities of assistance for BPS well in advance.
- Try to check out main chain stores in the host country and verify, if there is a possibility of grocery or shopping deliveries to your accommodation. Also find information about possible assistance in particular chain stores.
- Get familiar with currency of your host country. Check the internet for possible descriptions of coins and notes, exchange money in a bank long beforehand and become familiar with notes and coins.
- Get familiar with transport to and from university, to your accommodation. Ask your coordinator about help in this matter, in order not to feel lost during the first days at your host university.
- Healthcare and medication – if your vision needs specific medication, make sure you take the appropriate amount with you.

Also check transport conditions of your airline company for medicines. Alternatively, check the possibility of buying your medicine in the host country. If there are also some risks concerning your vision, make sure if there is a doctor close to your accommodation in host country and if procedures can be paid by your health insurance company.

14. Helpful contacts

It is very important to obtain first-hand information and to verify and supplement it from a number of sources. We recommend getting and registering contacts for important institutions, workplaces, persons.

Contact at the home university

- Guarantor of the study program
- Erasmus+ contact person at department when you are studying
- Erasmus+ coordinator
- Disability coordinator
- Disability Support Centre
- Former Erasmus+ students including BPS students

Contact at the host university

- Erasmus+ coordinator
- Disability coordinator
- Disability Support Centre
- Former Erasmus+ students including BPS
- Guarantor of the study program
- Health care – at University/ outside the University
- Erasmus Student Network/ ESN
- Student's organization that provides a buddy program

Contacts outside the host university

Many organizations and institutions outside the university offer help and services for BPS people and should be able to answer questions specifically relating to their area of work.

- Organizations of/for people with disabilities
- Organizations of/for BPS people
- Organizations providing support services for the BPS outside of university
- Agencies for social services provision (personal assistance)
- Voluntary Agencies
- IT/AT technical service
- Digitalization centres

- Libraries for the blind

➡ **Key questions**

- Does the university staff speak a language you speak?
- Do they offer services free of charge?
- Do they provide services to Erasmus+ students or only to citizens of their own country?
- What are the prices of services provided?

15. Information sources

MappEd project

Erasmus+ and how to support students with disabilities. Guidelines on collaboration and good practice for International Relation Offices and Disability Services in Higher Education Institutions

https://mapped.eu/sites/default/files/best-practices/MappED_Cooperation_Guidelines.pdf

Erasmus+ - Support for students and staff with physical, mental or health-related conditions (more detailed information)

https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/opportunities/individuals/physical-mental-conditions_en

Erasmus+ factsheet:

https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/sites/erasmusplus2/files/erasmus_plus_general_factsheet.pdf

Living costs (e.g. accommodation, food and drink, transport etc.) vary across Europe. You can find detailed information about each country's living costs on the European Commission website:

<https://ec.europa.eu/eures/main.jsp?acro=lw&lang=en&catId=490&parentId=0>

Visas for study in Europe?

Most countries allow students on a visa to work part-time, but some countries place restrictions on the amount of hours visa-holders can work. Check the immigration website for each country to find out more

<http://ec.europa.eu/education/study-in-europe/country-profiles>

ExchangeAgibility project

<http://exchangeability.eu/>

The ExchangeAbility project helps students with disabilities remove obstacles to participation in exchange and promote the opportunities available. ExchangeAbility works with ESN sections, HEIs and organizations that are experts in the field to create the best conditions possible for disabled students during their stay abroad.

National Agencies for Erasmus+ programme

http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/contact/national-agencies_en

Mobility International USA (MIUSA)

<http://www.miusa.org/access>

An organisation which, along with all the other activities, empowers people with disabilities to take advantage of the same international exchange opportunities as everyone else. They can provide you with useful information throughout the webpage or via contacting them.

Individual technical skills development

- Basic training material for NVDA screen reading software :
<https://www.nvaccess.org/product/basic-training-for-nvda-ebook/>
- Learn to use JAWS screen reading software and MAGic screen magnification software:
http://www.freedomscientific.com/Training/Surfs-Up/Surfs_Up_Start_Here.htm
- Using PowerPoint with JAWS or NVDA:
<http://svrc.vic.edu.au/downloads/tutorials/Windows/powerpoint-with%20jaws-or-nvda.pdf>
- Powerpoint Shortcuts, exercise and notes for Jaws Screen Reader:
<http://www.geocities.ws/jawsnotes/powerpoint.htm>



This publication was co-funded by the “Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme” Programme of the European Union.