



IMPROVING SKILLS IN WORKING WITH DISADVANTAGED ADULTS THROUGH ERASMUS+ MOBILITIES

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The course I attended through the Erasmus+ program is titled *Facing Diversity: Inclusive Education Strategies for Students with Fewer Opportunities*. It lasted for five days and took place in Helsinki, Finland. Participants included 13 individuals from Romania and Greece. The sending organization was *Liceul Tehnologic Nr. 1 Mărcăineni*, and the course provider was *New Horizons Malta*. The training period was from November 28, 2023, to December 2, 2023.

The course concluded with the recognition of learning outcomes and the receipt of certification documents: *Europass Mobility Learning Agreement* and a participation diploma.

The main objectives of the course were:

- Developing specific skills related to social inclusion.
- Learning new activities and non-formal education techniques for better integration of all individuals into a group.
- Exchanging best practices and experiences regarding different aspects and perceptions of marginalization and inclusion.
- Developing teamwork skills in multicultural groups.
- Practicing and improving English language skills.

The training activities consisted of theoretical presentations, video recordings, case studies, as well as practical exercises, interactive methods, and non-formal approaches. These were all applicable to groups of learners from disadvantaged backgrounds to facilitate the learning process. The trainer provided continuous feedback.

During the mobility, I maintained contact with the trainer, and later with the course participants, as we stayed in the same location, which increased group cohesion and the transfer of experiences and best practices.

Besides achieving the course objectives, this mobility helped me improve my knowledge of Finland's culture, history, and people, while promoting European cooperation in education.

The course took place at the *Oodi - Helsinki Central Library*, a new library concept developed in Finland. Oodi is used by both kindergarten children and adults, each engaging in age-appropriate activities, from sewing to music and robotics. Therefore, the work environment was



highly interesting, especially since I spent my breaks in the open space on the third floor, a small paradise for readers.

During the training sessions, we were invited to *EAEA Communications Unit KVS – The Finnish Lifelong Learning Foundation*, supported by the Finnish Ministry of Education. EAEA is a member of two working groups of the European Commission focusing on lifelong learning policy: the *Working Group on Adult Learning – Opening Opportunities for All* and the *Working Group on Equality and Values in Education and Training*.

In addition to the training activities, I also participated in cultural activities such as visits to the *Lutheran Cathedral* in Senate Square, *Temppeliaukio Church*, the Finnish Orthodox Church *Uspensky*, and the *Presidential Palace* in Market Square, near the port. In the port, there are stalls offering traditional Finnish dishes such as salmon soup, anchovies with potatoes and vegetables, as well as souvenir stalls.

Throughout the course, I learned about organizations that work with disadvantaged learners and how to understand and adapt to the realities faced by these individuals. Additionally, during the training, I participated in various active learning exercises and educational techniques to motivate students, including those with fewer opportunities, such as Roma students in the school where I work. Increasing motivation and engagement is crucial for creating a positive and inclusive learning atmosphere that supports students, particularly those enrolled in the *Second Chance* program.

By participating in the course *Facing Diversity: Inclusive Education Strategies for Students with Fewer Opportunities*, I developed personal and social skills to promote inclusive education and experienced exercises on how to promote positive values towards a more inclusive society. I actively participated in exercises aimed at building group cohesion and trust, and in non-formal methods for creating an engaging learning environment. I was also encouraged to reflect on ways to adapt my teaching when working with students.

Regarding stereotypes and prejudices in the classroom, communication styles, and the basics of inclusive education, I found an exercise based on non-verbal communication particularly interesting. In this exercise, participants were given stickers in the shape of apples of different colors, placed on their foreheads without knowing their color. We were not allowed to communicate verbally and had to group ourselves based on color, using only gestures, which often led to exclusion from certain groups. At the end of the exercise, the trainer asked us to share our feelings, including those of rejection when positioning ourselves near a group with a different color, or joy when we successfully joined a group. This exercise is very useful for the *Second Chance* students I work with, considering the social differences between them, to increase group cohesion and their confidence in the educational environment.



Another method I can mention is the *forum theater*, a technique I had heard of before attending this mobility, but which now seems easier to apply, likely due to the relevant explanations provided by the trainer. I also actively participated in applying the *Tree of Ideas* method.

A new model I learned during this course refers to the *ARCS* model, which stimulates student motivation by capturing attention, emphasizing content relevance, building confidence through meeting expectations, and finally motivating the student by satisfying their sense of achievement.

Moreover, through this mobility, I gained confidence in myself and my ability to communicate in English, and I developed cultural, social, and even digital skills through the cultural activities I participated in.

