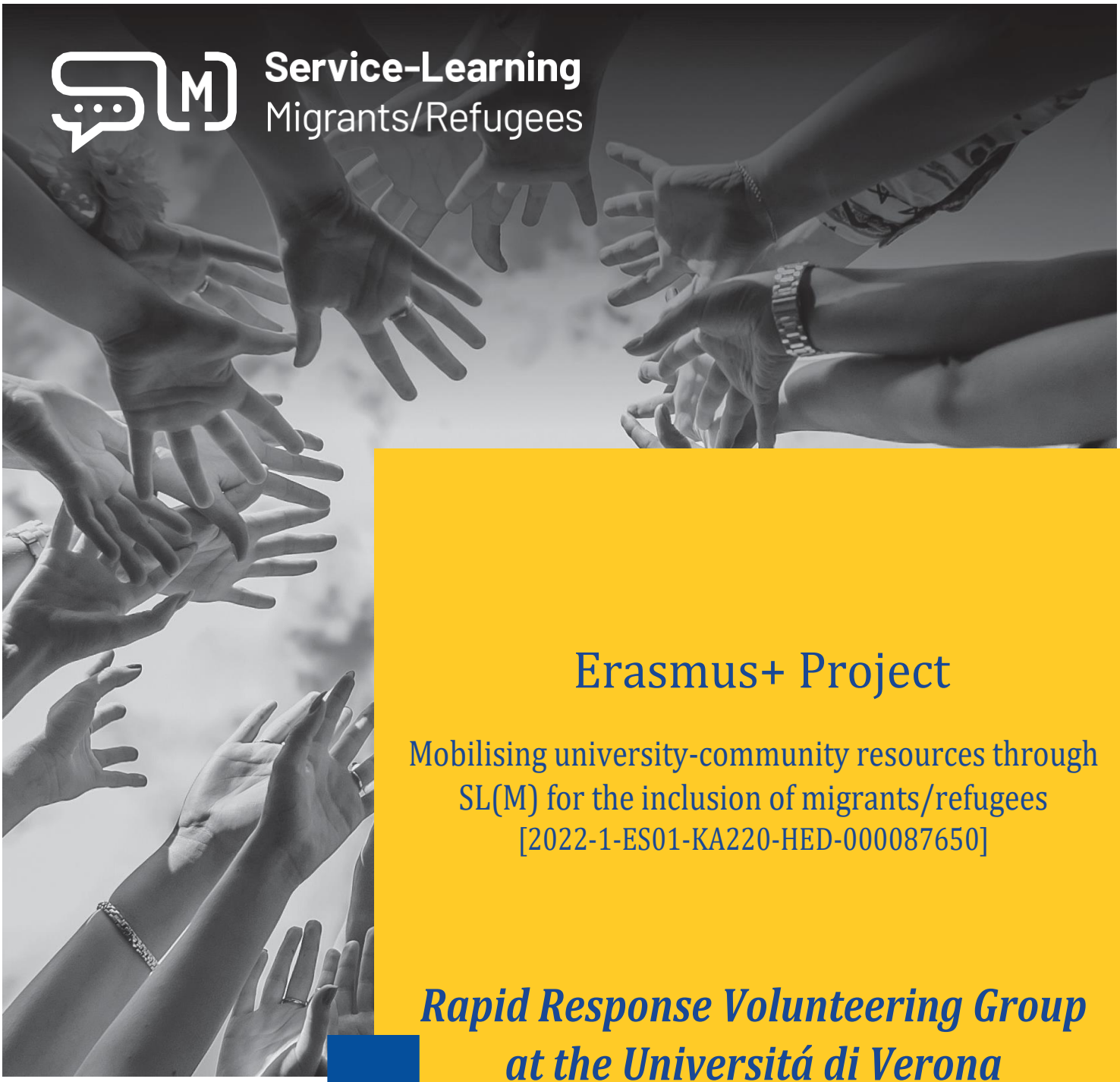

Service-Learning
Migrants/Refugees

Erasmus+ Project

Mobilising university-community resources through SL(M) for the inclusion of migrants/refugees
[2022-1-ES01-KA220-HED-000087650]

Rapid Response Volunteering Group at the Universitá di Verona

Co-funded by the European Union

USC Universidade de Santiago de Compostela

Ollscoil na Gaillimhe University of Galway

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The University of Verona's Rapid Response Volunteer Group

6.1. Introduction and mandate

The University of Verona (UniVr), as a committed signatory of the Manifesto for an Inclusive University (MUI), has established a multi-faceted initiative to facilitate access to higher education for individuals holding international protection, complementary protection, and asylum seekers. This commitment is structurally embodied in the MUI committee, which operates as a highly effective, non-rhetorical Rapid Response Volunteer Group.

This Group is a permanent, cross-functional body composed of dedicated **academic and student personnel** who voluntarily organise to work collaboratively on the integration of migrants. Its primary role is to serve as a critical mechanism for operationalising UniVr's commitment to social cohesion and the fundamental right to education.

In alignment with the global recognition that only 7% of refugees have access to higher education (UNHCR, 2024), the Group develops and executes concrete actions that ddress the profound administrative, bureaucratic, and social challenges faced by beneficiaries.

The overarching mission is to support these students throughout their academic journey— from initial access and enrolment to active participation in university life and full integration into the local community.

6.2. Operational framework: the seven strategic objectives

The Rapid Response Volunteer Group's action plan is structured around a comprehensive set of seven objectives designed to create a cohesive support pathway for the students.

These objectives define the specific areas of intervention and collaboration:

Objective 1: internal coordination and streamlining

The Group prioritises seamless **internal coordination** across various university departments (administrative, academic, and student services). The aim is to overcome organisational fragmentation, standardise procedures, and establish efficient communication channels to simplify and expedite the complex process of student access and continuation of studies for individuals under the MUI categories.

Objective 2: data collection and service planning

A core strategic function involves the **systematic collection and analysis of data** pertaining to the beneficiaries. This is critical for moving beyond anecdotal feedback and establishing a solid, quantitative foundation for evidence-based planning. The long-term goal is to better understand the needs of the target population and plan targeted services, ensuring that the Group's efforts are consistently impactful and resources are optimally allocated.

Objective 3: Evaluation of Qualifications

The Group manages the specialised process of **evaluating the educational qualifications** of protection holders, which often lack standard documentation. This evaluation is essential for legally and academically recognising foreign qualifications, streamlining the matriculation process, and enabling students to make informed and conscious academic choices without undue bureaucratic delays.

Objective 4: right to study and fee exemptions

A fundamental aspect of the Group's mission is to guarantee the right to study through tangible economic support. This includes managing **fee exemption procedures** and collaborating with regional and national bodies responsible for the right to study (e.g., ESU) to ensure beneficiaries can access all relevant financial aids and scholarships, thereby removing economic barriers to higher education.

Objective 5: strengthening orientation and support services

The Group develops and enhances **specialised orientation services** to accompany beneficiaries. This support is multi-layered, ranging from initial guidance towards conscious academic choices to practical support in navigating complex administrative procedures. The aim is to ensure students are fully informed and supported at every critical juncture of their application and enrolment.

Objective 6: internal training and capacity building

To ensure the University's personnel are equipped to handle the unique needs of MUI students, the Group develops and promotes **specific training programs** within the University. This objective addresses the need for a sustained "cooperation culture" and flexibility across administrative and academic staff, ensuring that internal procedures can adapt to the specific requirements of the project while maintaining institutional rigor.

Objective 7: academic and local integration support

This objective focuses on fostering the **social inclusion** of beneficiaries. It involves developing tailored support measures, most notably the implementation of a structured **peer-to-peer tutoring program**. This program, staffed by student volunteers, is vital for academic support and integration into the local academic and social community, providing crucial mentorship and cultural exchange opportunities.

6.3. Personnel involved

The effectiveness of the Rapid Response Volunteer Group is driven by the involvement of personnel across the University:

- **Academic staff:** provides institutional guidance, strategic direction, and ensures the alignment of the Group's actions with University governance.
- **Student staff (Volunteers/Tutors):** forms the core of the rapid response capability. These individuals, often through the peer-to-peer model, provide direct, responsive support to beneficiaries, facilitating both academic and social integration.
- **Key contacts:** figures such as the MUI contact person (e.g., Isolde Quadranti) ensure the sustained link between the local University action and the national/international networks.

6.4. Impact, expansion, and data overview

The MUI project, through its operation as a Rapid Response Volunteer Group, has been characterised by a consistent **expansion** since its pilot phase, supporting a growing number of students across multiple editions. Qualitative feedback is overwhelmingly positive, with reports noting "excellent feed-back received by the involved students and tutors." This confirms the profound impact of the accompanying path on the students' personal and professional growth.

6.5. Data on migrants assisted

While the Group's action plan (Objective 2) explicitly identifies "Data Collection" as a priority for service planning, **specific aggregate statistics detailing the total number of migrants assisted across all editions, along with a complete statistical breakdown of**

their nationalities, are not consolidated in the available operational documents. The University's focus has been on establishing the foundational operational framework and ensuring individualized accompaniment. The continuous work on Objective 2 is intended to provide the necessary quantitative data in the future to further refine the Group's responsiveness and scope.

The experience of the Rapid Response Volunteer Group demonstrates that the University of Verona is actively fulfilling its "fourth mission" by promoting social cohesion and building more inclusive societies through practical, coordinated, and non-redundant educational interventions.

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