EQUNI Consortium Good Practices Guide

Work Package 4 - Activity 4.2

EQUNI project

EQUNI Consortium Good Practices Guide

Work Package 4 – Activity 4.2 EQUNI project

Authors:

SumFuo, France:

N. Schaeffer

Contributors:

Lodz University of Technology, Poland:

M. Jarczyńska, J. Kopańska, D. Piotrowska

University of Algarve, Portugal:

A. Gomes, J. Vieira dos Santos, L. S. Vieira

University of Groningen, the Netherlands:

J. Riezebos, M.J.M. Schoevers, F. Wolthuis

Team Coaching, Poland:

K. Buss-Nykiel, R. Nykiel

Toulouse, December 2025

Project:

Title: Implementation of effective practices for the development of students' emotional intelligence with particular emphasis on anti-discrimination activities at European universities

Acronym: EQUNI

No: 2022-1-PL01-KA220-HED-00089417

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

Higher education institutions play a central role in promoting inclusive, equitable, and supportive academic environments. In addition to their educational and research missions, universities are increasingly expected to respond to social challenges such as discrimination, inequality, and the growing need for emotional awareness and wellbeing within academic communities. In this context, emotional intelligence (EQ) and inclusive practices have become strategic priorities for higher education institutions across Europe and beyond.

Emotional intelligence supports individuals in recognising, understanding, and managing their own emotions, as well as those of others. In academic settings, these competencies are closely linked to effective communication, intercultural dialogue, conflict prevention, and the ability to address discrimination and exclusion. Strengthening emotional intelligence among students, academic staff, and administrative personnel contributes to safer learning environments, improved collaboration across roles and generations, and more resilient institutional cultures. For these reasons, integrating EQ and inclusion into institutional strategies, staff development, and teaching practices is increasingly recognised as essential for the long-term sustainability and social responsibility of universities.

This guide has been developed within Activity 4.2 of the EQUNI project and is based on the consortium's direct experience in designing, implementing, and evaluating initiatives related to emotional intelligence and anti-discrimination in higher education. Its objective is to support universities in the practical implementation of good practices by providing concrete, tested examples that can be adapted to different institutional contexts. Rather than offering theoretical recommendations, the guide focuses on approaches that were piloted through trainings, summer schools, seminars, innovative learning tools, and micro-credential pathways, and that were refined through systematic evaluation and participant feedback.

The guide presents a thematic collection of good practices addressing, among others, experiential training in emotional intelligence, inclusive and anti-discriminatory pedagogical approaches, stress management and intercultural communication, the use of innovative tools such as educational games, and the recognition of transversal competences through micro-credentials. For each theme, the guide highlights key success factors, challenges encountered during implementation, and lessons learned that may support future initiatives in higher education institutions.

This document is intended for a broad target audience, including university leadership and decision-makers, academic staff, administrative and support personnel, trainers, and professionals responsible for staff development, student support, and equality, diversity, and inclusion policies. While institutional contexts may differ, the practices presented in this guide aim to support universities in developing coherent, evidence-based strategies that embed emotional intelligence and inclusion as integral components of academic life.

By sharing the consortium's experiences and lessons learned, this guide seeks to encourage reflection, adaptation, and further innovation, contributing to more inclusive, emotionally aware, and socially responsible higher education institutions.

2. The EQUNI Project: Context and Goals

Higher education institutions operate today in an increasingly complex social, cultural, and emotional environment. Universities are expected not only to provide high-quality education and research, but also to ensure equitable access, foster inclusion, and support the well-being of diverse academic communities. In this context, issues related to discrimination, emotional distress, declining academic engagement, and weakened social cohesion have become more visible across European campuses.

The project is strongly aligned with EU priorities calling on higher education institutions to foster transversal and socio-emotional skills, support mental well-being, and actively address discrimination. These priorities are articulated in the European Skills Agenda, the European Education Area framework, EU equality legislation, and the EU Anti-Racism Strategy, which collectively emphasise the responsibility of HEIs to create inclusive, supportive and skills-oriented academic environments

The EQUNI project was developed in response to these challenges, with the aim of strengthening emotional intelligence as a key competence for promoting inclusion, preventing discrimination, and enhancing psychological safety in higher education. A comprehensive needs analysis conducted collaboratively by all project partners highlighted a growing crisis in students' emotional well-being, as well as a lack of practical tools and structured approaches to address emotional and relational challenges within academic environments.

EQUNI adopts a holistic perspective that links emotional intelligence to broader institutional issues such as discrimination, stress management, interpersonal communication, and academic performance. Rather than addressing emotional intelligence as an isolated skill, the project positions it as a strategic lever for fostering respectful interactions, increasing awareness of biases, and supporting inclusive academic cultures. By equipping students and staff with tools to recognise, understand, and regulate emotions, particularly those that may lead to exclusionary or discriminatory behaviours, the project reinforces existing anti-discrimination policies with concrete, practice-oriented interventions.

The project targets the entire academic ecosystem, including students, academic staff, trainers, mentors, psychologists, advisers, and university leaders responsible for equality and inclusion policies. Through a series of experiential trainings, interactive workshops, and international summer schools, EQUNI promotes dialogue, reflection, and shared learning across roles, generations, and cultural backgrounds. This inclusive approach reflects the project's conviction that sustainable change requires the active involvement of all members of the academic community.

The general objective of the EQUNI project is to improve students' emotional intelligence as a means to tackle discrimination and ensure equal opportunities within European universities. This objective is pursued through three interrelated priorities. First, the project aims to develop emotional intelligence competencies across the academic community to prevent conflicts and exclusion before they escalate. Second, it seeks to establish a system for recognising emotional intelligence and anti-discrimination competencies through the use of micro-credentials, thereby enhancing the visibility and value of transversal skills. Third, EQUNI aims to prevent discrimination by fostering cooperation and exchange of practices among universities, drawing on the diverse experiences and perspectives of the project partners.

The international and multidisciplinary consortium represents a key strength of the project. By bringing together universities from different European countries, EQUNI benefits from a wide range of institutional contexts, cultural perspectives, and areas of expertise. This diversity enables the consortium to approach shared challenges from multiple angles and to co-create solutions that are adaptable and transferable across higher education systems.

To support its objectives, the EQUNI project has developed a set of innovative and practical outputs, including the EQUNI Game, a complementary mobile application, and this guide for universities. Together, these outputs provide higher education institutions with concrete resources to integrate emotional intelligence and anti-discrimination practices into teaching, training, and organisational development.

Overall, the EQUNI project positions emotional intelligence as a foundational competence for inclusive and equitable higher education. By linking individual development with institutional practices, and by combining innovation with evidence-based evaluation, the project contributes to the creation of academic environments in which diversity is valued, discrimination is actively addressed, and all members of the university community can thrive.

3. Foundational Educational Principles

The educational framework of the EQUNI project is grounded in a set of foundational principles that guide the design, implementation, and evaluation of all project activities. These principles reflect a holistic understanding of learning in higher education, where academic excellence is closely linked to emotional awareness, inclusion, and institutional responsibility.

Emotional intelligence is understood within the project as a transformative skill that supports both individual development and institutional change. In higher education contexts, emotional intelligence enables students and staff to recognise and manage emotions, engage in constructive communication, and respond effectively to complex interpersonal situations. Strengthening emotional intelligence contributes to improved collaboration, enhanced leadership capacities, and the creation of emotionally safe learning and working environments. As such, emotional intelligence is not treated as an isolated competence, but as a core transversal skill that underpins teaching, learning, and professional practice in universities.

Inclusion, diversity, and anti-discrimination are addressed as cross-cutting institutional goals that require systematic and sustained attention. The project adopts an inclusive perspective that recognises the diversity of experiences, identities, and roles within academic communities, including students, academic staff, and administrative personnel. Anti-discrimination is approached not only as a matter of policy compliance, but as an ongoing educational process that involves awareness-raising, critical reflection, and the development of inclusive practices. By integrating these principles across all activities, the project supports universities in fostering equitable environments where all members of the academic community can participate fully and with dignity.

The project approach is based on co-creation, pilot testing, and continuous evaluation. Activities were developed collaboratively by project partners, drawing on diverse institutional contexts and professional expertise. Innovative approaches and tools were piloted in real higher education settings and subsequently refined based on systematic feedback from participants and trainers. Continuous evaluation, through surveys, interviews, and feedback analysis, ensured that the project remained responsive to participants' needs and allowed for ongoing improvement. This iterative and participatory approach supports the development of practices that are both context-sensitive and transferable, providing a robust foundation for sustainable implementation in higher education institutions.

4. Research Methodology

The present guide is based on a practice-oriented research methodology designed to document, analyse, and synthesise the EQUNI consortium's experiences in implementing emotional intelligence and anti-discrimination initiatives in higher education. The methodological approach combines qualitative and quantitative data sources to ensure that the good practices presented are evidence-based, context-sensitive, and transferable to diverse institutional settings.

Data collection relied on three complementary sources: surveys, semi-structured interviews, and the analysis of feedback questionnaires. Together, these sources allowed for a comprehensive understanding of both the outcomes of the project activities and the processes through which they were achieved.

Quantitative data were primarily gathered through structured surveys administered to participants following key project activities, including summer schools, training seminars, leadership academies, and workshops. These surveys assessed predefined indicators such as the development of emotional intelligence, awareness of discrimination and inclusion issues, relevance of the content, quality of pedagogical methods, organisational aspects, and perceived usefulness for academic or professional practice. The use of standardised rating scales enabled comparison across activities and partner institutions.

Qualitative insights were collected through semi-structured interviews with selected project partners, trainers, and facilitators. These interviews provided deeper reflections on the pedagogical value of the activities, the role of emotional intelligence in addressing discrimination, and the institutional impact of the project. Interviews also helped identify challenges, contextual factors, and lessons learned that could not be captured through quantitative measures alone.

In addition, systematic analysis of feedback questionnaires, particularly open-ended responses completed by participants, was undertaken. This qualitative analysis focused on identifying recurring themes related to emotional awareness, inclusivity, the creation of safe learning environments, the effectiveness of tools such as the EQUNI game, and the overall learning experience. The feedback was thematically analysed to complement and contextualise the survey results.

The triangulation of data from surveys, interviews, and feedback questionnaires strengthened the validity of the findings and allowed for a nuanced interpretation of the results. This mixed-methods approach supported continuous improvement throughout the project lifecycle and informed the identification of good practices that are both effective and adaptable to different higher education contexts.

5. Thematic Good Practices Identified by the Consortium

This chapter presents a thematic collection of good practices identified and developed by the EQUNI consortium during the implementation of the project. The practices described in this section are grounded in concrete experiences gained through pilot activities carried out across partner institutions, including trainings, summer schools, workshops, and dissemination events. All practices have been tested in real higher education settings and informed by systematic evaluation and participant feedback.

The good practices are organised into thematic areas that reflect the key dimensions of emotional intelligence and anti-discrimination work in higher education. These themes address both individual and institutional levels, encompassing pedagogical approaches, organisational practices, innovative learning tools, and mechanisms for recognising transversal competences. This structure is intended to support universities in identifying practices that align with their strategic priorities and institutional contexts.

Each thematic subsection highlights practical examples that demonstrated positive impact, as well as the conditions that supported their effectiveness. In addition to showcasing successful approaches, the chapter also reflects on challenges encountered during implementation and lessons learned through continuous evaluation. This balanced perspective aims to provide universities with realistic insights into how similar initiatives can be adapted, scaled, or further developed.

By documenting these good practices, the EQUNI consortium seeks to offer a practical reference framework for higher education institutions interested in strengthening emotional intelligence, promoting inclusion, and preventing discrimination. While institutional contexts may vary, the practices presented in this chapter are designed to be transferable and adaptable, supporting universities in fostering inclusive, emotionally aware, and supportive academic environments.

5.1 Experiential Training in Emotional Intelligence

Experiential training activities constituted a core component of the EQUNI project, with summer schools, pilot trainings, and workshops designed to develop emotional awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and inclusive communication skills among students, academic staff, and administrative personnel. These activities combined interactive pedagogical methods, role-playing exercises, guided reflections, and collaborative learning tasks to ensure deep engagement and practical skill acquisition.

Across all training formats, participants reported a significant increase in emotional awareness and emotional intelligence competencies. More than 90% of participants indicated that their emotional awareness and emotional intelligence had improved, and that they better understood the role of emotional intelligence in preventing discrimination and fostering inclusive academic environments. Participants also reported enhanced interpersonal communication skills, greater awareness of microaggressions, and improved capacity to reflect on their own emotional responses in professional and academic interactions.

Beyond participant outcomes, project partners highlighted a strong transformative impact on facilitators, trainers, and institutional staff involved in the project. Several interviewees noted that the project led to new communication habits, increased sensitivity to emotional dynamics, and a deeper understanding of how emotions shape reactions, decision-making, and organisational practices. The trainings also contributed to improved internal communication within universities and reinforced the perception of universities as socially responsible and emotionally supportive institutions, particularly within science-oriented academic contexts.

A key lesson learned concerns the diversity of participants' prior knowledge and competencies in emotional intelligence and inclusion. Feedback indicated discrepancies between initial survey results and the topics participants were most interested in discussing, with some groups already familiar with gender or diversity issues while others required foundational input. As a result, differentiated learning activities and peer facilitation roles for advanced learners were identified as effective strategies to maintain engagement and ensure meaningful learning outcomes for heterogeneous groups.

The project also explored the development of a digital application to complement experiential training activities. Feedback suggests that while digital tools can support reflection, documentation of learning outcomes, and micro-credential pathways, their added value depends on clear pedagogical integration and user-friendly design. Participants emphasised that digital tools should complement, rather than replace, face-to-face experiential learning, particularly for emotionally sensitive topics.

Experiential training in emotional intelligence is most effective when it is interactive, reflective, and embedded in real-life academic scenarios. Training content should be adapted to participants' knowledge levels, with opportunities for peer learning and advanced facilitation roles. Combining in-person experiential activities with digital learning pathways can enhance scalability and recognition of transversal skills, provided that digital tools are carefully aligned with pedagogical objectives.

5.2   Anti-Discrimination in University Contexts

Addressing discrimination in higher education was a core objective of the EQUNI project and was systematically integrated across its training activities, summer schools, and workshops. Rather than approaching anti-discrimination solely from a regulatory or policy-based perspective, the project adopted an educational approach that emphasised awareness-raising, critical reflection, and the development of inclusive attitudes and behaviours within university contexts.

The topics addressed during the activities covered a broad range of discrimination-related issues relevant to higher education, including microaggressions, stereotyping, gender equity, disability, and cultural diversity. These themes were explored through interactive formats designed to encourage reflection on everyday academic practices and interpersonal interactions. Survey results indicate that participants significantly improved their understanding of how emotional intelligence can support anti-discrimination efforts in higher education, with average scores consistently rated between "good" and "very good." Participants also reported increased confidence in recognising and responding to discriminatory situations.

Qualitative feedback from interviews and open-ended questionnaires highlights the effectiveness of experiential and dialogical practices in addressing sensitive topics. Reality-check workshops, which invited participants to reflect on the subjective nature of perceptions and experiences, were repeatedly identified as particularly impactful. By emphasising that individual realities are shaped by personal, cultural, and institutional contexts, these workshops helped participants recognise unconscious biases and challenge taken-for-granted assumptions.

Similarly, the use of real-life case studies and guided discussions proved effective in translating abstract concepts into concrete situations encountered in university life. Discussing authentic scenarios enabled participants to connect discrimination-related issues to their own roles and responsibilities, whether as students, academic staff, or administrative personnel. Guided facilitation ensured that discussions remained respectful and constructive, contributing to the creation of emotionally safe spaces for dialogue.

Interviews also revealed important insights regarding the evolving nature of discrimination-related topics. Several interviewees emphasised that certain issues, such as gender equity or disability, are deeply embedded in societal and institutional structures and may be perceived differently across cultural contexts. In some cases, participants expressed a stronger interest in discussing forms of discrimination that they personally observe or experience, highlighting the importance of aligning training content with participants' lived realities.

Based on these findings, a key recommendation emerging from the project is the need to regularly review and update sensitive content, particularly in areas such as disability, gender identity, and intersectionality. Ensuring that examples, terminology, and pedagogical approaches reflect current debates and inclusive practices is essential to maintaining the relevance and credibility of anti-discrimination training in higher education.

Overall, the EQUNI experience demonstrates that effective anti-discrimination work in university contexts requires more than formal policies. It relies on continuous education, emotionally informed facilitation, and opportunities for open dialogue that allow individuals to reflect on their own perceptions and behaviours. By embedding these practices within experiential learning formats, universities can support the development of inclusive academic cultures that recognise diversity as a resource and actively work to prevent discrimination.

5.3   Stress Management and Intercultural Communication

Stress management and intercultural communication emerged as important complementary dimensions of emotional intelligence within the EQUNI project activities. These topics were addressed explicitly during several trainings and seminars, including the intensive training held in Toulouse, and were also integrated transversally into experiential learning formats. The focus on these areas reflects the increasing complexity of academic environments, where staff and students are required to navigate high workloads, emotional demands, and culturally diverse interactions.

Training activities introduced participants to cognitive approaches for managing stress in academic contexts. These approaches aimed to enhance participants' ability to recognise stress triggers, understand the cognitive and emotional mechanisms underlying stress responses, and apply practical strategies to regulate emotions in challenging situations. Survey results indicate that participants perceived these components as relevant and useful, with average scores ranging between "good" and "very good" for understanding how cognitive strategies can support stress management in higher education.

Intercultural communication was addressed through activities focusing on communication strategies for working with diverse student and staff populations. Participants were encouraged to reflect on how cultural background, language, professional role, and institutional position influence communication styles and expectations. Interviews and feedback highlighted that these discussions increased participants' awareness of differences in the perception and experience of discrimination across cultural contexts, as well as the potential for misunderstandings in multicultural academic settings.

Experiential methods such as group discussions, role-playing, and analysis of real-life scenarios were particularly effective in linking stress management and intercultural communication. Participants reported that these activities helped them better understand how emotional reactions, cultural assumptions, and communication patterns intersect in everyday academic interactions. Creating emotionally safe spaces for dialogue was identified as a key enabling factor, allowing participants to share experiences openly and to learn from differing perspectives.

Qualitative insights from interviews further emphasised that language plays a critical role in intercultural communication and emotional expression. Several interviewees noted that working in a non-native language can increase cognitive load and stress, sometimes shifting participants' focus from reflection and dialogue to task completion. These findings highlight the importance of adapting facilitation strategies to linguistic contexts and, where possible, allowing participants to engage in their mother tongue to deepen reflection and discussion.

Based on the project's evaluation results, a key recommendation is to systematically integrate stress management and intercultural communication modules into emotional intelligence training pathways. Addressing these dimensions alongside emotional awareness and inclusion enhances the practical relevance of EI training and supports participants in applying their learning to real academic situations. Embedding these modules within staff development programmes and student support initiatives can contribute to more resilient, inclusive, and effective academic communities.

5.4   Innovative Learning Tools: The EQUNI Game

The EQUNI Game was developed as an innovative learning tool designed to raise awareness of discrimination and foster emotional self-reflection within higher education contexts. Conceived as both a facilitated group-based experience and a digital application, the game aims to support learning about emotional intelligence, inclusion, and anti-discrimination through active engagement rather than passive instruction.

In its board-based and facilitated formats, the EQUNI Game has proven to be a powerful catalyst for discussion and collective reflection. Interviews and training feedback consistently highlight that the game functions less as a competitive activity and more as an instrument to spark dialogue, enabling participants to articulate experiences, confront assumptions, and explore different perspectives in a structured yet open manner. The use of avatars and role-based scenarios helps participants distance themselves from personal exposure, encouraging more honest and emotionally safe exchanges, particularly in small and diverse groups.

The effectiveness of the EQUNI Game is strongly linked to the quality of facilitation and the creation of a safe learning environment. While the game structure provides prompts and scenarios, trained facilitators play a crucial role in framing discussions, managing group dynamics, and guiding debriefing sessions. Feedback from both participants and project partners confirms that the most meaningful learning outcomes occur when sufficient time is allocated to reflection and discussion following gameplay. Without facilitation, the depth of emotional and critical reflection may be significantly reduced.

The EQUNI digital application, tested during the second Summer School in October 2025, extends the reach of the game by enabling individual and flexible engagement with the project's content. Evaluation results indicate that participants generally appreciated the application's educational value, usability, and mobile-friendly design. The app was particularly effective in supporting cognitive awareness of discrimination, inclusion, and emotional intelligence concepts, and was perceived as a useful complementary learning tool for workshops, lessons, or self-directed learning.

At the same time, the application testing highlighted important limitations and conditions for effective use. While users reported satisfactory learning outcomes, the experience was less impactful in terms of emotional self-reflection when used in a short, single-player format without guided discussion. Participants also identified the need for clearer onboarding, improved feedback on answers, and more time to process complex questions. These findings suggest that the digital version of the EQUNI Game should be understood as a complementary tool, rather than a stand-alone solution for developing emotional intelligence or addressing discrimination.

Based on the EQUNI experience, several key lessons emerge for universities wishing to adopt similar innovative learning tools. First, the EQUNI Game is most effective when embedded within facilitated learning pathways, combining gameplay with structured debriefing and discussion. Second, facilitators require specific training to ensure emotional safety, inclusiveness, and pedagogical coherence. Third, gameplay formats and content should be adapted to participants' experience levels, cultural backgrounds, and prior knowledge. Finally, digital tools should be continuously refined through user feedback and tested with diverse audiences to ensure accessibility, clarity, and educational impact.

Overall, the EQUNI Game illustrates how innovative, experiential, and digital learning tools can enhance emotional intelligence and anti-discrimination education in higher education, provided they are implemented with appropriate pedagogical support, institutional commitment, and continuous evaluation.

5.5 Transversal Skill Certification (Micro-Credentials)

The recognition of transversal skills through micro-credentials was an important innovation introduced within the EQUNI project. Building on the understanding that competencies such as emotional intelligence, empathy, collaboration, and inclusion are essential for academic success and professional development, the project sought to make these skills more visible and formally recognised within not only higher education institutions but also labour market entities.

Within the project, learning paths were developed to support the acquisition and certification of transversal skills related to emotional intelligence and inclusive practices. These learning paths combined experiential training activities, reflective exercises, and participation in project events such as summer schools and workshops. By linking learning outcomes to clearly defined competences, the micro-credential approach provided a structured framework for recognising learning that often remains informal or implicit in academic contexts.

Feedback collected through surveys, interviews, and questionnaires indicates that the certification of transversal skills was perceived as a valuable addition to the project activities. Participants and project partners highlighted that micro-credentials helped emphasise the importance of soft skills beyond the academic curriculum and contributed to increased awareness of their relevance for employability, leadership, and professional practice. In some institutional contexts, the introduction of micro-credentials represented a first step towards more systematic recognition of transversal competences.

Qualitative insights from interviews further suggest that micro-credentials can play a motivational role by making learning outcomes tangible and transferable. By providing formal recognition, micro-credentials support participants in articulating their competencies to external stakeholders, including employers, and reinforce the legitimacy of emotional intelligence and inclusion-related training within universities.

Based on the project experience, a key recommendation is to integrate micro-credentials into existing institutional frameworks, such as student portfolios, staff development programmes, and continuing professional development schemes. Embedding micro-credentials within formal recognition systems can enhance their visibility and sustainability, and support the mainstreaming of emotional intelligence and inclusive practices across higher education institutions.

Overall, the EQUNI project demonstrates that micro-credentials offer a promising mechanism for bridging the gap between experiential learning and formal recognition. When aligned with institutional strategies and quality assurance processes, the certification of transversal skills can contribute to more holistic approaches to learning and professional development in higher education.

5.6 Inclusive Organization of Training Events

The inclusive organisation of training events was a key enabling factor for the effectiveness of the EQUNI project activities. Beyond content and pedagogy, the way trainings, summer schools, and workshops were organised had a direct impact on participants' engagement, sense of inclusion, and overall learning experience. The project therefore paid particular attention to organisational aspects that support accessibility, emotional safety, and meaningful participation.

Evaluation results from surveys and feedback questionnaires indicate that the content of the training activities and the quality of speakers and facilitators were consistently rated highly by participants. Average scores for content relevance and speaker selection ranged between "good" and "very good," reflecting the perceived quality and expertise brought to the events. These results confirm that strong pedagogical content, delivered by skilled and committed facilitators, is a critical component of successful training initiatives.

Qualitative insights from interviews further highlight that inclusive organisation extends beyond logistical efficiency. Clear communication, transparent expectations, and well-prepared physical or virtual spaces contribute to creating an environment in which participants feel welcomed, respected, and able to engage fully. These elements are especially important in trainings addressing sensitive topics such as emotional intelligence and discrimination, where emotional safety and trust are essential.

Based on these findings, a key recommendation is to develop a shared logistics and communication protocol for all partners involved in the organisation of training events. Such a protocol could include standardised timelines for communication, clear information packages for participants, guidelines for accessible and inclusive spaces, and coordination mechanisms among organisers. Establishing common organisational standards would support consistency across institutions and enhance the overall quality and inclusiveness of future training activities.

Overall, the EQUNI experience demonstrates that inclusive organisation is an integral part of effective educational practice. By aligning high-quality content with well-structured, transparent, and participant-centred organisational processes, universities can maximise the impact of training initiatives and support inclusive learning environments.

5.7 Cross-role and Intergenerational Dialogue

Promoting cross-role and intergenerational dialogue was a distinctive and impactful feature of the EQUNI project's approach. Many project activities intentionally brought together students, academic staff, and administrative personnel within the same learning environments. This mixed composition was designed to reflect the diversity of roles, experiences, and perspectives present within higher education institutions and to support mutual understanding across hierarchical and generational boundaries.

Survey results and qualitative feedback indicate that these mixed-group formats contributed significantly to participants' awareness of how roles and institutional positions shape perceptions, communication styles, and experiences of inclusion or exclusion. Participants reported gaining a deeper understanding of perspectives different from their own and becoming more aware of implicit biases, micro-aggressions, and the impact of everyday communication within academic settings. The opportunity to engage in dialogue across roles was frequently described as a key added value of the project activities.

Interviews further highlight that cross-role and intergenerational dialogue helped challenge assumptions about authority, responsibility, and lived experience within universities. Participants noted that listening to colleagues or students from different backgrounds and institutional positions encouraged reflection on power dynamics and fostered greater empathy. In several cases, interviewees emphasised that mixed groups created a more realistic representation of university life and supported discussions grounded in concrete experiences rather than abstract concepts.

The effectiveness of these dialogues was closely linked to the creation of emotionally safe spaces. Facilitated discussions, clear ground rules, and experiential methods such as role-playing and case-based discussions enabled participants to express differing viewpoints respectfully. The combination of emotional intelligence training and inclusive facilitation helped ensure that differences in age, role, or status were perceived as learning opportunities rather than barriers.

Overall, the EQUNI project demonstrates that cross-role and intergenerational dialogue is a powerful practice for fostering inclusion and emotional awareness in higher education. By deliberately creating spaces where students, academic staff, and administrative personnel can learn together, universities can strengthen internal communication, reduce misunderstandings, and promote more inclusive institutional cultures. These findings underline the importance of embedding cross-role dialogue into training programmes, staff development initiatives, and institutional inclusion strategies.

5.8   Participatory Evaluation and Feedback Loops

Participatory evaluation and continuous feedback mechanisms were foundational to the EQUNI project and played a critical role in shaping both its pedagogical approach and its concrete outputs. Rather than being treated as a final validation step, evaluation was embedded throughout the project lifecycle and used as an ongoing learning and improvement process.

The consortium employed a multi-source evaluation framework, combining structured questionnaires, open-ended feedback, semi-structured interviews with project partners, and direct observation during trainings, summer schools, and workshops. This mixed-method approach made it possible to capture not only levels of satisfaction and perceived learning outcomes, but also qualitative insights into emotional engagement, group dynamics, and contextual factors influencing participant experiences.

Participant feedback was systematically analysed and shared within the consortium, allowing for iterative adaptation of activities and tools. For example, feedback from early training sessions informed adjustments in facilitation techniques, group composition, and time allocation for reflection. Similarly, differences observed between successive summer schools led to improvements in the creation of emotionally safe spaces, increased participant involvement, and more personalised project work. This responsiveness strengthened both the relevance and the perceived quality of the project activities.

The evaluation of the EQUNI digital application during the second Summer School further illustrates the value of participatory feedback loops. While quantitative results confirmed generally positive perceptions of usability, performance, and content quality, qualitative feedback revealed important limitations related to onboarding, time constraints, feedback clarity, and emotional depth when the application was used in a short, self-directed format. These insights highlighted that user experience, pedagogical impact, and emotional engagement must be assessed together, particularly when introducing digital tools to address sensitive topics such as discrimination and emotional intelligence.

Importantly, participatory evaluation also contributed to shared learning within the project team itself. Interviews with consortium members revealed that the evaluation process fostered reflection on institutional practices, cultural differences, and facilitation approaches. In several cases, partners reported that the project's impact was as significant for the team as for participants, reinforcing the value of evaluation as a collective capacity-building exercise rather than a purely external assessment.

Based on the EQUNI experience, a key recommendation for higher education institutions is to embed participatory evaluation and feedback loops within all emotional intelligence and inclusion initiatives. This includes allocating dedicated time for collective reflection during training events, combining quantitative and qualitative feedback tools, and ensuring that evaluation results are actively used to inform decision-making and redesign. Digital tools, in particular, should be tested iteratively with diverse user groups and accompanied by clear mechanisms for collecting and responding to user feedback.

Overall, the EQUNI project demonstrates that participatory evaluation is not only a means of quality assurance, but also a powerful driver of engagement, learning, and institutional change. By systematically listening to participants and integrating their perspectives into practice, universities can develop more effective, inclusive, and sustainable approaches to emotional intelligence and anti-discrimination in higher education.

6. Practical Recommendations for Implementation

Successful implementation of emotional intelligence and anti-discrimination initiatives requires clear institutional anchoring. Universities should position emotional intelligence, inclusion, and well-being as strategic priorities explicitly referenced in institutional policies, action plans, and quality assurance frameworks. Without visible leadership support and alignment with existing governance structures, initiatives risk remaining fragmented or short-lived. Institutional commitment provides legitimacy, resources, and continuity.

Cross-functional collaboration is essential to reflect the complexity of university environments. Establishing working groups that bring together academic staff, administrative and technical personnel, human resources units, student representatives, and inclusion or equality officers enables institutions to design actions that are both pedagogically sound and operationally feasible. Such collaboration helps bridge gaps between policy, practice, and lived experience, and fosters shared ownership of inclusion efforts.

Investment in facilitator training is a decisive factor for impact and sustainability. Emotional intelligence and anti-discrimination activities address sensitive topics that require skilled facilitation. Universities should train facilitators from different institutional functions in experiential, inclusive, and trauma-informed methods. Facilitators need strong emotional intelligence, intercultural competence, and the ability to manage group dynamics, foster trust, and guide reflective debriefings. This applies equally to face-to-face activities and to the use of digital learning tools.

Ensuring emotionally safe learning environments is a prerequisite for meaningful engagement. Participants are more likely to reflect honestly, challenge assumptions, and engage in dialogue when clear norms of respect, confidentiality, and non-judgement are established. Universities should

carefully design learning settings, including group composition, time allocation, and facilitation formats, to support psychological safety. Emotional safety is particularly important in cross-role, intergenerational, and multicultural groups.

Blended learning approaches strengthen reach and continuity when thoughtfully designed. The EQUNI experience shows that digital tools, such as the EQUNI application, are effective for raising awareness and reinforcing knowledge, especially when flexibility and accessibility are needed. However, their impact on emotional development is greatest when they complement, rather than replace, experiential and facilitated learning. Universities should integrate digital tools within structured learning pathways that include opportunities for discussion, reflection, and collective sense-making.

Formal recognition of transversal skills enhances motivation and institutional uptake. Integrating emotional intelligence, inclusion, and collaboration competencies into micro-credentials, student portfolios, or staff development frameworks helps make these skills visible and valued. Formal recognition supports learner engagement, signals institutional commitment, and strengthens the link between personal development and professional or academic progression.

Systematic participatory evaluation is essential for continuous improvement and credibility. Universities should embed feedback mechanisms in all training and development activities, combining quantitative indicators with qualitative insights. Allocating time for participant-driven reflection, analysing feedback collectively, and acting on evaluation results enables institutions to refine content, methods, and tools over time. Digital tools in particular should be tested iteratively with diverse audiences to ensure usability, clarity, and educational relevance.

Capitalising on existing resources accelerates implementation and ensures quality. Rather than developing new tools from scratch, universities are encouraged to build on tested resources such as the EQUNI Game, pedagogical toolkits, and structured learning pathways. Adapting these resources to local contexts through piloting and co-creation reduces development costs and supports evidence-based practice.

Flexibility and openness to adaptation are key to long-term success. Differences in institutional culture, national context, language, and participant profiles require universities to remain responsive and adaptive. The EQUNI project highlights the importance of learning from partners, adjusting activities based on feedback, and viewing implementation as an evolving process rather than a fixed model.

Ultimately, **investing in emotional intelligence and inclusion** strengthens institutional resilience and quality. By implementing these recommendations in a coherent, participatory, and well-supported manner, universities can enhance communication, reduce discrimination, support well-being, and

foster collaborative academic communities. Emotional intelligence is not an additional requirement, but a strategic resource for addressing the complex social and organisational challenges facing higher education today.

7. Conclusion

The EQUNI project has demonstrated that emotional intelligence and anti-discrimination initiatives can generate tangible and meaningful impact within higher education institutions when they are addressed through experiential, inclusive, and participatory approaches. Across the consortium, project activities consistently contributed to increased awareness of emotional processes and discriminatory dynamics, strengthened interpersonal skills, and improved collaboration among students, academic staff, and administrative personnel. Participants reported greater emotional awareness, enhanced empathy, and a stronger capacity to engage in respectful and reflective dialogue, particularly in diverse and cross-role settings.

Beyond individual learning outcomes, EQUNI generated significant macro-level impacts at institutional and consortium levels : The project fostered improved communication practices within partner universities, strengthened cross-institutional collaboration, and contributed to a shared understanding of inclusive academic cultures across European contexts. Several partners reported that the project influenced internal discussions on curriculum reform, staff development policies, and institutional equality strategies, with some institutions initiating processes to integrate emotional intelligence and anti-discrimination training into formal curricula and professional development frameworks. Moreover, the project highlighted the value of structured project management and transparent communication in international consortia, contributing to stronger and more sustainable inter-university partnerships, including with private-sector actors involved for the first time in some institutions.

The project also revealed a strong transformative effect on organisational cultures and individual professional practices. Academic and administrative staff reported heightened awareness of microaggressions, improved communication styles, and new collaborative habits. These shifts contributed to a broader recognition that universities, particularly science-oriented institutions, must address social and emotional dimensions alongside technical and scientific excellence. By opening dialogue on sensitive topics and providing concrete tools and pedagogical frameworks, EQUNI supported universities in redefining their role as socially responsible, inclusive, and emotionally supportive learning environments.

Looking ahead, the EQUNI experience points to several strategic next steps for higher education institutions. First, emotional intelligence and inclusion should be embedded structurally into teaching programmes, staff training, and institutional strategies, rather than being treated as optional or

project-based activities. Second, universities should establish mandatory or strongly recommended training pathways on emotional intelligence, discrimination, and inclusive communication for students, academic staff, and administrative personnel. Third, institutions are encouraged to adopt a phased implementation approach for experiential tools such as the EQUNI Game, beginning in participants' native languages to facilitate emotional expression and gradually expanding to international and intercultural contexts to enrich perspectives and foster cross-cultural learning.

Sustaining impact also requires continuous participatory evaluation and institutional learning loops. Universities should maintain mechanisms for collecting participant feedback, monitoring learning outcomes, and adapting training content and tools. In parallel, digital tools such as the EQUNI application and micro-credential systems offer promising pathways for documenting transversal skills, recognising learning outcomes, and supporting lifelong learning trajectories.

Finally, this guide serves as a call to action for universities to adapt, scale, and expand these good practices within their own institutional contexts. While the examples presented in this report are rooted in the EQUNI consortium's experience, they are not intended as prescriptive models. Instead, they provide a flexible and evidence-based framework that institutions can tailor to their specific needs, cultures, and strategic priorities. By doing so, universities can take concrete steps toward fostering emotionally intelligent leadership, inclusive learning environments, and resilient academic communities capable of addressing the complex social, emotional, and organisational challenges of contemporary higher education.

8. Executive summary

The EQUNI project addresses a critical and increasingly recognised challenge in higher education: the need to foster emotionally intelligent, inclusive, and equitable academic environments in order to prevent discrimination and support student and staff well-being. Building on a comprehensive needs analysis conducted across partner institutions, the project identified significant gaps in emotional intelligence (EQ), communication practices, and anti-discrimination awareness within universities. These gaps are linked not only to individual well-being and interpersonal relations, but also to academic performance, institutional cohesion, and the overall quality of the learning environment.

The project brought together an international consortium of universities and associated partners to design, test, and implement innovative training pathways, pedagogical tools, and institutional practices aimed at strengthening emotional intelligence competencies and inclusive behaviours across the academic community. Target groups included students, academic staff, administrative staff, trainers, mentors, psychologists, advisers, and university leadership responsible for equality and diversity policies.

A key outcome of the project was the development and piloting of experiential training activities, workshops, and Summer Schools that addressed emotional awareness, empathy, communication, stress management, and anti-discrimination topics such as microaggressions, stereotyping, gender equity, disability, and cultural diversity. Feedback from interviews, questionnaires, and participatory evaluation activities demonstrated strong educational value and significant impact on participants' awareness, interpersonal skills, and collaborative practices. More than 90% of participants in experiential emotional intelligence trainings reported increased emotional awareness, while cross-role and intergenerational dialogue activities enhanced mutual understanding between students, academic staff, and administrative personnel.

The consortium also developed innovative learning tools, notably the EQUNI Game and its accompanying mobile application, designed to raise awareness of discrimination and stimulate emotional self-reflection through gamified learning. Evaluation of the application during the Summer School in October 2025 showed generally positive user satisfaction regarding usability, performance, and content quality, while also identifying concrete areas for improvement related to technical stability, onboarding, feedback mechanisms, and content design. These findings informed iterative refinements of the tool and highlighted the importance of user-centred design in digital educational resources.

Another major achievement of the project was the design of transversal skill certification pathways through micro-credentials, aiming to formally recognise competencies such as empathy, collaboration, and inclusive communication. These micro-credentials provide universities with a framework to integrate soft skills into student portfolios and staff development systems, contributing to the institutional recognition of emotional intelligence as a strategic competence.

Beyond pedagogical innovation, the project generated significant institutional and organisational impacts. Partners reported improved internal communication practices, heightened awareness of microaggressions and discriminatory dynamics, and increased readiness to integrate emotional intelligence and anti-discrimination training into curricula and institutional strategies. The project also strengthened international cooperation among partner institutions and demonstrated the value of structured project management and cross-sector collaboration, including with private-sector actors.

Based on these outcomes, the report provides practical, evidence-based recommendations for higher education institutions. Key recommendations include establishing cross-functional working groups on inclusion and emotional intelligence, training facilitators across academic and administrative functions, ensuring emotionally safe learning environments, integrating experiential and digital tools into training pathways, and embedding participatory evaluation mechanisms in all training activities. The report also encourages universities to adopt a phased implementation

strategy for experiential tools, starting in participants' native languages and expanding to intercultural contexts, and to institutionalise emotional intelligence and anti-discrimination training within curricula and professional development frameworks.

Overall, the EQUNI project demonstrates that emotional intelligence is a foundational competence for equitable and inclusive higher education. By combining experiential pedagogy, innovative digital tools, formal skill recognition, and institutional change processes, the project provides a scalable and adaptable framework for universities across Europe. This guide offers higher education institutions a practical roadmap to strengthen inclusion, improve well-being, and build resilient academic communities capable of addressing the social and emotional challenges of contemporary university life.