SUPPORT STUDY FOR THE ERASMUS+ 2021-2027 INTERIM EVALUATION AND THE ERASMUS+ 2014-2020 FINAL EVALUATION

FINAL REPORT

Prepared by ICF

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Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture

Directorate B – Youth, Education and Erasmus+

Unit B4 - Erasmus+ Coordination

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List of abbreviations

AWP	Annual Work Programme
CEA	Cost-effectiveness analysis
CERV	Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme
CoVE	Centre of Vocational Excellence
CPR	Common Provisions Regulation
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DG EAC	Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture
DOT	Digital Opportunity Traineeship
EACEA	European Education and Culture Executive Agency
EC	European Commission
ECHE	Erasmus Charter for Higher Education
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
ECVET	European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
EIB	European Investment Bank
ELL	European Language Label
EMJMD	Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree
EP	European Parliament
EQ	Evaluation Question
EPALE	Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register
EQAVET	European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESEP	European School Education Platform
ESF/ESF+	European Social Fund/European Social Fund Plus
ESC	European Solidarity Corps
ESCO	European Skills, Competences, Qualifications & Occupations
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
EU	European Union
FR	Financial Regulation
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher education institution
HERE	Higher Education Reform Experts
ICM	International Credit Mobility
ICT	Information and Communication Technology

IVF	International Visegrad Fund
JMA	Jean Monnet Actions
JMDI	Jean Monnet Designated Institution
KA	Key Action
KII	Key Informant Interview
MEF	Monitoring and Evaluation Framework
MFF	Multiannual Financial Framework
MS	Member State(s)
NA	National Agency
NARIC	National Academic Recognition Information Centre
NAU	National Authority
NEO	National Erasmus+ Office
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NLP	Natural Language Processing
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OER	Open Educational Resources
OMC	Open Method of Coordination
PC	Public Consultation
PIC	Participant Identification Code
QCA	Qualitative comparative analysis
SALTO	Support, Advanced Learning and Training Opportunities
SWD	Staff Working Document
TCA	Training and Cooperation Activities
URF	Unique Registration Facility
VET	Vocational Education and Training

Glossary

Unless otherwise indicated, the source for the definitions provided in the table below is the Glossary of Terms from the Erasmus+ Programme Guide (https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-d).

Glossary of terms - Common terms	
Accreditation	Process to ensure that the organisations wishing to receive funding under an Action of the Erasmus+ programme comply with a set of qualitative standards or pre-requisites laid down by the European Commission for that Action.
Applicant	Any participating organisation or informal group of young people that submits a grant application. Applicants may apply either individually or on behalf of other organisations involved in the project. In the latter case, the applicant is also defined as coordinator. For actions managed by the Executive Agency EACEA, the applicants are those participants who will become beneficiaries and affiliated entities in the Grant Agreement.
Beneficiary	When a project is approved for an Erasmus+ grant, the applicant organisation becomes a beneficiary(ies) by signing a contract with the National or Executive Agency that has selected the project. If the application was made on behalf of other participating organisations, the partners may become co-beneficiaries of the grant.
Blended mobility	Combination of physical mobility and a virtual component, facilitating collaborative online learning exchange/teamwork.
Call for proposals	Invitation published by or on behalf of the European Commission to present, within a given deadline, a proposal for action that corresponds to the objectives pursued and meets the required conditions. Calls for proposals are published in the Official Journal of the European Union (C series) and/or on relevant websites of the Commission or of National Agencies (the EACEA publishes calls on the EU Funding & Tenders Portal).
Co-financing	The principle under which part of the costs of a project supported by the EU must be borne by the beneficiary or covered through external contributions other than the EU grant.
Coordinator/ Coordinating organisation	A participating organisation applying for an Erasmus+ grant on behalf of a consortium of partner organisations. The coordinator has special obligations foreseen in the grant agreement.
Field	In the context of Erasmus+, fields refer to the functional areas in scope of the programme: school education, higher education, adult education, and vocational education and training (VET), youth, and sport. *Source: ICF elaboration*
First time applicant	Any participating organisation that has not previously received support as a project coordinator (applicant) under a given type of action supported by this Programme or its predecessor programme in the last seven years.
Green skills	Fundamental skills to the transition to a low-carbon economy, which can be general such as sustainable agriculture, soil protection, energy use and waste reduction, or more technical such as knowledge on renewable energy.
Green travel	Travel that uses low-emission means of transport for the main part of the travel, such as bus, bike, train or car-pooling.

Hosting/ receiving organisation	The (main) organisation that provides learning content to participants in mobility activities by using its own resources and expertise. The hosting organisation cooperates with the sending organisation to define the expected learning outcomes and the methods that will be used to achieve them. It then executes the learning programme and conducts monitoring and mentoring during the activity.
International	In the context of Erasmus+, relates to any action involving at least one EU Member State or third country associated to the programme and at least one third country not associated to the programme.
Internationalisation	In the context of Erasmus+, relates to an organisation gaining access to mobility, networking and cooperation opportunities and setting up the strategies and processes in place to seize and develop these opportunities. *Source: ICF elaboration*
Learning mobility	Moving physically to a country other than the country of residence, possibly combined with a period of virtual participation, in order to undertake study, training or non-formal or informal learning. It may take the form of traineeships, apprenticeships, youth exchanges, teaching or participation in a professional development activity, and may include preparatory activities, such as training in the host language, as well as sending, receiving and follow-up activities.
Multiannual financial framework (MFF)	A Multiannual financial framework (MFF) is a is a framework regulating the EU annual budget over a period of several years (at least five, usually seven). It is laid down in an unanimously adopted Council Regulation with the consent of the European Parliament, on the basis of a proposal made by the European Commission. The MFF sets out the annual ceilings of expenditure that can be spent on various policy areas. It ensures that EU spending remains both predictable and stays within agreed limits. *Source: ICF elaboration*
Mobility/ Learning agreement	An agreement between the sending and receiving organisation and the participating individuals, defining the aims and content of the mobility period in order to ensure its relevance and quality. It can also be used as a basis for recognition of the period abroad by the receiving organisation.
National Agency (NA)	A designated body in charge of managing the implementation of the programme at national level in a Member State or in a third country associated to the programme. One or more National Agencies may exist in each country.
National Authority (NAU)	An authority in charge, at national level, of monitoring and supervising the management of the programme in a Member State or in a third country associated to the programme. One or more National Authorities may exist in each country.
National Erasmus+ Office (NEO)	National Erasmus+ Offices (NEOs) are established in certain third countries not associated to the programme to help the European Commission and national authorities implement Erasmus+. These countries are located in the Western Balkans, the Eastern and Southern Neighbourhoods and Central Asia. NEO responsibilities include: providing information on Erasmus+; assisting applicants and participants; supporting policy dialogue; maintaining contact with local authorities and EU Delegations. *Source: https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/contacts/national-erasmus-offices*

National Focal Points	Erasmus+ National Focal Points (ENFP) are representatives of the education sector tasked with supporting Erasmus+ participation in third countries not associated to the programme in Africa, Asia-Pacific, the Middle East and the Americas. The European Commission has been working since 2022 with countries in these regions to designate ENFPs. *Source: https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/contacts/erasmus-national-focal-points*
Newcomer organisation	Any organisation or institution that has not previously received support in a given type of action supported by this Programme or its predecessor programme either as a coordinator or a partner.
Participant in Erasmus+ project activities	Individual who is fully involved in a project and who may receive European Union funding intended to cover the costs of participation (notably travel and subsistence).
Participating organisation	An organisation or informal group of young people involved in a Erasmus+ project, as either coordinator or partner.
Partner organisation	In actions managed by National Agencies, a partner organisation is an organisation formally involved in the project (co-beneficiaries) but not taking the role of coordinator.
Participant with fewer opportunities	People with fewer opportunities means people who, for economic, social, cultural, geographical or health reasons, a migrant background, or for reasons such as disability and educational difficulties or for any other reasons, including those that can give rise to discrimination under article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental rights of the European Union, face obstacles that prevent them from having effective access to opportunities under the programme.
Project	A coherent set of activities which are designed and organised in order to achieve defined objectives and results.
Receiving organisation	A participating organisation receiving participants and organising activities of an Erasmus+ project.
SALTO	SALTO (Support, Advanced, Learning and Training Opportunities) is a network of resource centres that support implementation of the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes by providing support to National Agencies and organisations interested in implementation of projects. SALTO resource centres are established by the European Commission and hosted by National Agencies across Europe. SALTO resource centres provide expertise, resources and training in specific areas of particular relevance for the implementation of the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes. The SALTO network consists of ''thematic'' resource centres (i.e. focusing on a specific topic/priority) and ''regional'' ones (i.e. supporting the implementation of the programmes in specific regions: Eastern Europe and Caucasus, EuroMed, and South-East Europe). Three new SALTOS were set up in 2022 to better support new horizontal priority areas of EU youth and education programmes for the 2021-2027 programming period: inclusion and diversity (education and training), digital transformation and green transition. *Source: ICF elaboration*
Sector	In the context of Erasmus+, sectors refer to the main four functional areas in scope of the programme: education, training, youth and sport. Education and training are often collectively referred to as a single sector, subdivided into various fields: school education, higher education, adult education, and vocational education and training (VET). *Source: ICF elaboration*

Sending organisation	A participating organisation sending one or more participants to an activity of an Erasmus+ project.
Staff	A person who, on either a professional or a voluntary basis, is involved in education, training or non-formal learning at all levels. Includes professors, teachers (including pre-school teachers), trainers, school leaders, youth workers, sport staff, early childhood education and care staff, non-educational staff and other practitioners involved on a regular basis in promoting learning.
Third countries associated to the programme	Non-EU countries that participate fully in the Erasmus+ programme and have established a National Agency for that purpose. The third countries associated to the programme are: members of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) which are members of the European Economic Area (EEA) (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway) and acceding countries, candidate countries and potential candidates (North Macedonia, Serbia, Türkiye). *Source: ICF elaboration*
Third countries not associated to the programme	Countries that do not participate fully in the Erasmus+ programme, but which may take part (as partners or applicants) in certain Actions of the programme. The list of third countries not associated to the programme is set out in Part A of the Erasmus+ Programme Guide.
Transnational	In the context of Erasmus+, relates, unless otherwise indicated, to any activity involving at least two EU Member States and third countries associated to the programme.
Virtual cooperation	Any form of cooperation using information and communication technology tools to facilitate and support any relevant Programme actions.
Young people	In the context of the Erasmus+ programme, individuals aged between 13 and 30.
Glossary of terms - Higher Education	
Credit	A set of learning outcomes of an individual which have been assessed and which can be accumulated towards a qualification or transferred to other learning programmes or qualifications.
Credit mobility	A limited period of study or traineeship abroad set within on-going studies at a home institution - for the purpose of gaining credits. After the mobility phase, students return to their home institution to complete their studies.
Degree mobility	A period of study abroad aimed at acquiring a full degree or certificate in the destination country/countries.
Double degree/ multiple degree	(At least) two separate degree certificates awarded to a student upon successful completion of a joint programme. A double degree is a specific type of multiple degree. Each degree must be signed by the competent authority of the institution concerned, and recognised officially in the countries where the different awarding institutions are located.
Higher education institution	Means an institution which, in accordance with national law or practice, offers recognised degrees or other recognised tertiary level qualifications, regardless of what such an establishment is called, or a comparable institution at tertiary level which is considered by the national authorities as eligible to participate in the programme in their respective territories.
Joint degree	Single degree certificate awarded to a student upon successful completion of a joint programme. The joint degree must be signed by the competent authorities of two or more of the participating institutions jointly and recognised officially in the countries where those participating institutions are located.
Joint programmes	Higher education (study or research) programmes jointly designed, delivered and fully recognised by two or more higher education

	institutions. Joint programmes can be implemented at any higher education cycle, i.e. bachelor, master or doctorate or even short cycle. Joint programmes can be national (i.e. when all universities involved are from the same country) or transnational/international (i.e. when at least two different countries are represented among the higher education institutions involved).
Glossary of terms - Vocational Education and Training	
Apprenticeship (Apprentice)	Apprenticeships are understood as formal vocational education and training schemes that: a) combine learning in education or training institutions with substantial work-based learning in companies and other workplaces; b) lead to nationally recognised qualifications; c) are based on an agreement defining the rights and obligations of the apprentice, the employer and, where appropriate, the vocational education and training institution; and d)include payment or other compensation to the apprentice for the work-based component.
Vocational education and training (VET)	Vocational education and training is to be understood as the education and training which aims to equip young people and adults with knowledge, skills and competences required in particular occupations or more broadly on the labour market. It may be provided in formal and in non-formal settings, at all levels of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), including tertiary level, if applicable. For the purpose of Erasmus+, projects focusing on initial or continuing vocational education and training are eligible under VET actions.
VET learner	A person enrolled in an initial or continuous vocational education and training programme or a person who has recently graduated or obtained a qualification from such a programme.
Glossary of terms - Adult education	
Adult education	All forms of non-vocational adult education, whether of a formal, non-formal or informal nature (for continuous vocational training see "VET").
Adult learner	Any adult who, having completed or being no longer involved in initial education or training, returns to some forms of non-vocational continuing learning (formal, non-formal or informal).
Glossary of terms - Youth	
Youth activity	An out-of-school activity (such as youth exchange, volunteering or youth training) carried out by a young person, either individually or in a group, in particular through youth organisations, and characterised by a non-formal learning approach.
Youth worker	A professional or a volunteer involved in non-formal learning who supports young people in their personal socio-educational, and professional development.
Youthpass	The European tool to improve the recognition of the learning outcomes of young people and youth workers from their participation in projects supported by the Erasmus+ programme. Youthpass consists of: a) certificates that can be obtained by participants in several Actions of the programme; and b) a defined process which supports young people, youth workers and youth organisations to reflect about the learning outcomes from an Erasmus+ project in the field of youth and non-formal learning. Youthpass is also part of a broader European Commission strategy which aims to enhance the recognition of non-formal and informal learning and of youth work in Europe and beyond.
Glossary of terms – Sport	
Grassroots sport	Physical leisure activities practised regularly at non-professional level by people of all ages for health, educational or social purposes.

Sport staff	A person involved in the instruction, training and management of a sports team or individual sports people, either on a paid basis or on a voluntary basis.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose and focus of the evaluation

This report has been prepared by ICF under a contract to support the European Commission (EC) in conducting an interim evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027 and a final evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme 2014-2020.

Erasmus+ is the European Union's (EU's) programme in the fields of education and training, youth and sport. It is one of the EU's most visible success stories. It builds on the achievements of its long history, since the Erasmus programme was originally established in 1987, and also on those of other pre-existing European programmes in the fields of education and training, youth and sport, covering both intra-European as well as international partnerships.

Erasmus+ was established in 2014 as a result of the integration of all previously existing EU programmes implemented during the period 2007-2013 in the fields of education, training, youth and sport: Lifelong Learning[1], Youth in Action, Erasmus Mundus, Edulink, Tempus, Alfa and Preparatory Actions in Sport.

The general objective of Erasmus+ is to support, in particular through learning mobility, the educational, professional and personal development of people in education, training, youth and sport in Europe and beyond, thereby contributing to sustainable growth, quality jobs and social cohesion, to drive innovation, and to strengthen European identity and active citizenship. It does this through: supporting and financing the mobility of individuals (Key Action 1, KA1); cooperation among organisations and institutions (Key Action 2, KA2); support to policy development and cooperation (Key Action 3, KA3); and teaching, learning, research and debates on European integration matters (Jean Monnet Actions, JMA).

The programme is mainly implemented through indirect management, meaning that the EC entrusts budget implementation tasks to National Agencies in the EU Member States as well as in third countries associated to the programme. These agencies promote and implement the programme at national level and are the link between the EC and participating organisations at local, regional and national levels. Additionally, a few actions are indirectly managed by pillar assessed international organisations.

A number of actions of the Erasmus+ programme are implemented centrally at EU level (direct management) under the responsibility of the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) or the Commission.

The Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027 has been built on the success of the 2014-2020 programme, keeping substantial stability and continuity in the structure and management mode of the programme compared to its predecessor. However, a number of changes were introduced to better respond to evolving challenges and needs, and to address the recommendations issued following the mid-term evaluation of Erasmus+ 2014-2020 and the final evaluation of its predecessor programmes (implemented during the period 2007-2013). In particular, the structure of the programme was slightly simplified and rationalised to enhance the coherence and the relevance of its intervention logic and to ensure greater accessibility. The number of specific objectives was reduced from 13 to 3, and four overarching horizontal priorities were established to increase consistency in the implementation of the programme and the delivery of its objectives across its actions and fields. The programme actions were then rearranged across the three key actions, now

[1] Life-Long Learning was itself composed of 6 sub-programmes, including 4 sectoral programmes (Erasmus, Comenius, Grundtvig, and Leonardo Da Vinci), Jean Monnet, and transversal programme.

covering all programme fields (including sport, which was previously separate), to pursue the programme objectives in a more streamlined manner.

While the system and management structure as well as the range of actions of the programme have remained mostly stable compared to the 2014-2020 programme, the programme budget has been nearly doubled at more than EUR 26 billion (compared to around EUR 14.8 billion for the 2014-2020 programme) and the IT architecture supporting the different stages of the project lifecycle has been revamped.

This report presents the findings and conclusions of the evaluation study carried out by ICF between March 2023 and August 2024 to assess the performance of the Erasmus+ programme on the basis of five evaluation criteria:

- the **effectiveness** of the measures taken to achieve the programme's objectives, including as regards new initiatives;
- the continued **relevance** of all objectives of the programme;
- the programme's internal and external **coherence** with other programmes with similar or complementary objectives;
- the **efficiency** of the programme, including the inclusion, simplification measures put in place, as well as the scope for further simplification and burden reduction; and
- the **European added value** resulting from the actions and activities supported by the programme, including in terms of sustainable impact, compared with what could reasonably have been achieved by Member States at national and/or regional levels.

The evaluation also aims to examine the results and **long-term impact** of the Erasmus+ programme 2014-2020.

The evaluation covers actions in all sectors supported by the programme for the period 2014-2023 in all Member States, third countries associated to the programme and third countries not associated to the programme. In line with the requirements set out in the Regulation (EU) 2021/817 of the European Parliament and of the Council[2] (hereinafter 'the 2021-2027 Erasmus+ Regulation'), it addresses in particular:

- the delivery of inclusion and diversity measures in the programme;
- the contribution of the programme to mainstreaming climate and environmental actions;
- the delivery of simplification measures, like the introduction of the lump-sum approach in partnerships for cooperation;
- the participation of the EU outermost regions referred to in Article 349 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU) as well as overseas countries or territories in the programme; and
- the progress of institutions pursuing an aim of European interest, which are financed under JMA, towards delivering on the programme objectives.

It also draws on lessons learned in the context of unforeseen events like the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian invasion of Ukraine or the inflation surge.

The report presents findings and draws conclusions on the different Erasmus+ actions. It assesses the extent to which these conclusions differ across the programme's **fields and sectors** (education and training including school education, higher education, vocational education and training (VET), adult education, youth and sport), across the different **target levels** (individual, institutional and systemic), and across the different **key actions** and **horizontal priorities and objectives**. It also assesses the extent to which the 2014-2020 and 2021-2027 programmes have been contributing to **policy development and**

[2] Regulation (EU) 2021/817 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 establishing Erasmus+: the Union Programme for education and training, youth and sport and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013.

implementation in the Member States and third countries associated to the programme and, when relevant, in third countries not associated to the programme. The study also examined **new features** introduced in Erasmus+ 2021-2027, such as:

- mobility for school pupils, for adult learners, for sport staff, group mobilities, short-term mobilities, blended mobilities, accreditation scheme in school education, adult education, VET and youth, youth participation activities, DiscoverEU;
- Small-scale Partnerships, Partnerships for Excellence, like the European Universities, Centres of Vocational Excellence, and Erasmus+ Teacher Academies, Erasmus Mundus Design Measures;
- international mobility in the VET field, as well as Capacity-Building in the fields of VET and sport; and
- Jean Monnet Actions beyond higher education in other fields of education and training.

1.2 Context of the evaluation

This evaluation takes place in a context of increasing tensions and challenges for Europe and the EU. In recent years, several profoundly disruptive events and crises have impacted the continent and affected the implementation and delivery of many EU policies and programmes, including Erasmus+: the COVID-19 pandemic, the outbreak of war in EU neighbouring countries (Russian invasion of Ukraine, war in the Middle East), the rising uncertainty and instability of the international geo-political situation, which affect mobility across countries, and the rise of inflation and of interest rates since 2021.

The EU has weathered these crises to a large extent so far, demonstrating its ability to react to unexpected turns of events. However, public finances across the EU have been significantly impacted and concerns are again rising about their long-term sustainability. A new cycle of fiscal adjustment could be looming, in particular if interest rates remain elevated for a prolonged period of time. In this context, EU policies, programmes and funding instruments are likely to come under increased scrutiny during the negotiations of the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), which are expected to start in 2025.

In this context, identifying the impacts and attributing and quantifying the specific effects of EU interventions is more crucial than ever, in particular for high-profile interventions like Erasmus+. This is a challenging endeavour, as the delivery of results, outcomes and impacts from such a significant and complex programme depends on several parameters and variables which influence the effectiveness and efficiency of the programme's actions in multiple ways, both positive and negative. This is nevertheless a necessary endeavour to ensure that the programme's impacts can be optimised and sustained over the long term.

The evaluation, therefore, aims to provide an assessment of the Erasmus+ programme's results, outcomes and impacts in relation to its objectives, priorities, and inputs. It draws on lessons learned in the context of unforeseen events, like the COVID-19 pandemic or the Russian invasion of Ukraine, in terms of the programme's resilience and ability to deal with change and adapt to shifting circumstances in a context of increasing uncertainty. It also assesses if some additional inbuilt mechanisms for more agility and flexibility are needed.

The outcomes and recommendations of the evaluation are intended to help improve, where possible, the implementation of the current programme which runs until 2027 and to feed into the impact assessment for a possible Erasmus+ successor programme for the next EU programming period. They also aim to contribute to the knowledge basis in the area of education and training, youth and sport policy, which may result in insights for policy developments.

1.3 Content of the report

This report includes the following elements:

- Section 2: a description of the study **methodology**, including the data collection activities implemented and their main aims, and the analytical methods applied;
- Section 3: a presentation and discussion of the detailed **findings** of the evaluation study, organised around the set of evaluation questions addressed under each of the evaluation criteria;
- Section 4: a presentation of the main **conclusions** of the study and of the **recommendations** based on these conclusions.

In addition, the following documents are provided as annexes to the report:

- Annex I: Technical annex (including programme data and additional technical information supporting the analysis)
- Annex II: Public Consultation report
- Annex III: National Agency/EACEA survey
- Annex IV: Expert assessors survey
- Annex V: Socio-economic actors survey
- Annex VI: Meta-analyses
- Annex VII: Behavioural experiment report

These annexes present the outputs of some of the data collection and analysis activities undertaken during the evaluation study and presented in section 2 Methodology. They provide detailed supporting data and analysis underpinning the study findings, conclusions and recommendations.

The following documents are provided as self-standing reports:

- a **synopsis report**, presenting the results of all the consultation activities that took place in the framework of the evaluation;
- a **synthesis report** of the national reports submitted by Member States and third countries associated to the programme on the implementation and impact of Erasmus+ in their respective territories.

An **executive summary** of the evaluation study is provided as a separate document, outlining the evaluation's main conclusions, the main evidence supporting them and the recommendations arising from them.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Overview

The evaluation study was organised around a set of evaluation questions (EQs) under each evaluation criterion. A total of 63 evaluation questions were set in the terms of reference, which were grouped into 27 themes or 'macro-questions': seven under the effectiveness criterion and five each under the efficiency, relevance, coherence and European added value criteria. An evaluation framework was developed to link the evaluation questions with relevant data sources, indicators and judgment criteria.

To answer the evaluation questions, a broad set of data collection and analytical techniques were used, building on the lessons learnt from the previous combined evaluation of Erasmus+ (mid-term evaluation of Erasmus+ 2014-2020 and final evaluation of its predecessor programmes), and introducing new methods reflecting evolving evaluation requirements and techniques.

The data collection and analysis activities carried out to perform the evaluation have drawn on both primary and secondary data.

Secondary data (pre-existing or collected/produced independently from the evaluation study):

- **Programme data**, as collected by the Commission in the programme's internal dashboards managed by the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC) – in particular the dashboards on 'Programmes' Results', 'Erasmus+ reporting (MFF 2014-2020)', and 'Erasmus+ and ESC (MFF 2021-2027)' and the Statistical annexes of the Erasmus+ annual reports[3], as well as Project data from the Erasmus+ Project Results Platform[4]. The non-publicly available data (the DG EAC dashboards) was extracted on 5 January 2024 on the basis of an extraction protocol approved by DG EAC. The dashboards were 'frozen' on that day to ensure that the data would not be updated while the extraction process was ongoing. The programme data extracted from these dashboards and used for the purpose of this evaluation study is therefore based on the information that these dashboards contained up to and including 5 January 2024.
- **Literature review**, i.e. structured analysis of literature relevant to the evaluation, including the following types of documents: i) key programme documentation (Regulation, guides, annual work programmes, annual reports, National Agencies' yearly reports, National Authorities' 'October reports'); ii) documentation on programme management, monitoring tools, audit reports, dissemination tools; iii) documentation on other related EU funding instruments and relevant policy agenda developments; iv) documentation on similar national and international policy instruments; v) studies, evaluations, research reports on Erasmus+ carried out both at EU and national level, mainly by National Agencies throughout both programming periods. In total, over 1,500 sources were identified and analysed using natural language-processing (NLP) techniques and automated extraction. Additional studies were reviewed for the meta-analyses performed as part of the evaluation (see later).
- **Project sample analysis**, i.e. review of the outputs and outcomes of a sample of 180 finalised projects (162 under Erasmus+ 2014-2020 and 18 under Erasmus+

[3] https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/ro/resources-and-tools/statistics-and-factsheets

[4] https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects

2021-2027), representing around 0.1% of all finalised Erasmus+ projects over the period 2014-2023, to provide a statistical overview of: the thematic coverage of Erasmus+ projects and the relevance of those topics to key challenges in education, training, youth and sport and the programme's four horizontal priorities; the types of project outputs produced (beyond the basic classification available in the programme database); the availability of project outputs in the public domain; and the level of citation or references to project outputs.

- **National reports** prepared by the EU Member States and third countries associated to the programme on the implementation and impact of Erasmus+ in their respective territories analysed and synthetised in a self-standing report as part of this study ('synthesis report').
- **Data on comparator programmes** to compare some aspects of the Erasmus+ programme's features or performance with other schemes or initiatives with similar objectives and/or activities in the fields of education and training, youth and sport. An initial set of 68 national and transnational programmes with similar or comparable objectives or activities[5] were identified and mapped, based on desk research (mainly the analysis of the programmes' annual activity reports and websites). The selection criteria included the type of activity covered, the type of cooperation supported, the sector or field covered by the programme, the number of participant beneficiaries or funded projects over the period 2021-2023, or the total budget of the comparator programme. Both bilateral (two-way) and multilateral (multi-way) cooperation or exchange programmes were considered. Based on the outcomes of the desk research and of the collection of additional information via email, a shortlist of 32 programmes was established, aiming to ensure a geographical balance, diversity of activity, sectors and fields, as well as data availability[6].

Primary data (collected for the purpose of the evaluation study through stakeholder consultations)[7]:

- **Call for evidence** conducted by the Commission from July to September 2022 to collect stakeholder views on the programme performance and help define the scope of the evaluation. The call for evidence received 195 submissions.
- **Public consultation** (PC) conducted between September and December 2023 and aimed at collecting feedback from citizens and stakeholders on the programme's performance. A total of 1,243 contributions were sent either by individuals replying in their personal capacity or on behalf of their organisations. In addition, 64 position papers were submitted by various types of organisations from across programme fields.
- **Targeted consultations**, focusing on target groups of programme beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries as well as on different types of stakeholders, and including:
    - **Beneficiary surveys,** conducted to investigate and analyse the effects of participation in the programme among learners (school pupils, VET learners, higher education students, adult learners, youth outside of formal education/ training) and staff (in schools, VET, higher education, adult education, youth organisations and sport organisations). These surveys were conducted among all categories of individuals who participated in an Erasmus+ project from 2014 (post-mobility in the case of participation in mobility activities). A

[5] The scope of this benchmarking exercise extended to all activities covered by the Erasmus+ programme, except JMA activities which are specific to Erasmus+ and for which no comparable programme could be identified.

[6] The shortlist of comparator programmes is presented in Annex I - Technical Annex, Table 93.

[7] Further details about stakeholder consultation activities are provided in the Synopsis report.

corresponding survey was carried out among non-participants in all target groups to evaluate and analyse the effects of taking part in the programme in terms of outcomes, experiences, and attitudes (counterfactual analysis). Regression analysis was used to compare the outcomes for the two groups while controlling for compositional differences in terms of the demographics/characteristics considered, making it possible to statistically measure the existing correlation with participating in Erasmus+ (i.e., whether participation in the programme contributed to improving outcomes for programme participants). A total of 25,413 Erasmus+ participants (test group) and 2,094 non-participants (control group) took part in the learners' survey, while 26,332 participants (test group) and 2,894 non-participants (control group) took part in the staff survey. In addition, a pre/post-mobility survey targeting school pupils and youth outside of formal education/training was also carried out to obtain a finer measurement of short term effects of programme participation on the youngest target groups taking part in mobility activities. For school pupils, 366 Erasmus+ participants took part inf the survey (261 in the 'pre-mobility' component and 105 in the 'post-mobility' component), as well as 149 non-participants (123 in the 'pre-mobility' component and 26 in the 'post-mobility' one). For youth outside of formal education/training, only 7 participants 5 non-participants took part in the 'pre-mobility' component of the survey, which was considered too low to implement the 'post-mobility' component. Hence, the post-mobility survey was only carried out for school pupils.

- **Stakeholder surveys**, targeting three different types of stakeholders: Erasmus+ implementing bodies, i.e. National Agencies and EACEA (164 valid responses, including 156 from National Agencies and 8 from EACEA respondents); Erasmus+ expert assessors of project proposals and final reports for actions under direct and indirect management (1,842 valid responses); and socio-economic actors involved in Erasmus+ projects across both programming periods (1,550 valid responses).
- **Key informant interviews** (KIIs) aimed at collecting information from key informants at international, European and national levels, using semi-structured topic guides focusing on the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and coherence evaluation criteria. A total of 267 interviews were conducted (42 with international level informants, 60 with European-level informants, and 165 with national-level informants), involving stakeholders from 38 countries (21 Member States, 4 associated third countries; 13 non associated third countries).
- **Case studies** focusing on selected Erasmus+ projects and beneficiary organisations, and aimed at analysing different perspectives (staff, learners, organisation, project and system) on the benefits and effects of participating in the programme. 186 stakeholders were interviewed to carry out a total of 44 case studies, of which 29 examining organisational developments in organisations coordinating Erasmus+ projects in all programme fields ('organisational-level' case studies), 8 assessing how Jean Monnet Actions (JMAs) enhance teaching and research on European studies worldwide and contribute to spreading knowledge about the European Union ('Jean Monnet' case studies), and 7 analysing how specific programme actions impact practices and policymaking across programme fields ('system-level' case studies).

These various targeted consultation activities were designed to complement each other and to collectively provide a solid and wide evidence base to support the evaluation across its various dimensions.

In addition to these 'traditional' data collection and analysis activities, more advanced and innovative methods were also used to complement the evidence base:

- **Social media analysis**, to understand and measure awareness about the programme and its actions among different audiences on various social media platforms, track and analyse audience reaction to programme communications, campaigns or events, capture engagement metrics and other factors to better understand the programme's audience profile, as well as collect and analyse insights around sentiment and themes relevant to the programme and its actions. To this end, a social media listening tool (Talkwalker) was used to collect data from several platforms: X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok. Over 150,000 social media posts were collected for the analysis, mentioning one or more programme-related keywords. In addition, data from relevant social media accounts managed by DG EAC was also analysed.
- **Network analysis**, using publicly available data sources as well as programme data to identify participation patterns in the programme, understand the degree of cross-sectoral cooperation and interconnectedness of country and organisational networks, and compare network characteristics across actions, fields and time.
- **Behavioural analysis**, conducted through an online survey on a panel of over 10,000 non-participants and aimed at exploring why some groups of people participate in Erasmus+ while others do not, using rigorous methods from behavioural and experimental economics, and to shed light on the factors that hinder participation, also with a counterfactual approach.
- **Meta-analysis**, to summarise in a structured way the conclusions of several scientific studies looking at individual level impacts linked to the programme's participation and focusing on three topics: skills development, employability and European values.

The evidence collected through these various data collection and analysis activities was then analysed using the approach of systematic synthesis and triangulation to review, systemise and confirm findings and to provide robust answers to the evaluation questions. To this end, various methods were used to analyse and synthetise the collected data, including the following:

- **Textual analytics** using natural language processing (NLP) to automatically pre-process large amounts of structured or unstructured text data, extract information relevant for the evaluation, and quantify text data where relevant. These techniques were used across several activities for this evaluation study, including in particular the literature review, the analysis of answers to open questions in the various consultation activities, and the analysis of position papers submitted by respondents to the public consultation, as well as to extract and process information from the national reports on the implementation and impacts of the programme, to support the production of the synthesis report.
- **Qualitative comparative analysis (QCA)** to analyse patterns in qualitative data. This was in particular used to analyse the write-ups of key informant interviews and the national reports to retrieve relevant information and produce usable summaries.
- **Benchmarking analysis**, using the data collected on comparator programmes to address four evaluation questions: EQ 10 examining the efficiency of grants and participant volumes of Erasmus+ with respect to other programmes; EQ 20.1 and 21.1 focusing on the coherence and complementarity of Erasmus+ with other national and international programmes; and EQ 23 assessing its added value. In each case, only the programmes and metrics relevant for the specific question were used. To enhance the analysis, insights from public consultations and key informant

interviews were incorporated to compare Erasmus+ with other programmes or to assess its synergies, and complementarities with them.

The process of **data triangulation** was applied throughout the evaluation by systematically analysing and reviewing the findings from different sources of evidence as they came in, and more systematically in several rounds through team workshops and reviews to produce the first and second interim reports, and then the draft final and final reports. Both methodological and data triangulation were used, to build on the outputs of the different quantitative and qualitative research methods used, and to compare and consolidate data from various sources, with a view to provide a complete and reliable picture and enhance the validity of the findings.

This process made it possible to cross-check evidence and identify and examine possible bias and inconsistencies, thus making it possible to differentiate the evidence arising from single sources from that which could be corroborated by several sources and thus underpin the evaluaton findings. It also helped to identify remaining gaps in the evidence base, allowing appropriate action to be taken to fill them.

In addition, **five stakeholder workshops** were organised at various stages of the evaluation process, which were also used to review, fine-tune and confirm the study findings at various stages of their elaboration, as well as to capture additional expert input to support their further development. These five workshops focused on the stakeholder consultation strategy (June 2023), the meta-analyses (March 2024), the key issues for a possible successor of the Erasmus+ programme (March 2024), the findings from the draft final report (July 2024), and the synthesis of national reports on the impact and implementation of Erasmus+ (September 2024).

2.2 Strengths and weaknesses

The methodology applied to carry out the evaluation study made it possible to produce findings that are, to the maximum extent possible, robust, coherent and consistent. This is thanks to:

- **The use of a very wide array of data collection and analysis techniques and methods**, designed to complement each other and including both 'traditional' activities and more innovative ones, which has made it possible to collect a wealth of quantitative data and qualitative information, together constituting a very wide and solid body of evidence to underpin the evaluation.
- **The use of systematic synthesis and triangulation** to review, analyse and combine the outputs of the various data collection activities and produce the evaluation findings and conclusions presented in this report. This makes it possible to provide answers to the evaluation questions that:
  - are clear, well-structured and based on reliable judgement criteria and indicators;
  - are clearly traceable to the evidence sources;
  - are underpinned by a variety of sources whenever possible, limiting the risk of biases due to a single source/perspective;
  - use stakeholder contributions in an appropriate and balanced way;
  - are based on carefully observed cause/effect assumptions about Erasmus+;
  - consider all relevant contextual factors that might influence findings (e.g. COVID-19 pandemic, war in Ukraine, inflation spike of 2021-2023); and
  - present credible findings, identifying and discussing the key limitations of the data collected where needed.

In addition, the methodology used to extract programme monitoring data made it possible to use a reliable dataset for the evaluation study. The programme data were extracted from

several dashboards held and maintained by DG EAC and the EACEA, on the basis of a protocol including a set of parameters agreed with EAC, which aimed at capturing all elements of interest for the evaluation, including the data for the measurement of programme indicators. The establishment of this agreed 'extraction protocol' ensured that the study team could navigate consistently across programme rules and features, that data could be extracted in a transparent and traceable way and verified step by step. The extraction from frozen dashboards also allowed to obtain a single, stable and replicable data set reflecting the state of play of programme implementation at the cut-off date of 31 December 2023.

However, the methodology used for the study also entails several **weaknesses or limitations**, some inherent to its design and some related to its implementation. These limitations include the following:

- **Limitations of extracted programme data**: The extraction methodology for the programme data was designed to ensure the validity, completeness and usability of the data obtained. To this end, the extraction of the data was subject to clear parameters, which sought to ensure the most reliable and comparable data, also across programming periods. Nevertheless, the methodology used faces some limitations:
    - First, the data set for the period 2021-2023 is incomplete. The establishment of a cut-off date for data extraction (fixed at 31 December 2023) implies that a large share of 2021 and 2022 projects was obviously still on-going. Furthermore, the dataset used for Call year 2023 in particular is incomplete as it can only take into account contracted projects and contracted mobility at the date of 31 December 2023. This is a recurrent issue, which is flagged wherever relevant across the report. The incompleteness of 2023 data affects in particular the evaluation of some new initiatives introduced in the 2021-2027 programme, for which the available dataset is limited to one or two years of implementation[8]. Nevertheless, to ensure that conclusions reliably reflect the most recent state of play of the programme implementation, where relevant, measures adopted after the cut-off date and showing a positive or negative evolution of the programme performance have been reported, although their effectiveness could not be evaluated.
    - Second, not all data is comparable across the evaluation period (2014-2023), as indicators and some actions have changed in the transition to the current programming period. Furthermore, the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (MEF) for Erasmus+ 2021-2027, adopted in September 2023, introduced 12 additional indicators, on top of those included in the Legal basis of the programme. The late adoption of the MEF implied that some operational parameters were not fully in place at the time of data extraction. Where this is the case, this has been indicated in the report.
    - Third, not all legal basis indicators could be extracted from the programme data, hence the data relating to some programme outputs, results, or impacts were taken from the MFF Programme Results Reports or shared directly with the study team by DG EAC.
- **Recruitment of beneficiary survey respondents**: The recruitment of survey respondents was mostly based on contact databases provided by DG EAC for learners and organisations' staff in all programme sectors and across both programming periods. These contact databases were of varying sizes depending

[8] This is the case in particular of the DiscoverEU inclusion action (first call in 2022) and even more of the staff mobility in the sport sector, which only had its first call for proposals in 2023.

on the target groups, reflecting in a proportionate way the size of the action and the representativeness of the specific target group across programme actions. As a result, the survey samples obtained were also of varying sizes – larger for the target groups addressed by actions with a larger budget and implemented in both programming periods (e.g. higher education student mobility) and more limited for the smaller and most recent ones (e.g. mobility of school pupils, adult learners, sport staff, the latter only launched in 2023). This impacts the reliability of findings for the latter groups, as well as the capacity to generalise the findings to the whole programme with sufficient confidence. In addition, this recruitment approach did not make it possible to judge the extent to which the surveyed respondents are representative of the actual population of programme participants, as only a few background characteristics are collected on the programme participants in the programme dashboards compared to those inquired as part of the survey, and the data collection methods between the surveys and the dashboards are not comparable. Furthermore, some limitations also exist concerning the counterfactual analysis. This analysis does control for various characteristics of both participants and non-participants when judging the differences in results. However, the sample sizes of the control groups of non-beneficiaries are significantly smaller than the test groups of beneficiaries, limiting the capacity to control for some characteristics when judging the differences in result variables measured, and reducing the capacity to assess the extent to which these differences might in fact be related to participation in the programme.

- **Limitations of impact evaluation methodology**: the impact evaluation methodology used for the beneficiary surveys is based on a regression adjustment approach (i.e., controlling for impact confounders in a regression framework) to address causality. Controlling for these variables makes it possible to provide estimates of the impact of participation in Eramsus+ on a number of outcomes. However, the fact that the impact estimates result from multivariate regression design rather than counterfactual impact evaluation techniques means that the impact measures provided do not account for potential unobservable characteristics that were not collected in the data set. Potential unobserved characteristics (like motivation and other personality traits) might be associated with both participation in Erasmus+ and outcome variables which could bias the estimated impact measures. Hence, some degree of caution should be exercised when interpreting the impact estimates obtained, which should be considered as only indicative of the real impact exerted by Erasmus+ on the outcomes explored.
- **Qualitative fieldwork**: The recruitment of respondents for the key informant interviews and the selection of organisations for the case studies were made using category-based and criterion-based purposeful sampling (i.e. spread across each level of intervention or impact, field covered by the programme, type of stakeholder, etc.). This recruitment was based on voluntary participation and was thus contingent on the targeted individuals' and organisations' willingness and availability to participate. In the case of key informant interviews, this was mitigated through the identification by DG EAC of alternative target informants, and for the case studies through the replacement of organisations unresponsive or unwilling to participate by others from a reserve list. This, however, generated delays in the completion of the fieldwork in both activities and, in the case of case studies, slightly affected the geographical balance and coverage of programme actions.
- **Social media analysis**: due to the different data privacy restrictions implemented by the various social media platforms, a vast majority of the social media posts collected and included in the analysis stemmed from one platform (X/Twitter), which applies the least restrictions to the collection of data from public accounts. As a result of these platform restrictions, the collected data cannot be considered as

representative of the overall social media activity that has been taking place around the Erasmus+ programme during the period considered and of all its target groups.

- **Benchmarking analysis**: the data collected on comparator programme is largely based on desk research and publicly available information. The granularity of this data collected is therefore variable, and limited for most comparator programmes. As a result, the depth of the benchmarking exercise was limited. Actions were put in place to ensure the best-match possible with the characteristics of the Erasmus+ programme under analysis in the relevant evaluation questions and the best 'like-for-like' comparison possible. However, the quality and granularity of the data available made necessary a trade-off between the number of comparator programmes retained for the analysis and the depth of the analysis itself. Consequently, data at different levels was applied to each of the evaluation questions tackled for this analysis to ensure accuracy and alignment with the objectives of the relevant question.
- **Project sample analysis**: the methodology used did not make it possible to identify system-level effects from the projects examined or systemic-effects linked to the horizontal priorities of the programme. However, the activity provided insights into the thematic coverage of Erasmus+ projects, the types of outputs and outcomes delivered.

3 EVALUATION FINDINGS

3.1 Effectiveness

3.1.1 EQ 1 Achievement of programme objectives

EQ 1.1: To what extent have the expected outputs, results and impacts been achieved in both evaluation periods? Based on the level of achievement of the intervention logic, is there a need to streamline the programme's objectives? Are there any objectives missing from the Erasmus+ programme?

This first sub-question on the effectiveness of the Erasmus+ programme examines the achievements regarding the expected outputs, results and impacts of the 2014-2020 and 2021-2027 programmes, with reference to the intervention logics for both programming periods, to the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (MEF) of Erasmus+ 2021-2027[9] and the mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme (2014-2020)[10]. It then explores the potential need to streamline the programme's objectives and address any missing objectives.

Overall, the analysis carried out for this evaluation indicates that the programme made strong progress towards achieving its expected outputs, results and impacts in both programming periods, particularly regarding the volume of mobilities (which is especially noteworthy given the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mobilities during the period), the improvement in participants' skills and competences, the influence of Erasmus+ on policy, and improvements in the practices of participating organisations. For the 2014-2020 programme, expected outputs, results, and impacts were generally on track until call years 2019 and 2020, which were heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. In the 2021-2027 programme, expected outputs, results, and impacts had a slightly slowed start (due to the impacts of COVID-19 on call year 2021), but are on track to meet or have already met targets. These findings are based on strong quantitative findings against clearly outlined targets, as well as on qualitative insights from stakeholders.

Outputs

The intervention logics for both programming periods define a number of key outputs. These outputs (presented under 'types of actions' in the intervention logic for the 2014-2020 period) can be summarised under three categories: i) actions aimed at individuals, ii) actions aimed at organisations, and iii) actions at the system level.

This division is slightly different in the current programming period (2021-2027) where the above three 'categories' fall roughly within Key Actions 1, 2, and 3 respectively, while JMA are not linked to any key action and can produce outputs at all three levels.

A detailed mapping of the targets included in the MFF Performance Results Reports (Programme Performance Statements)[11] against the outputs from the programme data to assess programme achievements is provided in Annex I[12]. An overview of the degree of

[9] Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2023/2710 of 13 September 2023 supplementing Regulation (EU) 2021/817 of the European Parliament and of the Council with provisions on the establishment of a monitoring and evaluation framework for the Erasmus+ programme, OJ L, 2023/2710, 5.12.2023 (https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg_del/2023/2710). SWD(2023) 296 of 13 September 2023 (LexUriServ.do (europa.eu)).

[10] "Commission Staff Working Document on the Mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme (2014-2020) accompanying the document Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of Regions, SWD(2018) 40, 31 January 2018 (https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/swd-e-plus-mte.pdf).

[11] European Commission, 2024. "MFF Performance Results Reports: Performance Data Tables". https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2023-06/Core%20performance%20indicators%20%28new%29.pdf

[12] See Annex I, Technical Annex, Tables 43 and 44

achievement of the main types of outputs from the intervention logic is provided in the table below, highlighting the kind of evidence used to assess these outputs and the extent to which they can be considered achieved. Across the full range of outputs that have been tracked, the programme is generally on track to achieve its expected outputs or has already achieved them. The green shading in the table below means that the achievement of the output is on track/attained, while orange indicates that the achievement is somewhat lagging behind, yet not to a major extent. This overview table contains no red, which would have signalled significant underachievement. The distinction between orange and red is made based on whether the programme is anticipated to be able to get back on track before the end of the programming period, or where targets were only just missed.

It should be noted, though, that targets and outputs set in the MFF Programme Performance Statements are not measured the same way as the outputs taken into account in this analysis, as figures are extracted at different stages of the project lifecycle. The degree of achievement of the outputs of the programme is assessed by comparing the targets from the MFF Programme Performance Statements (where available) to the programme data extracted for this evaluation. The table below highlights the results of this comparison, as well as the use of other quantitative and qualitative evidence to summarise the programme's achievements.

Table 1: Overview of the degree of achievement of outputs from the intervention logic[13]

2014-2020		**2021-2027**	
Achievement of output	**Evidence**	**Achievement of output**	**Evidence**
Mobilities for learners	Quantitative and qualitative	Mobilities for learners	Quantitative and qualitative
Mobilities for staff	Quantitative and qualitative	Mobilities for staff	Quantitative and qualitative
Small scale cooperation projects	Qualitative evidence	Partnerships for cooperation	Quantitative evidence
Large scale cooperation projects	Qualitative evidence	Capacity-building projects	Qualitative evidence
Policy outputs (development, support, events, etc.)	Qualitative evidence	Online platforms and tools for virtual cooperation	Quantitative evidence
Organisation participations (not an official output)[14]	Quantitative evidence	Policy outputs (development, support, events, etc.)	Qualitative evidence
Jean Monnet activities	Qualitative evidence	Organisation participations (not an official output)[15]	Quantitative evidence
		Jean Monnet Actions	Qualitative evidence

Note: 'Quantitative evidence' refers to programme data, the Network analysis, or data from the stakeholder surveys (beneficiary surveys, socio-economic actors survey or NA/EACEA survey), whereas 'qualitative evidence' refers to the key informant interviews, scoping interviews, case studies or PC reports. Evidence from the literature review or meta-analysis can fall under either category, depending on the type of source.

[13] The outputs from the intervention logic have been slightly rephrased for brevity's sake.

[14] The outputs for organisation participations in the 2014-2020 programming period are partially achieved (number of participations from youth organisations has been achieved, while the partner country HE institutions has fallen behind target slightly between 2018-2020. Data on organisations and projects by country for actions under indirect and direct management was not tracked accurately in the MFF Performance Review Reports and hence no judgement could be made).

[15] In the 2021-2027 programming period organisation participations in education and training, youth and sport are lagging behind targets, hence the use of orange.

The table shows that mobilities in both programming periods are performing very well, even if there have been a few instances in which performance has been slightly below the expected outputs. Policy outputs across both programming periods are particularly well-regarded by a range of stakeholders[16]. Organisation participations across both programming periods deviate slightly from the expected outputs; while some are achieved (e.g., youth organisation participations), others lag behind (e.g., the KA2 organisation participations, partner country Higher Education institutions).

Beyond the MFF Performance Results Reports, which track outputs based on the indicators established in Annex II of the 2021-2027 Erasmus+ Regulation, it is difficult to assess to what extent the targets set for outputs under KA3 (other than the number of organisations taking part) and the JMA have been achieved, including for policy dialogue and cooperation, policy debates in higher education, or teaching and learning about objectives, values, and functioning of the EU in schools and VET institutions. While aims are set in the Programme Guide, these are difficult to track and would benefit from common indicators and measures to assess their achievement. At present, they are not supported by indicators or measures included in the Programme Performance Statements, Annual Reports, or the Annual Work Programmes to identify whether they have been achieved. Some of the actions, particularly Jean Monnet in School and VET education, are relatively new and hence there is little information available on their performance. This means that, while this evaluation has limited insights on these actions, evaluating them should be possible in more detail towards the end of the 2021-2027 programming period.

Stakeholders[17] that participated in the key informant and scoping interviews further signalled that, among the JMA, the field of higher education is working well. The number of submitted applications decreased in 2021 and 2022, but they have increased again in 2023 and 2024. With respect to other fields of education and training (school education and VET), it appears challenging for schools to engage with the application process as they often lack capacity and know-how to prepare these documents. Moreover, there are legal issues hindering the awarding process as public schools often do not have their own legal entity (belonging to national/regional public entities), which is required to sign a grant agreement. This can affect the interest, application and participation of public schools in the action.

Building on the programme data, the Network analysis conducted for this evaluation reveals that the level of engagement of countries participating in the Erasmus+ programme is relatively balanced. Most Member States send mobilities to (almost) all other participating countries, hence their degree centrality measures are closely matched. Unsurprisingly, and in line with funding, third countries associated to the programme have far less complete engagement. Noteworthy is that the impacts of COVID-19 on mobilities were not felt evenly across participating countries, with Cyprus, Greece, Croatia, Hungary, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Latvia, and North Macedonia particularly impacted, and which have not yet returned to the same levels of cooperation as prior to the pandemic.

Concerning the outputs in the 2014-2020 programming period, a strong performance for staff and learner mobilities can be observed. The only targets not achieved were either in 2014, which in all those cases had ambitious targets that were adjusted (VET, school and adult education staff, participants with special needs or fewer opportunities in the youth sector), or in call years 2019 and 2020 (only in the case of learner mobilities in the youth and higher education fields). In all those cases targets were surpassed significantly for the

[16] Case studies: Stichting Flik-Flak (SPO, NL), Agenzija Zghazagh (YOU, MT), Youth for exchange and understanding international (YOU, BE), European University Institute (IT), European Institute of Public Administration (NL), EdLab, Universidad de Granada (ES), Regional Capacity for Adult Edudcation and Learning, EAEA (BE), Pilot PoVE Water, CIV Water (NL), Youth Wiki (MT, FR, CY).

[17] Scoping interviews with EACEA, the European Parliament, and a National Agency, and a key informant interview with DG EAC.

remaining call years of the programming period. Information on the performance of the programme on small- and large-scale cooperation projects and policy outputs stems from the case studies and interviews conducted as part of this evaluation[18], which reflect positively on accomplishments on these outputs. There are no quantitative targets associated with these outputs. Organisation participations fell slightly short of targets more consistently: a number of partner country higher education institutions did not meet targets in two of four years for which they were set. Conversely, youth organisation targets were met consistently during the programming period.

The outputs for the 2021-2027 period at this interim evaluation stage generally indicate strong performance too. Mobilities of both staff and learners, and participants with fewer opportunities, are slightly below targets. However, the figures used for mobility data in this report do not provide a full overview of call years 2021-2023 as not all projects have been completed. The distance between these incomplete figures and targets is limited enough to conclude the progress towards these outputs is on track. Partnerships for cooperation (notably falling behind in youth and education and training fields, while meeting targets in sport) and organisation participations (with KA1 and KA3 below targets, but KA2 on track in call year 2021) are lagging slightly behind the target. Evidence on capacity-building projects (from the KIIs) and policy outputs (KIIs and case studies[19]) find the performance of the programme on these outputs strong. The numbers of virtual platform users under KA2 are on track for the European School Education Platform (ESEP) (previously the School Education Gateway) but have fallen slightly short for the Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe (EPALE) and eTwinning platforms[20]. Although the eTwinning community has been a part of the European School Education Platform since 2022, both ESEP and eTwinning have independent targets specified in the Programme Performance Statement. JMA, lastly, do not have quantitative output targets associated with them, but consulted stakeholders indicate that the activities under this action are generally effective[21]. However, JMA did not receive many applications in the fields of schools and VET for funding in the first two calls in 2022 and 2023. None of these constitute a major cause for concern, and programme documentation has signalled several reasons for delays or falling short of targets.

Results and Outcomes

The second type of effect defined in the intervention logic are results (called outcomes in the 2014-2020 period), which tie into facets such as improved skills, competences and knowledge of participants (for KA1), EU identity and active citizenship (for KA3), cooperation between organisations and increased capacity (for KA2), as well as additional teaching and learning around European Studies (for JMA). These results are partially tracked through programme data (with targets specified in the Programme Performance Statements, and otherwise have more qualitative aims described in the Programme Guide). The quantitative results that can be tracked have all been achieved.

An overview of the degree of achievement of results from the intervention logic is provided in the table below. Rather than discussing the full range of results, it provides a summary view of the main types of results, and highlights what kind of evidence is used to assess them, and the extent to which they are achieved. The programme is generally on track to

[18] Specifically, 7 KIIs mentioned achievements of cooperation projects – all of which made positive references (2 from Commission services, 4 from NAs, 1 from an international stakeholder organisation).

[19] Case studies: Pädagogische Hochschule Freiburg (SCH, DE), TU Berlin - ENHANCE Alliance (HED, DE), Universidad de Sevilla (HED, ES), Thomas More – Sportleg partnership (SPO, BE), Stichting Flik-Flak (SPO, NL), EuropeActive (SPO, BE), AKMI Anonimi Ekpaideftiki Etairia (VET, EL), Agenzija Zghazagh (YOU, MT), Scuola superiore di studi universitari e di perfezionamento Sant'Anna (IT), European University Institute (IT), European Institute of Public Administration (NL), Edlab, Universidad de Granada (ES), Regional Capacity for Adult Learning and Education, EAEA (BE), Youth Wiki (MT, FR, CY)

[20] See Annex I – Technical Annex, Tables 43 and 44 for more detail.

[21] Case studies: Casa do Professor (JMA, PT), European University Institute (JMA, IT), European Institute of Public Administration (JMA, NL).

achieving its expected results, or has already achieved them, across the full scope of results that have been tracked. Overall, progress in terms of results achievements is very positive, as measured both quantitatively (where possible) and qualitatively, with a few minor exceptions[22]. Results such as organisational networks, quality improvements, policy outputs, and research, teaching and learning about the EU are only supported by limited qualitative evidence, and are less substantiated as a result[23].

Table 2: Summary of the degree of achievement of results from the intervention logic

2014-2020		**2021-2027**	
Achievement of result (outcome)	**Evidence**	**Achievement of result**	**Evidence**
Improved skills, knowledge, and competences (individual level)	Qualitative and quantitative	Improved skills, knowledge, and competences (individual level)	Quantitative and qualitative
Changes in attitude, personal development, motivation (individual level)	Qualitative evidence	Changes in attitude, personal development, values, motivation, citizenship (individual level)	Quantitative and qualitative
Quality improvements at organisation level (new curricula, new practices, etc.)	Qualitative evidence	Quality improvements at organisation level (new curricula, new practices, capacity-building)	Qualitative evidence
Stronger international networks with other organisations, businesses, etc.	Qualitative evidence	Stronger international networks with other organisations, businesses, international, etc. (e.g. to exchange good practices)	Qualitative evidence
Policy outputs (policy debates, exchanges)	Qualitative evidence	Policy outputs (e.g. policy debates, exchanges)	Qualitative evidence
Research and teaching about the EU	Quantitative evidence	Research, learning and teaching about the EU (at individual and institutional level)	Qualitative evidence

Note: this table summarises the results from the intervention logic at a high level. These are slightly rephrased for brevity's sake. 'Quantitative evidence' refers to programme data, the Network analysis, or data from the stakeholder surveys (beneficiary survey, socio-economic actors survey or NA/EACEA survey), whereas qualitative evidence refers to the KIIs, scoping interviews, case studies, or PC report. Evidence from the literature review or meta-analysis can fall in either category, depending on the type of source.

Outcomes for the 2014-2020 programming period have all been achieved. Improved skills and competences, quantitatively assessed through the percentage of participants declaring that they have increased their key competences, and the percentage of participants in long-term mobility declaring that they have increased their language skills, have surpassed targets. Stakeholder insights, moreover, speak to the strong accomplishments of the programme on attitudes, personal development and motivation of participants, quality

[22] Targets for which quantitative evidence exists are highlighted in tables 43 and 44 in Annex I – Technical Annex

[23] See Annex I -Technical Annex, Tables 43 and 44.

improvements at the organisational level, and organisational networks. Similarly, stakeholders also signal the strong performance of the programme with regard to policy outputs and research and teaching about the EU. These insights are further corroborated through a number of reports studying the impact of Erasmus+ between 2014 and 2020[24].

For the 2021-2027 programming period, the results are also generally on track. Results regarding organisational networks, policy outputs, and research and teaching about the EU are deemed strong by stakeholders, and evidence from the literature review seems to support such views[25]. In terms of improved skills, knowledge, and competencies, there are a range of quantitative indicators signalling the strong performance of the programme. Tables 49, 50, 51, and 63 in Annex I display data on the indicators specified in the Staff Working Document on the Monitoring of Evaluation Framework of Erasmus+ 2021-2027[26], i.e. four indicators established by Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2023/2710 of 13 September 2023 and measuring results linked to the horizontal priorities and presented here at disaggregated level. These four indicators do not have annual milestones, but only final targets (i.e. to be achieved by the end of the programming period). These indicators show, without exception, marked improvement across the three years (though 2023 data is very tentative). It is important to note that, as these indicators were only adopted in September 2023, reporting has only started recently, even if data has been collected since 2021.

In addition, the Programme Performance Statement includes targets on the percentage of participants that received certificates, diplomas, or other formal recognitions in higher education, VET and the youth sector – all of which have been achieved (or significantly surpassed). Lastly, targets for the share of activities and projects addressing horizontal priorities under KA1 and KA2 for 2021 and 2022 have been surpassed significantly as well. However, there is a key inconsistency in the indicators or targets that affect 'results' indicators. In combining the sub-questions that compose the 'results' indicators established through the Delegated Act, statements are combined into a singular statistic that has different wording or is asking about different concepts (e.g. learning compared to changing habits). This means that the final statistics reported are difficult to interpret and have far less meaning than the disaggregated questions/indicators.

The share of organisations and institutions that consider they have developed high quality practices as a result of their participation in KA2 of the education and training strand, and the share of organisations that consider procedures for participation to be proportionate and simple, are included in the Programme Performance Statement. However, there are no data to track this performance yet, since the relevant changes in the final beneficiaries' reports were released only in autumn 2023 (and – though stored in the data warehouse – they are displayed in the dashboards only as from beginning of 2024).

The **results from the beneficiary learner survey further confirm the acquisition of skills**. The figure below shows that learners consider that their mobility has helped them acquire or improve professional skills in teamwork, sector- or field-specific skills, planning and organisational skills, analytical and problem-solving skills, and innovative and entrepreneurial skills. Results for learners with fewer opportunities are overall very similar, showing only a few minor differences. VET learners are on average slightly more positive

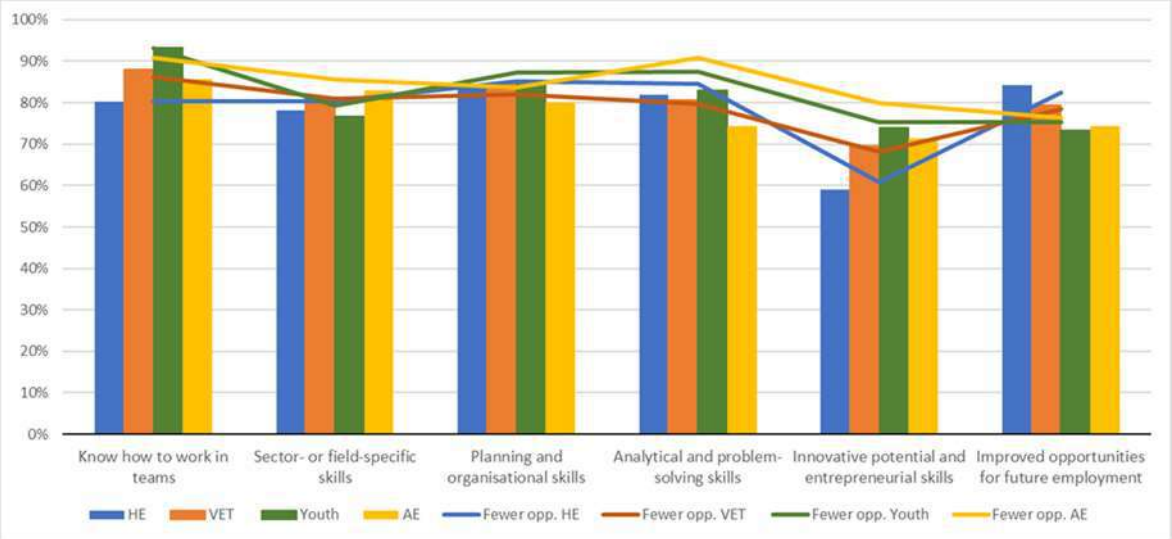
[24] See, for example, Erasmus+ Annual Reports 2014-2020, the Combined evaluation of Erasmus+ and predecessor programmes (2018); Erasmus+ National Agency Lithuania (2019). "Longitudinal study on the impact and sustainability of the Erasmus+ Programme key action 1 mobility projects for school education staff"; European Commission (2019). "Erasmus+ higher education impact study".

[25] See, for example, Erasmus+ Annual Reports 2021-2023, and the European Parliament report on the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027 (2023); European Commission (2023). "Study on Learning Mobility"; DAAD (2022). "Erasmus+ Cooperation Projects—Elements of Successful Internationalisation"; Epos (2022). "Impact van Erasmus+ en eTwinning op scholen".

[26] SWD(2023) 296 of 13 September 2023.

compared to their peers with fewer opportunities. Adult learners with fewer opportunities are those perceiving more benefits compared to other adult learners; however, given the limited size of this specific sample, it is difficult to draw firm conclusions. On average, both young people and students with fewer opportunities perceive more benefits compared to their peers in particular regarding analytical and problem-solving skills, followed by sector- or field specific skills. These findings thus also suggest the programme has had positive achievements regarding inclusion.

Figure 1: Share of learners (participants with and without fewer opportunities) by field who agreed that their stay abroad helped them acquire or improve the following professional skills:



Source: based on findings from the beneficiaries survey for learners with mobility start years between 2014 and 2023 (inclusive), based on a total of responses "strongly agreeing" or "rather agreeing" to these statements from a total of 8,588 participants in higher education, 2,107 participants in VET, 761 participants in youth, and 35 participants in adult education not identifying themselves as having fewer opportunities. For participants with fewer opportunities, this figure based on a total of responses "strongly agreeing" or "rather agreeing" from a total of 8,152 participants in higher education, 3,148 in VET, 1,718 in youth, and 55 in adult education with fewer opportunities. The question was not asked to school pupils.

Impacts

The impacts defined in the programme intervention logics for both programming periods can also be divided into individual-, organisational-, and system-level impacts. While these three levels of impacts link directly to Erasmus+ objectives, their achievement is more difficult to measure and to attribute to the programme. Impacts may take longer to demonstrate than outputs or results, and hence this is likely to influence the findings regarding impacts for the 2021-2027 programme in particular.

The three meta-analyses performed as part of this evaluation study show that there are only a limited number of studies on the causal impact of Erasmus+, meaning that it is difficult to assess the direct and specific role of the programme in trends observed at individual-, organisational-, and system-levels (e.g. former participants having higher wages or a higher willingness to work across borders than their peers could be due to selection bias and result from other individual characteristics) or in wider societal trends (e.g. on Europeanisation of education systems). However, even if the magnitude or causality of Erasmus+ on such impacts is difficult to assess, it is noteworthy that positive correlations or upward trends are observed in individual-, organisational-, and system-level impacts that form part of the Erasmus+ objectives. The case studies shed light on system-level impacts in particular, and

signal that stakeholders view these impacts positively and can name examples of such impacts – though it is difficult to ascertain their magnitude and frequency[27].

Box 1: Example of system-level impacts from the EdLab project on the European degree (label) (Case Study)

The European degree (label) was presented as one of the flagships of the 2022 Commission Communication on a European strategy for universities that proposed exploratory work for the award of a joint European degree based on European criteria and work towards a legal status for alliances of universities by piloting the implementation of existing European instruments. 10 Erasmus+ policy experimentation projects started in Spring 2023 following the adoption of the Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective higher education cooperation that invited the Commission to "pilot (…) the development and implementation under Erasmus+ of European criteria for the award of a joint European degree label. Their work has inspired the Commission's European Degree package presented in March 2024.

One of these policy experimentation projects was the ***EdLab project (European Degree Label institutional laboratory) funded under KA3****, in the 2021-2027 programming period. The project aims to test European criteria for a European degree (label), and provides recommendations towards a possible European degree. As part of this project, significant contributions were made by 26 Higher education institutions involved in four European Universities alliances (ARQUS, ENLIGHT, EUTOPIA and SEA-EU alliances). They cooperated with several ministries, quality assurance agencies and stakeholder organisations (e.g. student organisations) as associated partner to the project. This showcases the important role of the alliances in driving progress for the entire higher education sector. It also showcases not only the willingness to cooperate across borders, but also across the different European Universities alliances, with the ultimate goal from the sector of bringing about a new level of scope and intensity in European higher education cooperation through the development of a European degree (label)*

The EdLab project contributed to the European Commission's Blueprint for a European Degree and the two accompanying proposals for a Council Recommendation relevant for the development of joint programmes, namely on a European quality assurance and recognition system and on attractive and sustainable academic careers. EdLab has notably contributed to the testing of the criteria for a European degree (label). They also analysed the procedure for the issue of a European degree (label certificate) and its format, along with potential barriers to be addressed to produce detailed policy advice.

The work under the policy experimentation projects also spurred impact beyond the Commission's work into the Member States. For example, the regional government of Andalucia is considering adjustments to legislation to facilitate transnational cooperation in higher education and is supporting a pilot project to accommodate joint Bachelor programmes.

EdLab, as well as the other policy experimentation projects supporting the development of a European degree (label) have actively contributed to fostering an environment more conducive to legislative changes at the national level through close collaboration with national authorities, higher education stakeholders and Quality Assurance agencies. The collective effort of the policy experimentation projects has demonstrated significant impact, prompting systemic shifts and cultural changes paving the way towards a possible European degree (label). They have facilitated discussions among stakeholders and encouraged the further uptake of the Bologna tools. Focus groups and webinars have promoted dialogue between higher education institutions from across Europe, quality assurance agencies, ministries, and public authorities, contributing to broader systemic changes and highlighting the importance of collective engagement in shaping educational policies and practices.

[27] Case studies: Stichting Flik-Flak (SPO, NL), Agenzija Zghazagh (YOU, MT), Youth for exchange and understanding international (YOU, BE), European University Institute (JMA, IT), European Institute of Public Administration (JMA, NL), EdLab, Universidad de Granada (HED, ES), Regional Capacity for Adult Learning and Education, EAEA (ADU, BE), Pilot PoVE Water, CIV Water (VET, NL), Youth Wiki (Youth, MT, FR, CY).

An overview of the degree of achievement of impacts from the intervention logic is presented in the table below. Rather than discussing the full range of impacts, it provides a summary view of main types of impacts and highlights the kind of evidence used to assess these impacts and the extent to which these impacts are achieved. The programme generally seems to perform well towards these impacts, and while it is difficult to quantify the impacts of the programme, there is significant (self-)reported evidence on impacts at an individual level, and various examples of impact at an organisation and system level that have been included in the evaluation. Individual-level impacts can be quantified from impact studies and surveys. Impacts on organisations and the system-level tend to be perceived and described very positively by stakeholders[28], while programme impacts around accessibility and the quality of projects can be measured through the programme data (and are discussed in detail throughout this evaluation report, such as in EQ5).

Table 3 Summary of the degree of achievement of impacts from the intervention logic

2014-2020		**2021-2027**	
Achievement of impacts	**Evidence**	**Achievement of impacts**	**Evidence**
Impacts on individuals: Changes in participant behaviour or outcomes (e.g. employability, % that say they benefited from participation)	Quantitative and qualitative	Impacts on individuals: Changes in participant behaviour or outcomes (e.g. % that say they benefited from participation, % with increased European sense of belonging)	Quantitative and qualitative
Impacts on organisations and institutions: internationalisation, lasting partnerships, increased capacity, quality of work	Quantitative and qualitative	Impacts on organisations and institutions: internationalisation, lasting partnerships, increased capacity, quality of work	Qualitative and qualitative
System-level impacts: Europeanisation of education system, skilled labour, more learning about EU, etc.	Qualitative	System-level impacts: Europeanisation of education system, skilled labour, more learning about EU, etc.	Qualitative
Programme impacts: improved accessibility of the programme, improved quality of projects, etc.	Quantitative and qualitative	Programme impacts: improved accessibility of the programme, improved quality of projects, etc.	Quantitative and qualitative
Improved education completion	Qualitative and evidence from impact studies	Share of participants that consider they have benefited from their participation in learning mobility activities under KA1	Quantitative
Improved transition to further levels of education	Qualitative and evidence from impact studies	Share of participants that consider they have an increased European sense of belonging after participating in activities under KA1	Quantitative
Improved employability	Qualitative and quantitative (though nothing causal, from	Increased capacity of organisations	Qualitative

[28] The beneficiary staff survey provides further insights on the impacts (both at individual and organisational level).

2014-2020		2021-2027	
Achievement of impacts	**Evidence**	**Achievement of impacts**	**Evidence**
	impact studies)		
Improved solidarity	No evidence found	Contribution to policy development, strategies and cooperation in education and training, youth and sport	Qualitative
Improved career progression of staff	No evidence found		
Better quality of teaching, youth work, and sport activities	Qualitative		
Long-lasting organisation partnerships	Qualitative		
Implementation of reforms converging with Open Method of Coordination (OMC) in education, training, youth, and sport	Qualitative		
Implementation of EU tools at national level	Qualitative		

Note: This table summarises the outputs from the intervention logic at a high level. These are slightly rephrased for brevity's sake. 'Quantitative evidence' refers to programme data, the Network analysis, or data from the stakeholder surveys (beneficiary surveys, socio-economic actors survey or NA/EACEA survey), whereas qualitative evidence refers to the KIIs, scoping interviews, case studies, or the public consultation. Evidence from the literature review or meta-analysis can fall under either category, depending on the type of source.

The data for both impact indicators established in the 2021-2027 Erasmus+ Regulation[29] measure impacts linked to: (i) participants' perceived benefits from their participation in learning mobility, and (ii) sense of belonging. Both, are reported in the MFF Performance Results Reports alongside specific targets, namely: (i) the share of participants who consider that they benefited from participation (95% in each year), and (ii) the share of participants who feel they have an increased European sense of belonging (with a target of 60% in 2021 and 2022, and 64% in 2023)[30]. So far, the targets set for both indicators have been surpassed.

The two other impact indicators introduced following the adoption of the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework 2021-2027 measure: (i) the increased capacity of organisations, and (ii) contributions to policy development, strategies and cooperation in education and training, youth and sport, both in a qualitative manner. For both impact indicators, stakeholders in the case studies and key informant interviews share their views that the programme has had positive effects.

Organisational capacity is mentioned by stakeholders as a result of participation in Erasmus+, though this impact is difficult to quantify. Overall, stakeholders believe the programme is effective in increasing organisational capacity. However, the extent to which organisational capacity is increased, the share of organisations for which this is the case, or an assessment of whether this is a short-term or long-term impact could not be evaluated

[29] See Annex II of the 2021-2027 Erasmus+ Regulation as well as SWD(2023)296 for indicators' metadata.

[30] See Annex I – Technical Annex, Tables 40 and 91.

based on the available evidence. Box 2 provides more detail on the stakeholder insights underpinning this finding.

Box 2: Findings on the increased capacity of organisations

***Increased organisational capacity** is highlighted in case studies and KIIs as **direct and indirect consequences of project participation**.*

First, the programme increased organisational capacity through access to and application of innovative teaching methods and technologies, development of technological infrastructure, a strengthened capacity for staff to participate in new projects and cooperate with other institutions, improved staff expertise and skills, development of new tools (e.g. frameworks), increased leadership skills and strategic planning[31].

According to stakeholders, factors contributing to improved capacity-building through project activities[32] are collaborative workshops, resource support, broadening networks, fostering collaboration, a culture of continuous learning and knowledge sharing. For example, under the European Universities alliance 'ENHANCE', partner higher education institutions enhanced their capacity and capabilities and raised excellence and innovation levels by pooling expertise, knowledge, and resources, including equipment and joint support services, combining complementary strengths not available at any single institution, to the benefit of their students, staff and communities. Higher education institutions consider that their participation in a European Universities alliance boosted their attractiveness for global talent and raised their international visibility. The ENHANCE alliance also teamed up with other alliances to jointly work on a European Degree label in engineering (JEDI project) also contributing to boosting the partners' institutional capacity. Within the school education field, the Good Practice label was highlighted as an example of the programme boosting motivation to further increase capacity, experience and confidence to aim for more ambitious and bigger projects in the future[33]. As part of the KIIs, moreover, EU Delegations highlight significant institutional impacts in Latin America, contributing to academic diplomacy and regional integration in higher education. Latin American universities are forming consortia, which build trust and foster collaboration. These capacity-building projects also equip participants with valuable skills in managing large projects and intercultural communication, which are transferable and beneficial beyond the scope of individual projects.

Second, the organisations participating in the programme also raised capacity in other organisations, including through network-building, knowledge-exchange, training, and curriculum development[34]. Within the school education field, for example, the ICSE academy, which brings together 13 higher education institutions, 13 policymaking organisations and 65 schools offers job shadowing summer schools and a workshop series, which contribute to capacity building of the educational work force. Through this work, the academy has disseminated innovative teacher approaches in STEM education and built capacity within the organisation hosting the ICSE Academy itself.

Points of improvement were mentioned by a few stakeholders as well, which mainly noted the limited capacity for many organisations to engage with the process of applying for and running

[31] Case studies: I Liceum Ogólnokształcące im. Henryka Sienkiewicza w Kędzierzynie-Koźlu (SCH, PL), Pädagogische Hochschule Freiburg (SCH, DE), Primary school Anton Skala (SCH, RS), European Hockey Federation (SPO, BE), EuropeActive (SPO, BE), FH Joanneum (VET, AT), Chambre de Métiers et de l'Artisanat Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes (VET, FR), E29 (formerly, Ifjúsági Nomád Klub) (YOU, HU), Agenzija Zghazagh (YOU, MT), Profilirana Prirodo-Matematicheska Gimnazia Akademik Ivan Tsenov (JMA, BG), College of Europe (JMA, BE and PL), CHARM-EU, University of Barcelona (HED, ES); KIIs with NEOs, SALTOs, and EU Delegations, third country organisations.

[32] Case studies: TU Berlin - ENHANCE Alliance (HED, DE); European Hockey Federation (SPO, BE); EuropeActive (SPO, BE); Chambre de Métiers et de l'Artisanat Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes (VET, FR) ; Agenzija Zghazagh (YOU, MT); Profilirana Prirodo-Matematicheska Gimnazia Akademik Ivan Tsenov (JMA, BG); KIIs with NEOs, SALTOs, and EU Delegations; Findings from KIIs with four SALTO research centres, four Commission services, one EU Agency, six stakeholder organisations.

[33] Case study I Liceum Ogólnokształcące im. Henryka Sienkiewicza w Kędzierzynie-Koźlu (SCH, PL).

[34] Case studies: Pädagogische Hochschule Freiburg (SCH, DE); College of Europe (BE and PL), European University Institute (IT); Regional Capacity for Adult Learning and Education, EAEA (BE).

projects, and suggested grants to invest in support for organisational operations (operating grants) to improve project applications, utilisation of EU funding, and the sustainability of projects[35].

The programme's **contribution to policy development, strategies, and cooperation** in education and training, youth and sport mainly reflects the extent to which the programme contributes to building the European Education Area. The evaluation finds evidence of the programme's positive impact on policy development, strategies, and cooperation in these sectors in KIIs, where stakeholders signal the alignment of Erasmus+ with the EEA, and argue the programme plays a significant role in shaping it, though the extent of progress towards this impact indicator is difficult to measure. Stakeholders argue the role of the programme in contributing to policy development, strategies, and cooperation includes promoting internationalisation, fostering cooperation among higher education institutions, and supporting the development of qualification frameworks (Box 3 includes further detail on stakeholder insights). One of the case studies complement this view by highlighting the contributions to the objectives of the EEA by contributing to the development of a blueprint for European degrees and creating a joint academic master's degree. Stakeholders also find areas for improvement, namely the need for strengthened connections between project outcomes and policy formulation, the need for national and European legislation and funding systems that allows for an effective EEA, and the need for greater collaboration between Member States to facilitate the set-up of joint programmes and the automatic degree recognition of study periods abroad. Furthermore, Erasmus+ flagships actions, such as the European Universities, the Centres of vocational Excellence and the Erasmus+ Teacher Academies are key to achieve the European Education Area and contribute to the European Skills Agenda, as demonstrated by the achievements of the targets set in the related policy documents with regards to the funding of these actions (see EQ 19.5).

Case studies highlight projects that align with objectives under the European Skills Agenda, the European Youth Strategy (EUYS), a European dimension in Sport. The EUYS evaluation defines Erasmus+ as a key programme that contributes to achieving the objectives of the EU Youth Strategy and advancing youth policy cooperation and concludes that it is a key instrument to support its implementation at EU level. It underscores the very clear relationship with Erasmus+, stating that, together with the European Solidarity Corps, Erasmus+ is the main and best-known instrument for the EUYS and that "funding opportunities have become better focused and more strategic, e.g. as concerns new actions such as Youth Participation Activities, and the renewed Youth Worker Mobility action under Erasmus+". Erasmus+ contributes to the strategy also through the participation of third countries in the programme, with the EUYS evaluation stating that this "demonstrates the international reach of the EUYS". Evidence for dialogue and cooperation between stakeholders and cooperation between countries was found for example through the Case study on the Youth Wiki with regards to youth policy, however the evidence collected through the consultation activities could not confirm further the contribution of the programme to policy or strategy development in more specific areas.

Within the EU sport policy agenda, Erasmus+ contributes to strengthening the European dimension of sport and in advancing EU sport policy by addressing the policy objectives set in the 2021-2024 EU Work Plans for sport, in particular as it comes to protecting the integrity and values of sport, promoting its socio-economic and sustainable dimensions, and encouraging participation in health-enhancing physical activity. Erasmus+ cooperation projects and the newly established staff mobility have supported the policy objectives set in this Work Plan through targeted actions aligned with its priorities. In particular, the initiative HealthyLifestyle4All (2021-2023) further supported EU sport policy priorities, while linking

[35] Case studies: Agenzija Zghazagh (YOU, MT); AFEJI Hauts-de-France (ADU, FR); Youth for exchange and understanding international (YOU, BE) ; Casa do Professor (PT) ; CHARM-EU, University of Barcelona (ES) ; Bildungsdirektion Steiermark, Board of Education of Styria (AT); Pilot PoVE Water, CIV Water (NL).

sport and active lifestyles with health, food and other EU policies in a holistic approach aimed at promoting well-being.

Support to the development of sectoral policy agenda, to dialogue and cooperation among stakeholders and to policy cooperation between countries is mainly provided through KA3 activities managed under direct management, with almost EUR 144 million distributed across the different strands in the 2021-2023 period (data 2023 is still partial).

Box 3: Findings on the contributions to policy development, strategies and cooperation in education and training, youth, and sport

Contributions of the programme regarding policy development, cooperation, and strategies are found in different domains.

*First, **university policy and strategy** were adapted in a number of institutions as a result of participation in the programme, for example by integrating horizontal priorities into the educational programme and policy, and adapting the diversity policy programme based on learnings from other institutions[36].*

*Second, **sector-specific policies and strategies** were implemented particularly in the sport sector, where impacts were found in terms of development of policy and implementation trajectory for club administrators, and the dissemination of an online self-scan for club administrators to check their policies against safeguarding and transgressive behaviour best practice[37].*

*Third, the programme has generated **policy recommendations** through a range and fostered policy learning in a number of actions, including by mapping reports on LGBTIQ+ discrimination, an e-learning training platform for VET teachers, policy workshops and conferences, and integration of policy briefs to translate research findings into more accessible formats[38].*

*Fourth, **national and international policy making** was also influenced through the programme. This includes soft influence through inviting national policy makers to conferences, contributions to policy plans, providing evidence, and organisations providing inputs to national policy makers on how to best engage young people in policy dialogues[39]. Policy changes were also affected through a number of projects, including direct legislation change for an automatic recognition of a European diploma[40]. Limitations to such impacts were mentioned at the international level, where scalability and dissemination are difficult due to limited capacity or know-how[41]*

*Fifth, **collaboration with policy makers** was also achieved through a number of actions. Such actions generally involved policy dialogues, but also include a policy leader fellowship programme, data dashboards to help track policy progress, and networks for collaboration (e.g. the European Housing Policy Network (EHPN)[42]. However, collaboration with policy makers is also mentioned frequently as a particular challenge for stakeholders, particularly for practitioners, and in actions that involve smaller, less connected stakeholders[43].*

[36] Case studies: Universidad de Sevilla (HED, ES); Satakunnan ammattikorkeakoulu (HED, FI); KIIs with national level policy officers and stakeholder organisations from Austria, Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Türkiye

[37] Case studies: Thomas More – Sportleg partnership (SPO, BE), European Hockey Federation (SPO, BE), EuropeActive (SPO, BE).

[38] Case studies : AKMI Anonimi Ekpaideftiki Etairia (VET, EL); College of Europe (BE, PL); KIIs with six European stakeholder organisations

[39] Case studies: Stichting Flik-Flak (SPO, NL); Thomas More – Sportleg partnership (SPO, BE); Agenzija Zghazagh (YOU, MT); Youth Wiki (MT, FR, CY); KIIs with 5 representatives from Commission services

[40] Case studies: CHARM-EU; EdLab, Regional Capacity for Adult Learning and Education, EAEA (BE); Pilot PoVE Water, CIV Water (NL)

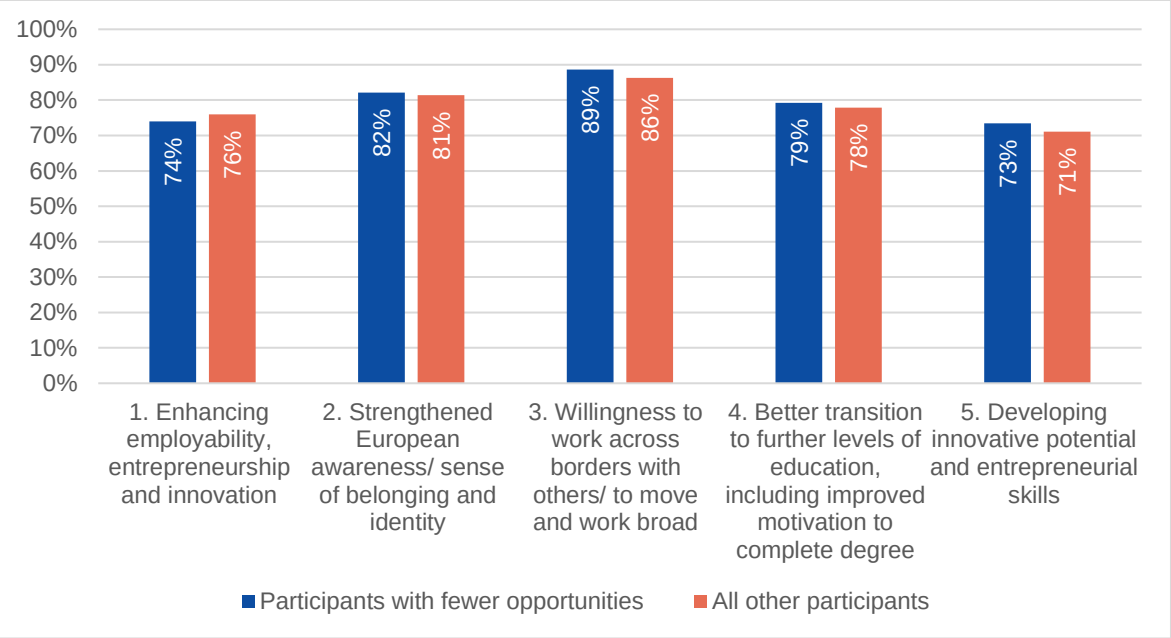
[41] KIIs with EU Delegations, NEOs and SALTOs; organisations in third countries not associated to Erasmus+

[42] Case studies: Scuola superiore di studi universitari e di perfezionamento Sant'Anna (IT); College of Europe (BE, PL); European University Institute (IT); Regional Capacity for Adult Learning and Education, EAEA (BE); European Institute of Public Administration (NL)

[43] Case studies: EdLab, Universidad de Granada (ES); Pädagogische Hochschule Freiburg (SCH, DE); KIIs with national level policy officers and stakeholder organisations (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, Türkiye); KIIs with three Commission services.

The figure below shows some of the results from the beneficiary learners survey on **key individual-level impacts included in the 2021-2027 programme intervention logic**. A large majority of **pupils** (school education), both those who declared themselves as affected by one or more barriers, thus qualifying themselves as having fewer opportunities, and those not qualifying as having fewer opportunities, felt they had improved on a range of competences. It is noteworthy that a slightly higher share of participants not declaring themselves as having fewer opportunities agree that their mobility has enhanced their employability, entrepreneurship and innovation, while the contrary applies to the other impacts.

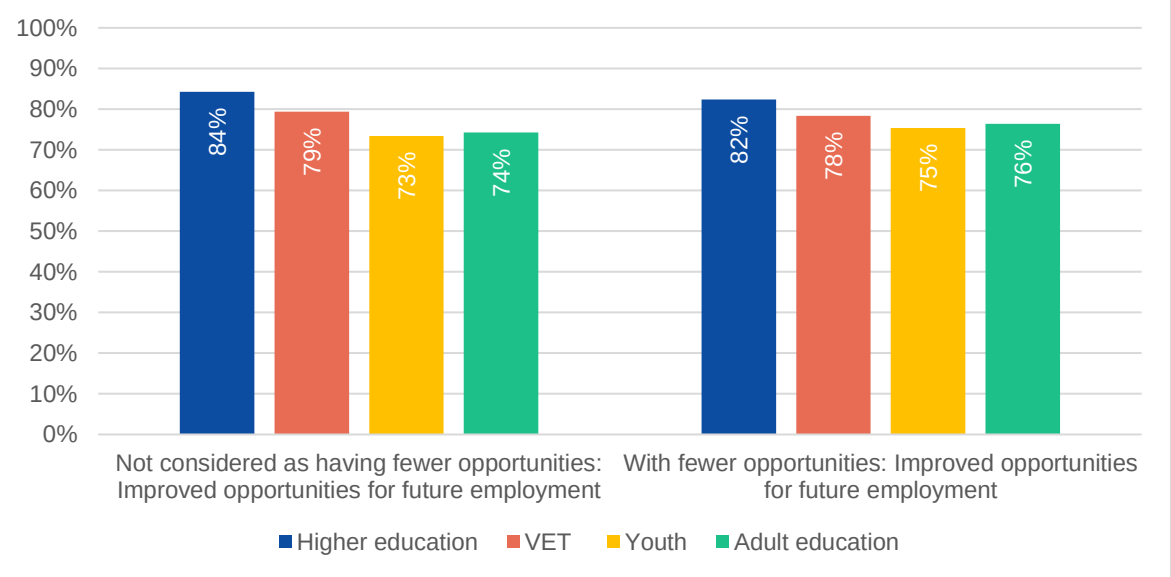
Figure 2: Share of school education programme participants (pupils) who agreed that their stay abroad helped them in…



Source: Beneficiary learners survey addressing pupils (School education), based on responses from a total of 259 programme participants with fewer opportunities, and 301 participants who, in replying to the survey, declared themselves as not having fewer opportunities.

When looking at the full sample of the beneficiary learners survey, those with fewer opportunities in the **youth and adult education** fields are more positive about their opportunities for future employment, whereas those in **higher education and VET** show more optimism when not falling into the fewer opportunities category.

Figure 3: Share of participants by field who agreed that their stay abroad helped them improve opportunities for future employment



Source: Beneficiary learners survey, based on a total of responses "strongly agreeing" or "rather agreeing" to these statements from a total of 8,588 participants in higher education, 2,107 participants in VET, 761 participants in youth, and 35 participants in adult education not classified as having fewer opportunities, and a total of 8,152 participants in higher education, 3,148 in VET, 1,718 in youth, and 55 in adult education with fewer opportunities.

The literature review and the meta-analysis also point to a few important domains of impact, all reflecting the 2014-2020 programming period. For example, among studies included in the meta-analysis, 46% of the indicators (i.e. the independent variables in the analyses) in these reports suggest a **positive and statistically significant relationship between participating in international student mobility and educational attainment or skills formation**. Within this group, 51 of the coefficients[44] were specific to language skills (60% of which are statistically significant and positive) 13 to cultural intelligence (92% of which are positive and statistically significant) and 16 on academic achievement (which are largely not statistically significant, but if so mixed 3-3 between positive and negative results). Hence the meta-analysis provides **reasonable evidence that participating in the exchange programme improves language skills and possibly also cultural intelligence**. Findings with regard to academic achievements are more mixed, and in most of the cases indicate no clear causal effect. Literature on the impact of the Erasmus+ programme on European awareness and identity, which is extremely limited, yields no real evidence that participating in an Erasmus+ mobility programme would lead to any significant change in participants' attitudes towards the European Union. Mobile learners are instead most likely to be a highly self-selected group, meaning that they already have stronger than average European identities when they apply for the exchange programme, and studies do not find much change due to their mobility experience.

Studies performed on the impacts of Erasmus+ on labour market outcomes struggle to find definitive answers to this question. Around a quarter of indicators contained in the studies included in the meta-analysis are positive and significant (i.e. have a positive statistically significant impact), but methodologies and research design are heterogeneous and cannot

[44] In the meta-analyses, independent variables from the 19 eligible studies were pooled (for 80 coefficients in total). These coefficients were analysed to determine whether they were statistically significant, and if so, whether they had a positive or negative effect.

firmly identify impacts. One study, carried out on graduates from the University of Siena, signals a 7-9% wage premium for participants in Erasmus+ compared to other graduates who did not participate using panel data[45]. This study points at a number of other possible benefits from participating in Erasmus+ for labour market outcomes, which stem from Erasmus Impact Studies, and include characteristics of internationalisation in one's current job[46], and a higher likelihood to hold managerial positions[47]. Findings from the Erasmus Impact Studies, however, are not causal and these effects may be due to personal characteristics rather than participation in Erasmus+.

Earlier papers, published before the period under evaluation, had signalled that alumni were sceptical about the impact of stay abroad periods on income and status[48,49], and papers attempting to study causal links between studying abroad and future income have not done so robustly to date [50,51,52,53]. Hence, this evaluation is unable to scientifically confirm that Erasmus+ increases participants' employability nor that it supports the quality of employment.

Programme objectives

The 2021-2027 programme objectives are illustrated below.

Figure 4: Erasmus+ 2021-2027 objectives

Source: SWD(2023)296 on the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework of Erasmus+.

In the 2021-2027 programme, the specific objectives address the different programme fields (Specific objective 1: Education and Training; Specific

[45] Favero, L., and Fucci, A. 2017. The Erasmus effect on earnings: a panel analysis from Siena. Quaderni del dipartimento di economia politica e statistica, no. 762.

[46] European Commission. (2014). The ERASMUS Impact Study. (http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/library/study/2014/erasmusimpact_en.pdf)

[47] European Commission. (2016). The ERASMUS Impact Study Regional Analysis (http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/study/2016/erasmus-impact_en.pdf)

[48] Teichler, Ulrich, and Kerstin Janson. "The professional value of temporary study in another European country: Employment and work of former ERASMUS students." Journal of studies in International Education 11.3-4 (2007): 486-495.

[49] Engel, Constanze. "The impact of Erasmus mobility on the professional career: Empirical results of international studies on temporary student and teaching staff mobility." Belgeo. Revue belge de géographie 4 (2010): 351-363.

[50] Messer, Dolores, and Stefan C. Wolter. "Are student exchange programs worth it?" Higher Education 54.5 (2007): 647-663.

[51] Card, David. "The causal effect of education on earnings." Handbook of labor economics 3 (1999): 1801-1863.

[52] Deschênes, Olivier. "Estimating the effects of family background on the return to schooling." Journal of Business & Economic Statistics 25.3 (2007): 265-277.

[53] Favero, L., and Fucci, A. 2017. The Erasmus effect on earnings: a panel analysis from Siena. Quaderni del dipartimento di economia politica e statistica, no. 762.

objective 3: Sport), while in the 2014-2020 programme, the specific objectives were formulated in relation to the level at which results were expected:

- At the individual level: increase participants' competences as well as positively impact their attitudes and perceptions.
- At the institutional level: support changes in services, pedagogies, methodologies, content and practices.
- At the systemic level: contribute to the improvement of national systems and to the development of a European dimension, contribute to systemic changes in partner countries.

The general objective of the 2014-2020 programme was to contribute to the achievement of the education target in the Europe 2020 strategy, the ET 2020 strategic framework, the sustainable development of partner countries in the higher education field, the renewed framework for European cooperation in the Youth field, developing the European dimension in sport, and promotion of European values[54]. For the 2021-2027 programme the general objective was relatively similar, being to support, through lifelong learning, the educational, professional and personal development of people in the fields of education and training, youth and sport, in Europe and beyond, thereby contributing to sustainable growth, quality jobs and social cohesion, to driving innovation and to strengthening European identity and active citizenship[55].

Within the programme, these themes are linked to the abovementioned programme-specific objectives, which are further divided into the outcomes, results, and impacts discussed above. Particularly within the 2021-2027 programming period, these links are very clear and progress towards them is significant. Though the link between participation in the programme and impacts on productivity is not causal, indications from the analysis of impact indicators provided above signal a positive correlation, while the volume of participation has increased substantially within the last 10 years, further adding to this objective. Moreover, the newly established result indicator on participant understanding of inclusion and diversity, combined with impacts on participant feelings of belonging, contribute to a sense of inclusion in Europe which is further reflected in the share of projects addressing this objective and the increasing share of participants with fewer opportunities in the programme that receive additional funding to support their mobility experience.

The stakeholder consultations undertaken for this evaluation indicate that the programme either fully or partially achieves its objectives, though more consider this to be true in the education and training sector than in the youth or sport sectors[56]. It is important to note that a quarter (24%) and half (52%) of overall respondents to the public consultation respectively answered "I don't know" regarding the achievement of youth and sport sectors, and that the respondents representing these sectors were significantly fewer. These different perceptions exist even though the programme data indicates these fields as being equally on track – though this data, of course, only tracks a subset of the programme objectives.

A few important remarks were made by consulted stakeholders about programme objectives:

1. Respondents to the NA/EACEA survey considered the programme's architecture to be either fully appropriate (55%) or partially appropriate (42%) for achieving its

[54] See 2014-2020 Erasmus+ Regulation: Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 establishing 'Erasmus+': the Union programme for education, training, youth and sport and repealing Decisions No 1719/2006/EC, No 1720/2006/EC and No 1298/2008/EC, OJ L 347 of 20.12.2013, p. 50. (https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32013R1288).

[55] See 2021-2027 Erasmus+ Regulation.

[56] Annex III - NA/EACEA survey: Question "Thinking about your sector(s), to what extent does Erasmus+ achieve its objectives?"; Public consultation question: "To what extent is the Erasmus+ programme, as a whole, managing to fulfil its objectives?"

objectives. Key informants interviewed also found the general objectives clear and all-encompassing yet concrete enough to respond to Member States' realities. They welcomed the changes made to the programme from the 2014-2020 to the 2021-2027 programming period, adding that the programme architecture should not be further (significantly) altered.

2. Stakeholders consulted did not seem to consistently consider that the programme has too many or too few objectives, and suggestions for missing objectives span a wide variety of topics that are rarely repeated (and tend to be specific to the respondent stakeholders' priorities), hence not revealing a clear need to either streamline or add missing objectives.

EQ 1.2: Please identify, describe and quantify (if possible) the spill-over effects between various actions (clusters of actions) of Erasmus+ 2021-2027, as described in the intervention logic.

Beyond specifying the outputs, results, and impacts of the Erasmus+ programme, the intervention logic also identifies some possible spill-over effects between the actions (clusters of actions). In classic economic theory, a spill-over is an effect that occurs in one context because of something else in a seemingly unrelated context[57]. In the context of Erasmus+, this could mean that the participation of some learners or staff in the programme results in externalities (spill-overs) for non-participants, for example because participants share their learnings, which improves learning outcomes for non-participants (positive externality), because former participants in Erasmus+ outcompete non-participants in the labour market and depress their wages (negative externality), or because participation in mobility enables the transfer of innovative practices in the participating organisations.

The evidence collected for this evaluation points to a number of spill-over effects (or effects that tie different actions together, even if not strictly falling under the definition of spill-over) at individual, organisational, and system level in the current programming period. These spill-overs are presented below, starting with those occurring at the individual and organisational level, and then those that reverberate across actions and sectors, or occur at the system-level.

Individual and organisational spill-overs

At the individual and organisational level, a few spill-overs can be identified or are recognised by stakeholders.

Repeated participation by organisations in Erasmus+ can facilitate organisational learning, by which they increase their capacity and make it easier to absorb positive effects of participation, especially if partner organisations also remain the same. This could mean, for example, that mobile learners or staff can more easily integrate into their host organisation. The Network analysis performed for this evaluation signals that from 2021 to 2022, 24% of organisations sent mobilities to each other more than once, and that 5% of 'organisation pairs' continued collaboration throughout the new programming period. From 2022 to 2023, the number of pairs that repeated their collaboration was lower, at 9%. Further data on repeated participation stems from the socio-economic actors' survey and the programme data[58]. Stakeholder consultations, such as the case studies, also highlight organisational learning through this channel[59].

Benefits from participation on individual learners and staff also point to a few spill-over effects, according to stakeholders. First, some of the skills developed, such as socio-emotional skills, are likely to affect a participant's social environment[60]. Second, participants share knowledge, attained through interactions with learners or staff in other organisations, with peers, and learning by staff affects their teaching or assessment methods, which in turn has spill-over effects on the learning of those in their classroom[61]. Third, participation in Erasmus+ actions affects the organisations as well, for example through innovative practices or internationalisation (used here to refer to intra-European engagement, though

[57] Lucas, R. (1988). On the mechanics of economic development. Journal of Monetary Economics 22:3-42; Romer, P. M. (1986). Increasing Returns and Long-Run Growth. Journal of Political Economy 94 (5): 1002-1037.

[58] Annex V - Socio-economic actors survey and Annex I – Technical Annex for the programme data.

[59] Organisational level case studies on Pädagogische Hochschule Freiburg (SCH, DE), Asociația Sprijin+ (ADU, RO), Afeji Hauts-de-France (ADU, FR), Oktatasi es Szakerto Bt. (ADU, HU), and TU Berlin - ENHANCE Alliance (HED, DE)

[60] Organisational level case studies on Asociația Sprijin+ (ADU, RO), AFEJI Hauts-de-France (ADU, FR), Oktatasi es Szakerto Bt. (ADU, HU), Społeczny Instytut Ekologiczny (ADU, PL), E29 (formerly, Ifjúsági Nomád Klub) (YOU, HU), and Agenzija Zghazagh (YOU, MT).

[61] For example, case studies on Asociația Sprijin+ (ADU, RO), Stichting Flik-Flak (SPO, NL), and European University Institute (NL).

some stakeholders mention the international dimension too). Spill-overs can also be less positive, for example when schools that engage in Erasmus+ exchanges become more attractive to new pupils than other schools, which may lead to diminishing peer effects in those schools[62] [63].

Cross-action, cross-sector, or system-level spill-overs

Further spill-over effects can be observed at the system level, or through a cross-action or cross-sectoral lens. These spill-over effects are only identified through qualitative sources, and hence rather constitute 'perceptions' of spill-overs by a range of stakeholders.

System-level spill-overs are mentioned in the case studies and key informant interviews[64], and include:

- European Universities Alliances influencing national policy and legislation for the benefit of the entire higher education sector, notably to enable more conducive environments for seamless transnational cooperation, including to cater for simplified processes for establishing joint educational programme and activities in relation to for example quality assurance and recognition, defining the number of required ECTS, proportion of language and digital learning, etc. For example, in Spain (specifically, allowing for three-year bachelor's degrees for joint programmes within the alliance, while standard degrees in the country are four years);
- the effects of intra-European collaboration in degrees and on recognition of learning, that is to say ensuring that learner and staff learning is formally recorded, recognised and credited (this includes learning in different settings, e.g. study programmes abroad, traineeships, etc.);
- the involvement of public employment services (PES) and social services in adult education; and the expansion of an established ecosystem of Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) into a third country not associated to the programme (South Africa).

Box 4: Examples of spill-overs from the Case studies RegALE (Adult Education) and Pilot PoVE Water (VET) projects

*The **Regional Capacity for Adult Learning and Education project (RegALE)**[65], led by the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA), aims to strengthen the networks of adult education organisations and create synergies with regional and local authorities. This project was funded in 2020 under KA3. Spill-over effects beyond the project's remit were achieved by influencing EU policy initiatives on individual learning accounts (ILA) and micro-credentials, a strengthened collaboration and visibility of stakeholders through better inter-ministerial collaboration (which can yield further concrete benefits in the future), as well as an informed regional network, which means stakeholders have more information about what each actor does in terms of adult education provision, providing opportunities for future projects, collaboration, or synergies.*

*The **Pilot Platform of Vocational Excellence (PoVE)**[66] (Pilot PoVE Water), a 2-year project from the 2019 Centres of Vocational Excellence pilot call, and the following PoVE Water Scale-Up[67] from the 2021 Call, led by CIV Water (Netherlands), aims to support innovation for water education by developing a regional water skills ecosystem and better align the education programmes with*

[62] Key Informant Interview with NA from EU Member State (BE).

[63] See, for example: Favero, L., and Fucci, A. 2017. The Erasmus effect on earnings: a panel analysis from Siena. Quaderni del dipartimento di economia politica e statistica, no. 762; Barrios-Fernandez, Andres. 2023. Peer effects in education. Working paper. https://andresbarriosf.github.io/peer_effects_in_education_oxford.pdf

[64] For example, systemic level case studies on EdLab, Universidad de Granada (HED, ES), Regional Capacity for Adult Education and Learning, EAEA (ADU, BE), and Pilot PoVE Water, CIV Water (VET, NL).

[65] https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/621444-EPP-1-2020-1-BE-EPPKA3-IPI-SOC-IN

[66] https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/612632-EPP-1-2019-1-NL-EPPKA2-SSA-P

[67] https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/101055851

needs of the labour market. In particular, the scale-up project yielded interesting spillovers, supporting the expansion of regional collaborations to a national context in the Netherlands, and supporting the expansion by a new partnership in a third country not associated with the programme (South Africa). In the Netherlands, a supportive policy environment was created at the national level through a memorandum of understanding signed with the Ministry of Education and department of water and sanitation. In Latvia, government resources were redirected from 10 VET schools to three, which allowed significant investments in facilities, equipment and tools in support of the Latvian water sector, as well as developing a new curriculum in the sector in collaboration with employers in the water sector. The CoVE partner in South Africa, moreover, garnered support from regional triple-helix partners and has already noted strong support from national departments and stakeholders (despite only being established in 2023).

Cross-action or cross-sectoral spill-overs are mentioned by some stakeholders, though evidence here is more limited. For example, activities in one key action may be complementing work in others – e.g. KA3 projects may have a systemic impact in the education and training sector by providing policy direction and insights based on data collection and research, while KA2 and KA1 projects or mobilities can achieve practical change by providing innovative teaching material or curricula[68]. An example of cross-sectoral spill-over is organisations in education and training that apply for KA120-SCH because they have pupils falling under the School education field, which then expand into KA120-VET mobilities as they also have pupils that fall under the VET field. The organisations interviewed for system-level and Jean Monnet case studies[69] signalled improved cross-sectoral cooperation as an outcome of project participation.

Box 5: Cross-sectoral cooperation as part of the Jean Monnet Actions

3 case studies on Jean Monnet Actions show cross-sectoral (or cross-field) spillovers in two ways.

First, two JMA case studies highlight increased cross-sectoral cooperation as a specific outcome, namely the European University Institute (IT) and European Institute of Public Administration (NL), which noted that the JMA funding helped support collaboration with institutions and actors across sectors, including representatives from academia and policy makers. Policy areas in which such cross-sectoral collaboration occurred vary strongly, and include (among others) public administration, education, housing, social safety, health, social security and employment, and sports. In the Netherlands such collaboration also created a leverage effect, allowing the EIPA to establish strong cooperation with various national ministries. This collaboration, for example, led to the funding of the establishment of the European Housing Policy Network (EHPN).

Second, there is cooperation in the form of school networks, such as the Profilirana Prirodo-Matematicheska Gimnazia Akademik Ivan Tsenov (BG). In this project, cooperation between the school and the higher education field is key to the project design. As part of the project, a core group of educators developed instructional strategies and materials on EU topics. To this end, teachers collaborated with a scholar from the University of Sofia who is an EU expert on curricula and course materials. The project resulted in within-school collaboration among teachers of different subjects, increased professional capacity of participating teachers, sharing resources and outputs of the project with other schools, and increased awareness of and interest in EU topics among students.

[68] Systemic level case study on Regional Capacity for Adult Learning and Education, EAEA (BE), and organisational level case studies on Asociația Sprijin+ (ADU, RO), Oktatasi es Szakerto Bt (ADU, HU), Agenzija Zghazagh (YOU, MT)

[69] Case studies on European University Institute (JMA, IT), European Institute of Public Administration (JMA, NL), Regional Capacity for Adult Education and Learning, EAEA (ADU, BE), and Youth Wiki (Youth, MT, FR, CY)

EQ 1.3: To what extent has Erasmus+ 2021-2027 had a transformative effect on systems, values and norms, particularly with respect to the four horizontal priorities of the programme: inclusion and diversity; digital transformation; green transition (environment and fight against climate change); participation in democratic life and civic engagement?

EQ 1.4: To what extent do the actions/activities/projects supported by Erasmus+ 2021-2027 contribute to mainstreaming climate actions and achieving climate objectives, including those intended to reduce the environmental impact of the programme? To what degree are they designed in an eco-friendly manner and incorporate green practices[70]?

The four horizontal priorities guide Erasmus+ funding decisions and actions, aiming for a holistic approach that ideally benefits diverse participants, embraces digital transformation, addresses environmental concerns, and fosters active citizenship. The presence of horizontal priorities is also expected to have a transformative effect on systems, norms and values under each priority. The programme effects on each priority are analysed in turn below.

The programme has demonstrated a positive impact on supporting **the priority of inclusion and diversity** throughout its activities. Firstly, it provides funding to projects focusing on this priority across their activities. Between 2021 and 2023, the proportion of projects addressing this priority (in KA1, KA2 and KA3, and JMA) decreased from 23% to 13%, and the portion of grants (the volume of funding granted) from 22% to 18%[71]. Specifically, in KA2, the portion of projects addressing this priority declined from 49% to 44%[72]. However, these variations need to be interpreted with caution as they may reflect a progressive balancing between the four horizontal priorities in the early years of the programming period, and/or the fact that the implementation of 2023 activities was ongoing at the time of this analysis, and hence 2023 data are incomplete.

Evidence shows that participants in the programme learn about inclusion and diversity issues during their participation and want to work more on inclusion and diversity issues afterwards[73]. In the 2021-2023 period, 55% of participants reported being more committed to taking action on inclusion and diversity issues as a result of their mobility experience (participant survey, KA1, N=615,236). This ranged from 49% amongst higher education participants, to 77% of VET participants. In addition, 70% of participants learned about inclusion and diversity issues during their mobility, ranging from 56% in higher education to 83% in VET (N=678,193). On both indicators, the proportion of participants indicating increased awareness and behaviour change in this area grew between 2021 and 2023.

Stakeholder feedback, including from the PC, NA/EACEA survey and KIIs, also reflects a positive view of the programme's impact on this priority. The majority (74%) of respondents to the PC (N=1,231) strongly agreed or agreed on the good performance of the programme for the inclusion and diversity priority[74]. Also, most National Agencies/EACEA staff (85%, out of a total of 164 respondents) responding to the dedicated survey considered that the programme had transformative effects across all horizontal priorities (31% strongly and

[70] Evaluation sub-question 1.3 addresses the effects of the 2021-2027 Erasmus+ programme in relation to its four horizontal priorities (inclusion and diversity; digital transformation; green transition; participation in democratic life and civic engagement). As sub-question 1.4 relates to the programme's contribution to achieving climate objectives, it is analysed together with the horizontal priority of green transition.

[71] Annex I – Technical Annex, Table 34

[72] Annex I – Technical Annex, Table 35

[73] Annex I – Technical Annex, Table 73

[74] Annex II, PC Report, "Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements: Erasmus+ is performing well in…" – Summary of overall responses (N = 1,231).

54% partially agreed)[75]. In the KIIs, most international stakeholders interviewed recognised that the four horizontal priorities of Erasmus+, put forward in calls for proposals, contribute to the mainstreaming of these issues in the sectors of education, training, youth and sport. This was also supported by most European-level interviewees, noting that the programme is contributing to this priority.

Also, the evidence from the National reports is indicating progress in implementing this priority. This is generally seen as the most successfully addressed horizontal priority, as highlighted in 19 reports[76], in particular as increased participation of people with fewer opportunities and disadvantaged groups is reported. However, challenges persist in reaching certain target groups, as mentioned in 16 reports[77].

The programme has also demonstrated a positive impact on **the digital transformation priority** throughout its activities. Firstly, between 2021 and 2023, the proportion of projects addressing this priority (in KA1, KA2 and KA3, and JMA) decreased from 22% to 13%[78], and the proportion of grants (the volume of funding granted) from 25% to 23%[79]. Specifically, in KA2, the proportion of projects addressing this priority decreased from 46% to 40%[80]. However, these variations need to be interpreted with caution as they may reflect a progressive balancing between the four horizontal priorities in the early years of the programming period, and/or the fact that the implementation of 2023 activities was ongoing at the time of this analysis, and hence 2023 data are incomplete.

Furthermore, around one third of the learning mobility participants in the programme declared they have improved their level of digital skills[81] during their participation and want to apply more digital tools afterwards. 29% of participants in the 2021-2023 period reported to have changed their behaviour and are willing to use more digital technologies in their studies/work after their mobility experience (participants survey, 2021-2023, N=569,241). This ranged from 25% amongst youth participants to 37% among school participants (averaging 33% for education fields, 25% for youth and 35% for sport). The proportion of participants indicating increased awareness and behavioural change rose by four percentage points between 2021 and 2023.

Also notable is the progress with implementing the Digital Opportunity Traineeships (DOT), intended to boost the digital skills of learners/staff. The number of participants (learners and staff) in the DOT and trainings in the 2021-2023 period was close to 45,000 (with 83% in the field of higher education, followed by 10% in VET)[82].

Finally, stakeholders' feedback, including responses from the PC and NA/EACEA survey, reflects a positive view of the programme's impact on digital transformation. 77% of PC respondents either strongly agreed or agreed on the good performance of the programme

[75] Annex III - NA/EACEA survey, Q21 To what extent has Erasmus+ 2021-2027 had a transformative effect at system level particularly with respect to the four horizontal priorities of the programme listed below?

[76] BEnl, CZ, CY, DE, EE, ES, FR, IE, IT, LV, LU, PL, PT, RO, SI, IS, NO, RS, TR

[77] AT, CZ, CY, DK, HR, IT, LV, MT, NL, PL, RO, SE, SI, SK, NO, RS

[78] Annex I – Technical Annex, Tables 34 and 36

[79] A feature of programme implementation has been the possibility of blended mobilities (combining physical and virtual mobilities). Blended mobilities are *per se* not intended to improve the digital skills, but can support the digital transformation priority. It should be noted that the interest in blended mobilities in Key Action 1 appears to be decreasing. This could partially be explained by the reduction and ending of COVID-19 related restrictions since 2021, and also by the fact that there is no budget post-COVID related to blended mobilities, while during the pandemic organisations could apply for funds even when exchanging only digitally. A total of 90,311 participants were reported in the blended activities in the period 2021-2023, representing around 5% of all participants in Key Action 1 in this period. The proportion of participants in blended activities declined from 6% in 2021 to 4% in 2023. The proportion also differed by field, from 1% in youth to 7% in higher education, and 8% in VET.

[80] Annex I - Technical Annex, Table 36

[81] Annex I - Technical Annex, Table 75

[82] Annex I Technical Annex, Table 42

for this priority[83]. Similarly, 72% of National Agency/EACEA respondents (N=164) in the survey identified transformative effects of the programme[84].

However, the evidence from the National reports is more nuanced as mixed progress is reported across countries overall. On the positive side, digitalisation was accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, as mentioned in 22 reports[85]. However, 16 reports indicate a need for further development in this area[86]).

The programme has also shown a positive impact in **the green transition priority.** Firstly, this is demonstrated through consistent funding levels addressing this priority. Between 2021 and 2023, the proportion of projects addressing this priority (KA1, KA2, and KA3, and JMA) decreased from 13% to 10%, but the proportion of grants (the volume of funding granted) increased from 17% to 20%[87]. Specifically, in KA2, the proportion of projects addressing this priority increased from 26% to 31%[88]. However, these variations need to be interpreted with caution as they may reflect a progressive balancing between the four horizontal priorities in the early years of the programming period, and/or the fact that the implementation of 2023 activities was ongoing at the time of this analysis, and hence 2023 data are incomplete.

Milestones set for activities supporting the green transition priority have mostly been achieved or are on track[89]. Specifically, the 2023 target for KA2 has been exceeded (in terms of the proportion of activities addressing climate change). The targets were also met for three out of four milestones in the sport and youth sectors, except for the KA1 sport, which was launched in 2023. Finally, the number of passes under DiscoverEU, which also contributes in the youth sector to the green transition priority by offering young people the chance to explore Europe through sustainable travel, totalled 179,209.

The significant progress was observed with the increasing share of green travel when implementing programme activities, although this needs to be further supported. Around one third of learning mobilities in the programme uses green transport, with a 25% rise observed between 2021 and 2023, with variations in the extent of green travel by field[90]. Some challenges to using green travel modes were however also identified by stakeholders, such as insufficient financial support and additional time and costs associated with green travel[91].

Programme participants have shown increased knowledge and behavioural change related to environmental awareness and sustainability. However, the evidence varies as to the extent of this impact on participants (the observed impact ranges between a third and a half of participants)[92].

[83] Annex II, PC Report, “Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements: Erasmus+ is performing well in…” – Summary of overall responses (N = 1,231)

[84] Annex III, NA/EACEA survey, Q21 To what extent has Erasmus+ 2021-2027 had a transformative effect at system level particularly with respect to the four horizontal priorities of the programme listed below?

[85] AT, BEde, BEnl, BG, CZ, CY, DE, EL, ES, FI, IE, IT, LV, LU, HU, PL, PT, RO, SE, SK, NO, TR

[86] BEnl, CY, DE, DK, ES, IE, IT, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, SE, SI, SK, TR.

[87] Annex I - Technical Annex, Table 34

[88] Annex I - Technical Annex, Table 37

[89] Annex I - Technical Annex, Table 44

[90] Annex I - Technical Annex, Table 41

[91] Some PC respondents mentioned the inadequate top-up related to green transport, as travelling by means other than plane usually entailed additional time and costs. Suggestions such as having an interrail pass to travel with a train everywhere in Europe for a certain period, emission compensations, and having more meetings online were given as examples of how to achieve progress in this field.

[92] Annex I - Technical Annex, Table 74. Based on the participant survey, around half of the participants in the programme improved their environmental awareness during their participation and want to apply more sustainable behaviours afterwards. 50% participants learnt about environmental issues during their mobility and 46% of participants reported to have changed

Finally, stakeholder feedback on the programme's contribution to the green transition priority is mixed, with National Agencies having a more positive view compared to the PC respondents. Specifically, comparing the responses between the four priorities, the PC respondents (N=1,231) were most uncertain about the performance of the programme with regard to reducing its carbon footprint (47% strongly agreed or agreed on this)[93]. National Agencies/EACEA (N=164) were more positive in this respect, with 72% agreeing or partially agreeing that the programme is performing well in supporting the green transition priority (20% strongly, and 52% partially agreed)[94]. In the national reports, some innovative approaches were mentioned in 10 reports[95]. For example, in Germany, the national report highlighted the success of programme support for sustainable travel, with 27% of participants in KA1 choosing environmentally friendly options in 2021. The programme contributes to raising awareness of environmental and climate issues, with participants developing a greater understanding and more sustainable habits.

The programme has demonstrated a positive impact in **the priority of participation in democratic life and civic engagement** throughout its activities. Firstly, it has shown consistent funding levels to projects focusing on this priority within their activities. Between 2021 and 2023, the proportion of projects focusing on participation in democratic life (KA1, KA2, KA3 and JMA)[96] decreased from 15% to 11%, and the volume of funding granted for these projects increased slightly, from 12% to 13%[97] Specifically in KA2, the proportion of projects addressing this priority remained stable at around 28%[98]. However, these variations need to be interpreted with caution as they may reflect a progressive balancing between the four horizontal priorities in the early years of the programming period, and/or the fact that the implementation of 2023 activities was ongoing at the time of this analysis, and hence 2023 data are incomplete.

Participants in the programme have shown increased knowledge about democratic values and a willingness to engage more actively in democratic processes[99]. In KA1, concerning participation in democratic life, 39% of participants in the 2021-2023 period have shown increased willingness to engage in democratic processes and community activities (which is indicative of a major behavioural change and transformative effects). This percentage varied from 33% among higher education participants to 67% among VET participants. Moreover, 57% of participants acquired knowledge about democratic values during their mobility, with percentages ranging from 50% in higher education to 82% in VET. The data also indicates a rise in awareness and behavioural change among participants between 2021 and 2023.

Stakeholders' feedback collected from the PC, NA/EACEA survey reflects a positive view of the programme's impact on promoting democratic values. In particular, 88% of

their habits to become more sustainable as a result of their mobility experience (the participants survey, 2021-2023 period, Key Action 1, n=546,938). This ranged from 38% amongst higher education participants to 75% of VET participants. On both indicators, the proportion of participants indicating increased awareness and behavioural change increased between 2021 and 2023. This observed impact is lower when analysing the beneficiary learner survey conducted in this evaluation. This shows that most mobilities in Key Action 1 are not paying much attention to sustainability aspects. This was investigated in the beneficiary learners survey conducted for this evaluation. Just over a quarter (27%) of learners having participated in KA1 mobilities (N=6,078) reported that their mobility paid attention to green and sustainability aspects. This varied by sector and field, from 18% in VET to 41% in adult education and 39% in the youth sector.

[93] Annex II, PC Report. "Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements: Erasmus+ is performing well in…" – Summary of overall responses (N = 1,231)

[94] Annex III, NA/EACEA survey, Q21 To what extent has Erasmus+ 2021-2027 had a transformative effect at system level particularly with respect to the four horizontal priorities of the programme listed below?

[95] AT, BEnl, CY, DE, ES, FR, IT, MT, NL, PL

[96] Annex I - Technical Annex, Tables 34 to 38 presenting the evolution of each priority in terms of grants and projects by Call Year and Key Action.

[97] Annex I - Technical Annex, Table 34

[98] Annex I - Technical Annex, Table 38

[99] Annex I - Technical Annex, Table 90

respondents to the PC with a detailed or partial knowledge of the programme (N=1,231) strongly agreed or agreed that the programme performed well in terms of promoting common EU values and strengthened European identity, and 75% said the same about fostering active citizenship and participation in democratic life[100]. The majority (68%) of National Agency and EACEA respondents to the NA/EACEA survey (N=164) agreed and partially agreed on the good performance of the programme in this respect as well (16% agreed strongly, 52% partially)[101]. The position paper submitted by the European Student Network (ESN) as part of their PC contribution also indicates the need to address remaining challenges such as facilitating interaction between international students and local communities during their mobility experience, as one of the aspects of civic engagement[102].

Finally, regarding National reports, positive impacts were reported on European identity and civic engagement in 21 reports[103]. However, there was less concrete evidence of increased civic participation in 13 reports[104].

EQ 1.5: How effective are the forms of cooperation and the types of action under Erasmus+ 2021-2027 and Erasmus+ 2014-2020 for the purpose of supporting the political priorities, including its international dimension? Could the international dimension of Erasmus+ be strengthened?

The political priorities for the two programming periods covered in this evaluation are summarised in the table below[105].

Table 4: EU political priorities 2014-2019 and 2019-2024

2014-2019[106]		2019-2024[107]	
Priority	**Goals**	**Priority**	**Goals**
A resilient Energy Union with a forward-looking climate change policy	► Create an Energy Union ► Strengthen the share of renewable energies ► Lead the fight against global warming	The European Green Deal	► The European Green Deal seeks to transform the EU into a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy
A connected digital single market	► Break down national "silos" in the digital space and create a digital single market to generate	A Europe fit for the digital age	► The EU digital strategy aims to support the digital transition for people and businesses

[100] Annex II, PC Report, "Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements: Erasmus+ is performing well in…" – Summary of overall responses (N = 1,231).

[101] Annex III, NA/EACEA survey, Section 4.7, Q21 To what extent has Erasmus+ 2021-2027 had a transformative effect at system level particularly with respect to the four horizontal priorities of the programme listed below?

102 European Student Network (2023), The Student Perspective to the Erasmus+ 2021-2027 Mid-term Evaluation (The Student Perspective to the Erasmus+ 2021-2027 Mid-term Evaluation | Erasmus Student Network (esn.org)). The paper points to the long-lasting challenge of facilitating the interaction between international students and their local communities. Data from the XIVth edition of the ESN survey (reported in 2022) showed that, on average, before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, only 8% of students engaged in volunteering activities during their exchange. The share of students volunteering during mobility has only slightly increased to 10% according to the ESN survey XV.

[103] AT, BEnl, BG, CZ, CY, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, LU, NL, PL, PT, RO, SI, LI, NO, RS, TR.

[104] BEde, BEfr, DE, DK, IE, IT, LV, LT, HU, MT, SE, SK, IS.

[105] To facilitate comparability between the two periods, the goals between the two programmes are mapped against each other, except for the 2014-2019 priority Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), which could not be mapped against a counterpart in the current programming period.

[106] https://commission.europa.eu/publications/president-junckers-political-guidelines_en

[107] https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024_en

2014-2019[106]		2019-2024[107]	
Priority	**Goals**	**Priority**	**Goals**
	additional growth and creating new jobs		
A new boost for jobs, growth and investment	► Action to create jobs, by boosting Europe's competitiveness and investment.	An economy that works for people	► The EU seeks to create a more attractive investment environment, and growth that creates quality jobs, especially for young people and small businesses.
A deeper and fairer internal market with a strengthened industrial base	► Strengthen the potential of the free movement of goods, capital, services and people ► Promote labour mobility		
Europe as a stronger global actor	► Identify common responses to international events, be more effective in using EU external action tools	A stronger Europe in the world	► The Commission seeks to champion multilateralism and rules-based global order through a more active role and stronger voice for the EU in the world
A reasonable and balanced free trade agreement with the United States	► Integrated transatlantic market to maximise the creation of decent jobs and sustainable and balanced growth		
An area of Justice and Fundamental Rights based on mutual trust	► Includes goals around the rule of law and civil rights (including fight against racism and xenophobia)	Promoting our European way of life	► Trying to protect the rule of law, justice, and the EU's core values. This includes equality, tolerance, and social fairness.
Towards a new policy on migration	► Collaboration on migration and asylum policy, deal with demographic challenges		
A Union of democratic change	► Having more political rather than technocratic dialogue with the Parliament, and more transparency	A new push for European democracy	► Giving Europeans a bigger say and protect our democracy from external interference such as disinformation and online hate messages.
A deeper and fairer Economic and Monetary Union (EMU)	► Reforming the EMU, deepen it, and rethink the process		

2014-2019[106]		2019-2024[107]	
Priority	**Goals**	**Priority**	**Goals**
	underlining structural reforms		

Overall, the thematic coverage of the programme against EU political priorities is significantly clearer in the current programming period than in the previous one. This may in part be since the EU's 2019-2024 political priorities are more transversal and easier to apply to a programme like Erasmus+. The application of these political priorities to particular regions is most evident within the capacity-building projects.

The 2014-2019 EU political priorities

Two of the 2014-2019 priorities, targeting economic and labour market outcomes, lie at the heart of the 2014-2020 Erasmus+ programme. These priorities are reflected in the core of the outputs, results, and impacts defined in the 2014-2020 programme's intervention logic. The programme contributed to them by engaging participants in learning mobilities that may facilitate future labour mobility and support building skills which contribute to positive labour market outcomes for participants, and hence reinforce the achievement of these political priorities, as detailed under EQ1.1 above. Three remaining priorities, targeting the digital market, climate change, and EU civil rights and rule of law, are indirectly covered in the intervention logic of the 2014-2020 Programme, through objectives, expected results and impacts related to, for example, improved skills and competences, and research and teaching about the EU.

However, in the 2014-2020 programme, there was only a limited focus on digital skills[108], and no particular focus on the environment and climate change, and as such, these priorities were only incidentally reflected in objectives like improved skills and competences, innovation, or new teaching methods. Moreover, progress on improving skills or understanding in these areas was not tracked during these years, and no specific targets were outlined in the 2023 and 2024 MFF Performance Results Reports[109]. The study supporting the mid-term evaluation of the 2014-2020 programme and the final evaluation of the predecessor programmes[110], highlighted a focus on "ICT – new technologies – digital competences" in 13% of Erasmus+ mobility actions, and 20% of Erasmus+ cooperation actions carried out between 2013 and 2016. The evaluation study found that the use of digital resources increased for participants in short-term mobilities of pupils, and participants in staff mobilities (except in higher education). Participants across fields also self-reported a higher level of digital competences than non-participants from the beneficiary survey carried out for that evaluation, though those findings could not differentiate between ex-ante differences and additional skill attainment due to participation. In that evaluation there was also no focus on environment and climate change, other than the finding that this topic was not in the top 10 most common topics of focus for mobility or cooperation projects. The findings in the mid-term evaluation of the 2014-2020 programme, however, cover a wider temporal array (years 2007-2016, than the 2014-2019 political priorities.

[108] See the 2018 and 2019 Work Programme as part of KA1 mobilities in the higher education field called "traineeships in digital skills", and as one of the priorities or outcomes mentioned in the strategic partnerships in the field of education and training and youth, and the knowledge and sector skills alliances.

[109] European Commission, 2023. "MFF Performance Results Reports: Performance Data Tables". https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2023-06/Core%20performance%20indicators%20%28new%29.pdf; European Commission, 2024. "MFF Performance Results Reports: Performance Data Tables". https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/4e8f26d1-6604-496f-87c4-0b9a886adf29_en?filename=EU%20core%20performance%20indicators_15_07_0.pdf

[110] ICF (2017). Combined evaluation of Erasmus+ and predecessor programmes – Final report – main evaluation report (volume 1).

Attention was paid to EU civil rights and rule of law, mainly as learning and teaching about the EU and cultures within the EU was specifically on the agenda, as well as improved solidarity. Such goals were, for example, mentioned in the Programme Guide for mobilities in the youth sector specifically. Tracking progress against achievements for this political priority, however, is not included in the Mid-term evaluation of the 2014-2020 programme or the MFF Performance Results Report[111]. Also in this case, the study supporting the mid-term evaluation of the 2014-2020 programme and the final evaluation of the predecessor programmes shone light on a few achievements of the 2014-2020 programme related to EU citizenship and civic participation, finding that 19% and 9% of mobility and cooperation projects focused on this topic, and that both staff and students tended to feel more European after participation, while the perceived importance of community engagement activities and active civic engagement in organisations decreased for learners (while perceived importance of civic behaviours and activities increased). Staff, conversely, were found to more frequently engage in volunteering and community activities after participation. These findings are, as above, however, not representative of all participants, and cover a wider range of data (years 2007-2016) than the political priorities.

Finally, other 2014-2019 political priorities lie quite far beyond the objectives of the 2014-2020 Erasmus+ programme, including those targeting the trade agreement, migration policy and deepening the EMU. Also, while EU priorities concerning democratic change and Europe as a stronger global actor could, in theory, tie into Erasmus+, the way these priorities are covered strays relatively far from the potential impacts that the programme may have, which relate to internationalisation, the international dimension of education, and the engagement of participants with civics, identity, and democracy. When looking at the intervention logic, results that link to the themes of these priorities (even if not to the actual priorities as described) include the following outcomes:

- Better understanding of other countries, cultures, and the EU,
- Stronger international networks,
- More and better teaching about the EU.

The international dimension specifically covers the youth and higher education fields during that period, including international credit mobility (ICM) of higher education students and staff, Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees (EMJMDs), mobility for young people and youth workers, capacity-building projects in the youth and higher education fields, support to policy dialogue in the higher education field and the youth structured dialogue, and JMA. These actions contribute to the 'Europe as a stronger global actor' priority as well as to the economic and labour market priorities. Specifically, capacity-building projects in the youth sector targeting Region 2 (East) relate to civil society and entrepreneurship objectives, and hence, target priorities around justice and fundamental rights, and democratic change as well.

As discussed under EQ1.1, based on the evidence collected and analysed to date, the results or targets associated with the actions discussed above have generally been achieved.

The 2019-2024 EU political priorities

The Erasmus+ programme has made significant positive improvements in how it reflects the EU's political priorities for the 2019-2024 period in its structure and actions. In particular, it introduced four horizontal priorities, which can be quite well mapped against four of the six EU political priorities, namely:

[111] European Commission, 2024. "MFF Performance Results Reports: Performance Data Tables". https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/4e8f26d1-6604-496f-87c4-0b9a886adf29_en?filename=EU%20core%20performance%20indicators_15_07_0.pdf

- The European green deal (Environment and the fight against climate change),
- A Europe fit for the digital age (Digital transformation),
- A new push for European democracy (Participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement),
- Promoting our European way of life (Inclusion and diversity; Participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement).

Within the programme, the share of grants allocated to each of these priorities are tracked. On top of this, the share of projects under KA1 and KA2 addressing each horizontal priority is either a legal base or Delegated Act indicator (and included as part of the MFF Performance Results Reports). Moreover, all horizontal priorities are mapped in the intervention logic, and the extent to which participants (self-report to) have improved their understanding of or changed their behaviour regarding these topics is also part of the core performance indicators (e.g. whether participants are more interested in "active participation in democratic life and civic society"). The effectiveness of the programme in addressing these horizontal priorities, and therefore most EU's political priorities for 2019-2024, is discussed in EQ1.3, while EQ1.4 directly reflects on the political priorities outlined in the European Green Deal.

Overall, based on the evidence collected and analysed to date, this evaluation finds that the **programme is achieving significant effects among participants** regarding the goals of the **political priorities "promoting our European way of life", "a new push for European democracy", and "a Europe fit for the digital age"** (in the 2021-2027 programming period in particular). For political priority addressing the European green deal, the programme is making progress, though challenges remain regarding the use of green transport and the programme's carbon footprint. These findings are discussed in more detail in EQ1.1, EQ1.3, and EQ1.4.

Of the last two EU political priorities, "a stronger Europe in the world" is reflected in the international dimension of the programme through actions supporting public diplomacy, institutional cooperation and people-to-people contacts, while "an economy that works for people" is at the core of Erasmus+ objectives and hence is reflected in (almost) all programme outputs, results, and impacts. There is, however, still room for improvement in terms of the alignment and responsiveness of the programme to these priorities. The key limiting factor, as also described in EQ1.1, is that it is not possible to reliably track the performance of the programme against some of the outputs, results, and impacts, which also makes it difficult to assess the programme's achievements against wider EU priorities and to identify where improvements can be made.

The international dimension of the Erasmus+ programme has region-specific strategies and priorities. By prioritising specific areas, the EU works to enhance human development across different regions, facilitating EU policy dialogue and public diplomacy actions, while complementing its actions at a country level. The international dimension includes: mobility of higher education students and staff and virtual exchanges in higher education and youth (KA1); Erasmus Mundus joint masters degrees and design measures, as well as capacity-building in higher education, youth, VET, and sport (KA2); and actions under KA3 (National Erasmus+ offices, support to the network of Erasmus+ National Focal Points, international student and alumni network Erasmus+, meetings with grant holders and other stakeholders, and selection and implementation), as well as under JMA (JMA in the field of higher education, and Jean Monnet policy debate).

For capacity-building projects, these priorities are outlined in the Programme Guide and work programmes. The political priorities covered in 2019 and 2020 are the same as discussed in the previous section. From 2021 onwards, priorities are specified for each region and field, which cover the EU political priorities for the 2019-2024 period to a varying degree (depending on the field and region).

- Strands 1 and 2 of the higher education capacity-building projects (in addition to the "a stronger Europe in the world" priority, which affects all actions targeting the international dimension) explicitly cover the 'remaining' five political priorities for neighbouring regions (Regions 1, 2, 3) as well as Sub-Saharan Africa (Region 9), three or four priorities each for regions 4, 10 and 11 (Asia, Latin America, Caribbean), and only two (Green Deal and Economy) for regions 5, 6, and 7 (Central Asia, Middle East, and Pacific).
- Capacity-building projects in VET, conversely, cover only six regions (Regions 1, 2, 3, 8, 9 and 10). Priorities in neighbouring regions (namely, Western Balkans, Neighbourhood East, and South-Mediterranean) span priorities outlined in economic and investment plans or recommendations for the VET field specifically, and hence both tend to target the Economy priority. Priorities for Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean target less developed countries and priorities outlined in the Multi-annual Indicative Programmes, and thus cover the Economy priority. For Sub-Saharan Africa, migration priority countries or projects that contribute to public-private dialogue between VET and the private sector can also be prioritised, therefore also targeting the "European way of life" priority.
- In the youth sector, only Regions 1, 2, and 3 are covered, and themes broadly cover all political priorities.
- Until 2023, the sport sector only covers Region 1[112] and only addresses the Economy and "European way of life" priorities through skills development, sharing common values, and integration and reconciliation goals.

Assessing the coverage of priorities across these fields, projects in the VET field tend to build priorities around clear regional or country-level strategies set at the EU level, while in youth, all political priorities are covered. For the VET field, the focus of projects within each region (aligned with political priorities) is linked explicitly with strategy documents in the Programme Guide, which is not done for other fields. In the sport sector, arguably all field-relevant priorities are addressed as well. For higher education, however, the priorities between regions seem to be set somewhat more arbitrarily. While the focus for Regions 1, 2, and 3 regarding the "European way of life" makes sense, the distribution of the other four actions across the remaining regions does not seem to be as logically tied to strategies as in the other fields. For example, in the Erasmus+ Multiannual Indicative Programme[113] the regional strategy for the Americas and Caribbean includes a reference to "migration" while the regional strategy for Sub-Saharan Africa does not, whereas in the Programme Guide the "integration of migrants" priority is referenced for Sub-Saharan Africa and not for Latin America or the Caribbean. A closer alignment between the strategy document and Programme Guide could be beneficial. While targets for the number of projects are generally reached, it is difficult to ascertain how effective this targeting is at contributing to the achievement of these political priorities in the international dimension, given the dearth of available evidence.

Based on the analysis above and discussed in EQ1.1, a key area emerges where the **international dimension of Erasmus+ could be further strengthened**: the capacity-building projects in higher education could fit better into regional or country-level strategies in a similar manner to the VET field, to reflect the EU priorities (such as the Global Gateway strategy and Erasmus+ Multiannual Indicative Programme) in a way that complements regional or country-level goals.

[112] It opened up to Region 2 in 2024, however this is not in the scope of this evaluation

[113] https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/document/download/ae1b61bc-1638-49bd-a2d6-2f9d5bbf609f_en#:~:text=This%20single%20Multiannual%20Indicative%20Programme,years%20(2021%20%E2%80%93%202027)

EQ 1.6: Which fields and actions of the programmes are the most effective considering the needs?

Main needs and challenges that the programme aims to address

Erasmus+ 2014-2020 drew on the legacy of its predecessors (Lifelong Learning Programme, Youth in Action, Erasmus Mundus, Tempus, Alfa, Edulink and the Preparatory Actions in Sport), and aimed to address issues that were defined in key policy documents that were available at the time. Needs in these documents were incorporated into the legal basis and relevant Programme Guides. Based on these sources, as well as the mid-term evaluation of the 2014-2020 programme and the technical specifications for this study, the main needs can be summarised as follows:

- **Improve key competencies**: Need to increase employability, reduce skill mismatches and education poverty and remain competitive in the face of global competition for talent by improving level of key competences most notably in the areas of ICT and foreign language.
- **Enhance quality of education and training**: Need to increase the level of educational attainment and retention by enhancing quality of education and training.
- **International dimension**: Need to enhance the international dimension of education, and training, youth and sports to promote European lifelong learning area.
- **Promote EU values and democracy**: Need to reduce lack of trust in the EU and low participation in democratic life, and to combat threats to common European values, most notably in the areas of social exclusion and intolerance.
- **Good governance**: Need to increase participation in sports and tackle threats to integrity in sport by promotion of good governance and volunteering.

The needs and challenges addressed by Erasmus+ 2021-2027 stem from key policy documents such as the Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030) and underlying sectoral policy agendas, the European Skills Agenda, the New European Innovation Agenda, the European Pillar of Social Rights, the Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027, the European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027, the European Youth Work Agenda and the European Union Work Plan for Sport 2021-2024. Furthermore, the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for the Erasmus+ programme provides an overview of the needs and challenges that informed the preparation of the Commission's proposal for the 2021-2027 Erasmus+ programme, as part of the intervention logic of the programme, and that can be summarised as follows:

- **Provide the right set of competences from a lifelong learning perspective**: Need to invest in activities providing individuals with the right set of knowledge, skills and competences[114] in order to make people more employable and resilient, and to foster social cohesion.
- **Promote inclusion and diversity**: Need to ensure equal opportunities of participation in the programme to better reach out to and include more people of different ages and from diverse cultural, social and economic backgrounds, including people having fewer opportunities as a result of facing one or several barriers to participation.
- **Support adaptation to the digital transition**: Need to increase capacity of educators to facilitate adoption of and adaptation to the digital transformation

[114] In line with the Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning EUR-Lex - 32018H0604(01) - EN - EUR-Lex (europa.eu)

through use of digital tools, content and higher investments in virtual cooperation platforms and digital education.

- **Support the adoption of green practices**: Need to respond to the global challenge of climate change and make the economy and lifestyles more sustainable.
- **Build trust in the EU and democracy**: Need to address the Europe-wide trends of limited participation in democratic life and the low levels of knowledge and awareness about European matters and values such as of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through the pivotal role of education.
- **Deepen international cooperation**: Need to intensify international mobility and cooperation with third countries to support institutions and organisations in Europe in facing the challenges of globalisation.

Most of the needs and challenges addressed are largely aligned and consistent between the two programming periods, with a stronger emphasis in the current programme on inclusion and diversity, adapting to the digital transformation and adopting green practices. In the formulation of the needs addressed by the current programme, there is no explicit mention of sport-specific issues within the description of the main needs and/or challenges. This is a result of the better integration of the sport sector in the programme's overall structure, aimed at enhancing its internal coherence.

Most and least effective actions with respect to programme sectors and fields

Feedback on the most and least effective actions with respect to programme sectors and fields can be found in Annex III NA/EACEA survey (Q25[115]).

Key Action 1

The overall results and impacts of **KA1 activities** are **widely reported to have been positive for both learner and staff mobilities**. In particular, the NA/EACEA survey asked respondents to identify the three most effective and least effective types of action for learners, staff and organisations. The responses[116] suggested that:

- Staff mobility was consistently ranked as the single most effective action targeting staff across all fields and sectors.
- Learner mobilities were also ranked as the most effective action on the level of individual learners and/or young people in the school education, higher education and VET fields and in the youth sector.

Key Action 2

In the field of **school education**, Cooperation Partnerships were viewed as effective by all respondents to the NA/EACEA survey, and as the most effective of all Erasmus+ activities from a policy and systems viewpoint. Small-scale Partnerships were similarly viewed as effective. Several case studies suggest that **through participation in KA2 teachers benefit from observing and learning from other school practices**, while among learners there were improvements in participation and motivation, and both learned from knowledge sharing[117].

In the field of **VET,** Cooperation Partnerships were ranked in the top 3 most effective Erasmus+ activities by all respondents to the NA/EACEA survey. One National Agency

[115] Annex III, NAs/EACEA survey, Q25: In your sector, which actions do you think have strongest and weakest results for beneficiaries and participants, organisations and systems? (Note: Respondents were asked to select up to 3 most effective and 3 least effective types of action).

[116] Based on the following numbers of responses to the NA/EACEA survey: higher education (n=28), VET (n=27), school education (n=32), adult education (n=26), youth (n=29), sport (n=19).

[117] Case studies: Istituto comprensivo Manzoni-Radice (SCH, IT), I Liceum Ogólnokształcące im. Henryka Sienkiewicza w Kędzierzynie-Koźlu (SCH, PL), Pädagogische Hochschule Freiburg (SCH, DE), Primary school Anton Skala (SCH, RS).

emphasised their effectiveness to enhance the professionalism of VET schools whilst ensuring efficient resource utilisation. Small-scale Partnerships were viewed as somewhat less effective, whereas **the action viewed as the most effective was the Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs).** Case studies suggest that, at an organisational level, KA2 activities were seen as essential to the international profile of organisations. For practitioners there were improvements in methodologies and practices, and for learners there were improvements in digital and intercultural skills[118]. One VET institution stated that the main advantage of KA2 activities is that their deliverables can stay with an organisation, serving as a legacy[119].

In **adult education**, NA/EACEA survey respondents ranked Cooperation Partnerships in the top 3 most effective Erasmus+ activities for staff and organisations, and Small-scale Partnerships in the top 3 for organisations and learners. Key effects for staff include **improved networking opportunities and new approaches to training**[120].

In the field of **higher education**, Small-Scale Partnerships are not applicable, and Cooperation Partnerships were ranked by NA/EACEA survey respondents as the second most effective action for staff (behind mobility activities). From the case studies, it emerges that the main organisational benefits of participation in KA2 for HEIs are **increased internationalisation and visibility and research collaboration opportunities**, while for staff they include **improvements in learning and knowledge sharing**[121].

In the **youth** sector, respondents to the NA/EACEA survey identified Small-scale Partnerships as the most effective of all activities at organisation level and placed Cooperation Partnerships second – both ahead of mobility activities. Two National Agencies emphasised that these partnerships offer additional resources and platforms to **enhance youth work** and **contribute to policy development**, while also providing an adaptable format tailored to the specific development needs of the organisations involved. The case studies also highlight positive effects of Capacity building projects in the youth sector, for both teachers and young people, such as **improved self-confidence and social skills and enhanced cultural awareness**[122].

In the **sport** sector, NA/ECEA survey respondents viewed both Cooperation Partnerships and Small-scale Partnerships as effective at the level of organisations, in addition to not-for-profit sports events. Key effects identified in case studies include the **professionalisation of organisations**, **improvement in technical skills and knowledge sharing**[123].

Key Action 3

The NA/EACEA survey results show that activities in KA3 are perceived as less effective compared to other KAs. Policy experimentations were ranked least effective for school education at the level of organisations, VET at the level of staff, and adult education at the level of organisations and learners. Policy dialogue activities were ranked within the 3 least effective for staff and learners across a number of fields. Policy related activities under KA3 are predominantly institutionally focussed and as such tend to have a rather lower or harder to measure impact at the level of individual participants. The effects of policy experimentations at the organisational level also tend to be lesser known, as shown by the

[118] Case studies: FH Joanneum (VET, AT), Chambre de Métiers et de l'Artisanat Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes (VET, FR), Vegova Ljubljana (VET, SI), Kauno technologijų mokymo centras (VET, LT), Pilot PoVE Water, CIV Water (VET, NL).

[119] Case study AKMI Anonimi Ekpaideftiki Etairia (VET, EL).

[120] Case studies Asociația Sprijin+ (ADU, RO), AFEJI Hauts-de-France (ADU, FR), Społeczny Instytut Ekologiczny (ADU, PL).

[121] Case studies TU Berlin - ENHANCE Alliance (HED, DE), Univerza v Mariboru (HED, SI), Universidad de Sevilla (HED, ES), CHARM-EU, University of Barcelona (HED, ES).

[122] Case studies E29 (formerly, Ifjúsági Nomád Klub) (YOU, HU), Društvo ustvarjalcev Taka Tuka (YOU, SI).

[123] Case studies Stichting Flik-Flak (SPO, NL), European Hockey Federation (SPO, BE), EuropeActive (SPO, BE), European Young Women Programme, FIA (SPO, FR).

fact that 16.5% of NA/EACEA survey respondents indicated limited knowledge or uncertainty about it.

KA3 activities were perceived as being more effective from a policy and systems perspective, which is their main focus. In the NA/EACEA survey, 18 respondents provided insights into the positive effects of Policy Dialogue and Cooperation with Stakeholders at system level. 11 of them highlighted the potential positive impact of involving political decision makers and stakeholders.

Furthermore, the perceived effectiveness of KA3 actions is negatively impacted by the fact that they are less well-known than actions under other KAs. This is also because of the support character of the KA3 activities implemented under indirect management, such as the Training and Cooperation Activities (TCA) or the SALTO Resource Centres. As stated by one respondent to the NA/EACEA survey: "*Although TCAs and SALTO resource centres are valuable, their purpose and opportunities are not widely known. Dissemination and awareness-raising activities require a centralised approach in order to be more effective".*

Positive effects of KA3 are confirmed also beyond the national level. For instance, five representatives from Commission services highlighted that policy related activities under KA3 play an important role in shaping the European Education Area (EEA), including through promoting internationalisation, fostering cooperation among higher education institutions, and supporting the development of qualification frameworks. At international level, for example, a KII informant from an international organisation highlighted the benefits of collaborative efforts with the EU under Erasmus+, especially under KA3, including regarding digital transformation, micro-credentials and influencing EU initiatives.

Although the NA/EACEA survey results suggest that KA3 activities are seen as less effective than other KA activities, evidence from case studies suggest that participants viewed them positively in terms of effectiveness. For example, the project 'Regional Capacity for Adult Learning and Education', implemented under KA3 (adult education) in the 2014-2020 period, extended its benefits beyond the scope of the individual beneficiary organisation as the project fostered collaboration among stakeholders, influencing policy discussions at European Commission meetings and emphasising the value of strategic partnerships in the adult education field[124].

In the youth sector, case studies suggest that KA3 projects have brought benefits in bringing learners and policy makers together, improved engagement and participation, and have led to increased knowledge and skills. The outputs of KA3 activities have helped in developing and shaping strategies and policies at both an organisational level and wider, and the benefits have been seen at both individual and organisational level[125].

EQ 1.7: Can conclusions be drawn on the effectiveness of actions that have been continued and those that were discontinued between the two periods? The impact of all actions/elements of Erasmus+ 2014-2020, with special attention paid to those actions/elements that continued in Erasmus+ 2021-2027; the impact of actions/elements that have been discontinued such as EVS, to the extent that it might help to design the future programme.

While a significant portion of the actions funded in the 2014-2020 programming period remained in the 2021-2027 programming period, a few were discontinued (see Table EQ1.7 in Annex I for an outline of all actions in the two programming periods, showing those that

[124] Case study Regional Capacity for Adult Learning and Education, EAEA (ADU, BE)

[125] Case studies Youth for Exchange and Understanding International (YOU, BE), Edlab, Universidad de Granada (HED, ES), Youth Wiki (Youth, MT, FR, CY)

were discontinued or newly added in the current programming period). Specifically, two actions were discontinued:

1. Student Loan Guarantee Facility (Erasmus+ Master Loans)
2. European Voluntary Service (EVS), including large scale EVS events, the EVS Charter, the EVS card, and the EVS insurance.

Actions like the School exchange partnerships were deeply re-designed and moved from KA2 to KA1. Other actions, like the Knowledge Alliances and the Sector-skills alliances changed name and were redesigned while keeping most of their main features.

Discontinued actions

The **European Voluntary Service (EVS)** was covered by Erasmus+ 2014-2020 until 2018[126], supporting some 54,000 volunteers These mobilities represented a relatively small part of the total mobilities in the youth sector by young people, which reached around 565.000 mobilities in the same period (2014 to 2018). In the Erasmus+ 2014-2020 mid-term evaluation, the EVS was generally considered effective, even if participants were somewhat less satisfied with key aspects of the mobility (such as the mentoring they received). The EVS was discontinued as a 'brand' and removed from the Erasmus+ programme in 2019. Volunteering activities were then supported under the European Solidarity Corps. Currently, Erasmus+ offers opportunities for youth exchanges, mobility projects for youth workers, youth participation activities and DiscoverEU activities (general and Inclusion Action) under KA1 focusing on non-formal learning in the field of Youth, as well as some opportunities for volunteering-related mobilities in Erasmus+ in the field of Sport (e.g. under the "not-for-profit European sports events"). The European Solidarity Corps has funded over 65,000 mobilities for young people in the current programming period[127].

The **Erasmus+ Student Loan Guarantee Facility (SLGF)** was discontinued as a stand-alone pilot initiative for transnational student mobility because it failed to gain significant traction with financial institutions for this purpose. The initial target for the Student Loan Guarantee Facility, which had a maximum budget allocation of EUR 520 million for the whole programme period, was to provide by 2020 some 200,000 students with access to EU-guaranteed loans for studying abroad. But by the end of 2017, only 428 students had opted to take part in the scheme, with the majority of them coming from Spain[128] [129]. Following its discontinuation, a broader set of students and learners can still obtain financing to enhance their educational attainment and skills, including for studying abroad, through the Skills & Education Guarantee initiative (S&E), as part of the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) and through the Social Investment and Skills Window (under the InvestEU programme), both managed by the EIF.

Within KA2, **Strategic Partnerships** in the school education field included pupil (learner) mobilities (as part of the School Exchange Partnership'), which have been reorganised under KA1 in the current programming period. These actions aimed to support innovations in the education and training sector with a long-term outlook. In the Erasmus+ 2014-2020 mid-term evaluation, it appeared that the action faced barriers to achieving the objectives of KA2. In particular, the school exchange partnerships had such a strong focus on

[126] EVS was covered under Erasmus+ 2014-2020 under KA105 (mobility projects for young people and youth workers) until 2017. In 2017, KA135 Strategic EVS was launched and in 2018, in preparation of the European Solidarity Corps, volunteering was moved from KA105 to KA125 Volunteering projects.

[127] https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/eu-budget/performance-and-reporting/programme-performance-statements/european-solidarity-corps-performance_en

[128] https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/444828c6-7151-11e9-9f05-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-307571692

[129] https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/99a76b24-2289-11e8-ac73-01aa75ed71a1

mobilities that innovative results seemed limited[130]. However, the project sampling exercise carried out under this evaluation, which covers both programming periods and includes a majority of projects launched under the 2014-2020 programme, suggests that the school exchange partnerships projects yielded positive effects on pupils' knowledge and skills (e.g. environmental and digital), intercultural exchange and a European sense of belonging[131]. Also in the case of the Sector-skills Alliances (not assessed in the previous mid-term evaluation, as recently introduced), the project sampling exercise suggests that they reached a significant number of learners and positively affected change regarding skill attainment and the connection between VET education and the labour market[132].

In the current 2021-2027 programme, both types of actions have therefore been included with a different name "Partnerships for Innovation: Alliances" and a slightly different focus. First, the Alliances for Education and Enterprises (Lot 1) incorporates alliances for sectoral cooperation of skills and alliances between higher education, VET and business, based on the previous Knowledge Alliances. These Alliances for Innovation aim to create innovative, transnational and sustainable cooperation settings to foster new, innovative and multidisciplinary approaches to teaching and learning, strengthen the effectiveness of education and training systems. Their objective is to boost innovation through cooperation among education and training providers, as well as labour market and entrepreneurial actors. The Alliances also aim to reinforce sense of initiative, entrepreneurial mind-sets for learners and educational staff, social responsibility, community engagement, as well as enhance the quality and relevance of skills developed and certified through education and training systems Sector Skills alliances have also continued and morphed into an action (Blueprint Alliances for Innovation, Lot 2) that aims to strengthen innovation capacity through cooperation among higher education and VET institutions, as well as boost the provision of new skills and address skill mismatches by creating new curricula in the higher education and VET fields.

Moreover, a new initiative was established by taking a more institutional approach to bridge employers and VET educators, while developing new activities that go beyond skills provision, in Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs).

Lastly, the Strategic Partnerships were also renamed as 'Partnerships for Cooperation' (including both 'Cooperation Partnerships' and 'Small-scale partnerships', the latter is a brand new action specifically designed for newcomer and small organisations), which also allow for the exchange of good practices, but with a primary focus on building experience in international cooperation and strengthening capacity[133]. Within KA2 school education field, moreover, the KA229 (mobility of school pupils) have been shifted to KA1, which addresses learning mobilities in the same way as the other sectors, and no longer are required to have reciprocity of mobilities between schools or exchanges (though they can still do so if they wish).

Continued actions

Apart from the actions listed above, all other Erasmus+ actions were continued between the two programming periods. The assessment described below builds on the findings on the effectiveness of these actions presented under EQ 1.1.

[130] European Commission. 2018. Combined evaluation of Erasmus+ and predecessor programmes: Final report – main evaluation report (volume 1). https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/eval/icf-volume1-main-report.pdf

[131] Projects with reference "2018-1-de03-ka229-047128", "2018-1-it02-ka229-048193", "2020-1-fr01-ka229-080164", "2019-1-de03-ka229-059591", "2018-1-ee01-ka229-047081", and "2019-1-es01-ka229-064212".

[132] Projects with reference "600641-EPP-1-2018-1-LT-EPPKA2-SSA" and "601073-EPP-1-2018-1-IT-EPPKA2-SSA". The projects included in the sample were selected randomly. No Knowledge Alliance was included in the sample.

[133] 2024 Erasmus+ Programme Guide. https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2023-11/2024-Erasmus%2BProgramme-Guide_EN.pdf

First, under KA1, most continued actions show significant effectiveness. Mobilities for staff in higher education, school education, adult education, VET, and in the youth sector, as well as mobilities for learners in the youth, higher education, and VET fields, all showed strong performance in the 2014-2020 programming period. Stakeholders consider the accreditations in higher education and VET broadly effective as well[134]. This evaluation has not been able to assess the continued effectiveness of language assessment (as this is no longer a core performance indicator) and support for participants with fewer opportunities in the Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters Degrees (as data on this is only available in the current programming period).

Second, under KA2, a number of actions have continued from the 2014-2020 to the current programming period or just renamed. These include strategic partnerships (renamed as Partnerships for Cooperation), capacity building, and transnational cooperation activities (TCA) (renamed as 'Training and Cooperation Activities' and moved from KA2 to KA3), although with some adjustments in some cases. For each of these, some evidence on their effectiveness was found. Virtual exchanges, moreover, have expanded significantly and took a significant role during the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, while on the other hand the number of virtual platform users (which are not connected to virtual exchanges) has fallen slightly short of targets for the EPALE and eTwinning platforms. Insights on the effectiveness of not-for-profit European sport events are not available based on the available evidence.

Continued actions under KA3 are generally perceived very positively by stakeholders in the key informant interviews and case studies[135], which highlight the positive impact of KA3 projects on policy dialogue and affecting policy change, as well as their effects on the cooperation at regional, national, or international level between different education stakeholders. Such actions include the implementation of the EU policy agendas, the support to resource centres, and policy dialogue with relevant European stakeholders and international organisations. The evaluation team does not have sufficient information on the implementation of EU transparency and recognition tools to assess the effectiveness of this action.

Lastly, despite limited stakeholder insights on the continued Jean Monnet Actions in higher education, the funded actions are found to be largely effective. Stakeholders[136] signal, in particular, their appreciation for the role of JMA in fostering dialogue between academia, stakeholders (such as those involved in European integration, students, private companies and international organisations), and policy makers, its role in promoting civic participation and citizenship education, its role in creating international networks, and the achievements in promoting teaching and learning about the EU.

Overall assessment of continued and discontinued actions

Overall, it can be concluded that the discontinuation of the EVS under Erasmus+ was justified and successful, because it not only enabled the programme to be more focused on learning mobilities for youth, which were more aligned with its overall objectives and scope, but there are also positive signs that the volunteering activities previously covered by the

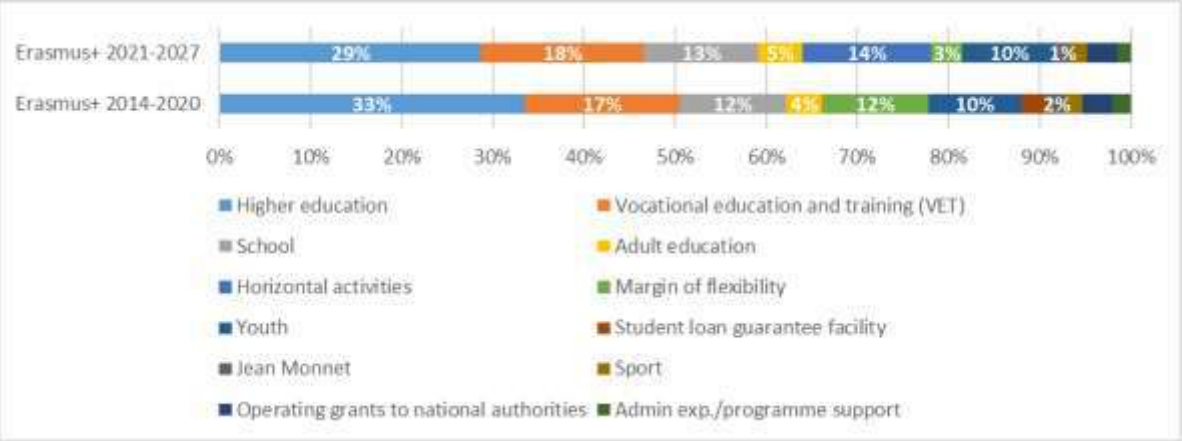
[134] Key informant interviews at the national level (Member States (2): NO, SE), and the European level: industry stakeholder organisation (1), DG EAC (1). Case studies E29 (formerly, Ifjúsági Nomád Klub) (YOU, HU) and Pilot PoVE Water, CIV Water (NL).

[135] Case studies AKMI Anonimi Ekpaideftiki Etairia (VET, EL), Agenzija Zghazagh (YOU, MT), Youth for exchange and understanding international (YOU, BE), CHARM-EU, University of Barcelona (ES), EdLab, Universidad de Granada (ES), Bildungsdirektion Steiermark, Board of Education of Styria (AT), Regional Capacity for Adult Learning and Education, EAEA (BE), Pilot PoVE Water, CIV Water (NL), Youth Wiki (MT, FR, CY), European Young Women Programme, FIA (FR); 3 national level interviews, 2 stakeholder organisations, 1 NEO, 2 from the European Commission, and 1 SALTO.

[136] Interviews with Jean Monnet centres (1), the EC (1), an EU delegation (1), a national stakeholder organisation (1); Case studies Scuola superiore di studi universitari e di perfezionamento Sant'Anna (IT), Alma Mater Studiorum - Università di Bologna (IT), College of Europe (BE, PL), European University Institute (IT), European Institute of Public Administration (NL).

EVS are equally effective as part of the European Solidarity Corps, as shown by the increasing number of participants in volunteering activities under the European Solidarity Corps[137]. As discussed under EQ19, Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps are overall complementary, although a few potential overlaps have been identified, including overlap in the applicant pool (i.e. both the type of organisations and the participant groups that would be targeted), which, however, does not seem to affect their overall effectiveness. Moreover, it is important to note (see figure below) that the share of the budget (10%) dedicated to the youth sector has remained the same across both programming periods, despite EVS' discontinuation from the Erasmus+ programme and the inclusion of volunteering activities under the European Solidarity Corps. This effectively means that a higher share of the total available budget (Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps) is available in the youth sector. This is further discussed in EQ9.3.

Figure 5: Budget changes, Erasmus+ 2014-2020 and Erasmus+ 2021-2027



Source: ICF elaboration based on Erasmus+ legal bases

For the Erasmus+ Master Student Loan Graduate Facility, considering the very low take-up and the issues identified with its effectiveness, no evidence was found to suggest that the discontinuation of this element had a negative impact on the overall effectiveness of the Erasmus+ programme.

It is difficult to assess whether all activities in Erasmus+ 2021-2027 were associated with strong positive effects in the 2014-2020 programming period, as information about the effectiveness of some actions is very limited, and often reliant on qualitative insights from stakeholders. However, it is clear that Erasmus+ 2021-2027 has continued all activities for which this evaluation found strong positive effects in 2014-2020.

Based on the available evidence, it is not possible to assess whether there are any gaps in areas of action under Erasmus+ 2021-2027 that are affecting the effectiveness of the programme. There are some suggestions on missing objectives (see EQ1.1), though few are repeated consistently by stakeholders. The programme could, for example benefit from an increased focus on research – both as developed within the programme (e.g. translating research into practical applications, piloting academic concepts and experimenting in schools[138]), but also research on the programme's impact itself (see EQ1.2), where stronger

[137] See: European Commission, 2024. "MFF Performance Results Reports: Performance Data Tables". https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2023-06/Core%20performance%20indicators%20%28new%29.pdf, p. 564 and p. 1144.

[138] KIIs with two stakeholder organisations in the Higher Education sector mention research impacts separately, while around half of the stakeholder organisations signal in particular the improvements of synergies between Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe between higher education and research. This was further echoed in Case studies CHARM-EU, University of Barcelona (ES) and Pädagogische Hochschule Freiburg (SCH, DE).

evidence could support both the understanding of Erasmus+ and the impacts of a variety of educational interventions that fall under its remit.

EQ 1.8: What conclusions can be drawn on the likely impact of Erasmus+ 2021-2027 given that significant parts of its actions are a continuation of Erasmus+ 2014-2020?

As stated in the previous sections, the overall needs, priorities and types of actions funded have not changed radically over the two programming periods. The evaluation has observed no detrimental effects from the fact that the same types of actions have been continued as in the predecessor programme. In fact, exposure to and participation in similar types of interventions over time is likely to achieve stronger results and impacts especially at organisational and system levels due to the build-up of experience.

The evaluation found that it is anticipated that the impacts of the 2014-2020 programme will carry on with the current programme, likely in a more positive and sustainable manner. Findings from the interim evaluation of Erasmus+ 2021-2027 show that all continued actions, particularly under KA1 and KA3, show significant effectiveness and performance increase while KA2 actions have been slightly underperforming. Based on the stakeholder insights from the case studies on Jean Monnet Actions, the funded actions are found to be largely effective (See also EQ 1.1, E.Q.1.6 and EQ 1.7).

Still, several factors make it difficult to draw clear conclusions concerning continued effectiveness and they are mostly related to programme resilience in the face of external shocks. Some of these factors had already demonstrated negative impacts. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic decreased participation in the 2021-2023 period, although its negative impact appears to have now been largely surpassed. Rising inflation, however, remains an active brake on programme participation for future calls. The war in Ukraine, and the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East may disrupt achievements, especially in the areas of mobility and international cooperation (see EQ 3). Future calls should take these issues into account to ensure that the trend of positive impact from the predecessor programme can be continued.

EQ 1.9: Jean Monnet in schools: How well is the action known? What added value does it bring and what are the first results?

JMA in the field of higher education promote excellence in teaching and research in the field of EU studies and foster the dialogue between the academic world and policymakers with particular emphasis on the European integration process. Under the 2021-2027 Erasmus+ programme, JMA offer new funding opportunities for schools and vocational education and training institutions. These aim to support teachers in primary, secondary and vocational education to inform young people and develop critical awareness about the EU, what it stands for, how it works and what difference it makes to their daily lives and thus promote active citizenship education in Member States and third countries associated to the programme. Supported actions in schools include Jean Monnet Learning EU Initiatives and Jean Monnet Schools Networks. Jean Monnet Teacher Training action targets HEI providing initial and continuous training for teachers.

JMA in schools do not have quantitative output targets associated with them. However, in terms of their effectiveness, the stakeholders consulted for the specific case studies indicated that the activities performed under JMA in schools generally yielded effective results. In terms of utilisation, the Teacher Training Action and Schools Networks have received a sufficient number of applications to fully utilise the available budget. The Learning EU Initiatives received fewer applications than anticipated in the first two years (2022 and 2023). However, in 2024, there was a significant increase in applications, leading

to the full utilisation of the total budget of 3 million euros, which supported 94 projects. None of these constitute a major cause for concern, and the evaluation has identified several reasons for delays or falling short of targets (See EQ.1.1 for more details).

Within the scope of this evaluation, three JMA projects in the school education field, one for each sub-action, were examined as case studies[139]. In the context of this evaluation question, the following conclusions can be made from the result of this exercise:

- All projects' beneficiaries reported that (i) it would not be possible to realise the same activities without the JMA in schools funding, and that (ii) they achieved effective results in learner, professional and organisational level.
- Two of the three beneficiaries consulted in the school education field did not report a significant issue regarding how well the action is known. Only the beneficiary from Bulgaria reported that they learned about this action through EPAS network and otherwise, they would not have known about this opportunity.
- In terms of added value, all three beneficiaries reported that the outputs produced by the projects have been superior in terms of depth and scope, compared to conventional learning-teaching means which are available in their country (such as civic education and/or history classes).
- None of the beneficiaries consulted reported a significant difficulty regarding the application procedure and further administrative processes.
- All of the beneficiaries referred to international study visits to EU Institutions as the "high point" of their projects where the most learning has occurred. However, all beneficiaries complained about the fact that they were not able to take as many individuals as they wanted due to budgetary constraints. This constraint also put pressure on the coordinators during the candidate selection process (i.e., how to identify the participants of the study visit).
- All the beneficiaries agreed the technical and administrative support received was of good quality as well as the digital reporting tool.

The evidence and results available so far concerning JMA in schools do not make it possible to draw firm conclusions on the level of awareness of these new actions, nor on their added value at this stage, yet they point to a good start and promising outlook for the future.

[139] Case studies and their action types are Casa do Professor (PT) – Teacher Training Action, Profilirana Prirodo-Matematicheska Gimnazia Akademik Ivan Tsenov (BG) – Learning EU Initiatives, and Istituto Statale d'Arte - Liceo artistico "Edgardo Mannucci" (IT) – Network for Schools

3.1.2 EQ 2 Implementation and architecture

EQ 2. 1: How effective are the measures that contribute to the high-quality and inclusive implementation of the programme, including support for activities and bodies (resource centres, information networks, training and cooperation activities, etc.) in enhancing the strategic implementation of Erasmus+? What additional measures or changes to the existing support actions may contribute to further supporting the high-quality implementation of the programme?

In alignment with the core values of the EU, inclusivity and accessibility have been central objectives of the Erasmus+ programme since its launch in 2014. This commitment became even more critical in the wake of the 2015 refugee crisis, which saw over 1 million people seeking refuge in the EU[140]. This crisis underscored the importance of enhancing inclusivity within both the EU's labour market and social and educational programmes.

Recognising the urgency, the mid-term review of the 2014-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)[141] led to a strategic allocation of additional EU budget resources specifically aimed at bolstering inclusivity. This reallocation further reinforced the centrality of inclusivity within the programme. Against this, the mid-term evaluation of Erasmus+ 2014-2020, whilst acknowledging commendable efforts and noting successful elements related to inclusivity, highlighted the need for further actions to ensure broader access and increased participation. Since 2015, there has been a substantial increase in the focus on inclusivity in the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme, alongside a growing number of measures (i.e. tools and platforms supported under Erasmus+) aimed at enhancing high-quality implementation. Despite the clear progress made in making the programme more inclusive, evidence gathered for this evaluation shows some existing hindrances to the participation of people with fewer opportunities (see EQ5 and EQ6). Similarly, specific challenges were identified in terms of quality implementation.

Progress in terms of diversity and inclusion

To promote social inclusion and the participation of people with special needs or with fewer opportunities, the Erasmus+ programme 2014-2020 was supported by a dedicated 'Erasmus+ Inclusion and Diversity Strategy for Youth'[142]. The strategy defined seven main categories[143] that stood as an important step in harmonising inclusion-related efforts. The 2021-2027 generation of the programme brought a more extensive interpretation of inclusion, along with a comprehensive 'Inclusion and Diversity Strategy'[144]. First, inclusion was defined as one of the four horizontal priorities of the programme, and second, the programme's focus was extended to encompass a broader spectrum of individuals facing fewer opportunities[145]. The objective of inclusion and diversity has also been more systematically integrated into the programme structure.

[140] European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication. (2017). "The EU and the migration crisis" https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/e9465e4f-b2e4-11e7-837e-01aa75ed71a1#:~:text=In%202015%20and%202016%20the,to%20deal%20with%20the%20crisis

[141] D'ALFONSO A. (2017). "2014-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF): Mid-term revision". https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2016)593569

[142] https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/youth/library/reports/inclusion-diversity-strategy_en.pdf

[143] European Parliament (2022). REPORT on the implementation of inclusion measures within Erasmus+ 2014-2020.

https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2022-0158_EN.html

[144] https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/document/implementation-guidelines-erasmus-and-european-solidarity-corps-inclusion-and-diversity-strategy

[145] https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-d/glossary-common-terms

In the 2014-2020 programme, a number of National Agencies conducted horizontal activities to promote equity and inclusion[146], with emphasis on newly arrived migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees. The analysis of National Agencies' yearly reports shows that in 2021 and 2022, all of them implemented horizontal activities targeted at inclusion, forming part of an overall inclusion and diversity strategy that looked to foster inclusion at all educational levels. This represents a move from a sector-by-sector approach towards a more horizontal approach, and also shows that the objective of ensuring programme inclusivity is more strategic and integrated than under its previous generation. Between 2015 and 2020, the proportion of National Agencies that implemented activities aiming to enhance the inclusive dimension of the programme increased from 38% to 78%, and at the beginning of the 2021-2027 generation of the programme, all National Agencies implemented activities addressing programme inclusivity as part of horizontal priorities and actions.

As from the current programme, National Agencies are expected to have dedicated staff such as: (i) inclusion officers, (ii) digital officers, and (iii) sustainability officers to ensure a coordinated approach to the implementation of the programme's horizontal priorities.

Effectiveness of activities and bodies supporting inclusive and quality programme implementation

Erasmus+ funds activities and bodies supporting inclusive and quality implementation of the programme: i) Training and Cooperation Activities (TCAs), ii) the SALTO Resource Centres, iii) Eurodesk, iv) National VET teams, and v) DiscoverEU learning cycle, all implemented under Key action 3 (indirect management). The analysis, mainly based on National Agencies' yearly reports, found that these measures are appreciated and widely implemented through a wide range of activities. This is also well demonstrated by the results of the Public Consultation whereas nearly all respondents that were in the position of formulating an opinion agreed that these measures should be kept in their current format or somewhat modified as discussed below. Importantly, the analysis has not identified any evidently missing measure or support action.

Training and Cooperation Activities (TCAs)

TCAs (in 2014-2020 called Transnational Cooperation Activities) aim at improving the overall quality of the Erasmus+ programme implementation. The focus of the TCAs is on sharing practices, experiences, supporting competence development and providing networking opportunities for individuals and organisations all over Europe. Their importance is clearly confirmed by responses to the NA/EACEA survey[147]. Nearly all respondents (94%) agree that TCAs provided by the programme offer substantial added value, and almost as many (90%) agree that these activities are an effective tool to support the capacity building process of participating organisations. The extension of TCAs to the E&T sector since 2014[148] is viewed positively. The uptake of TCAs is clearly demonstrated by related programme data analysis. Between 2014-2020, the number of unique TCA IDs amounted to over 20,000[149]. In the current programming period, the planning and implementation of TCAs moved towards a macro-approach offering more flexibility to NAs to plan and adapt activities to raising needs and priorities. NAs establish a multi-annual strategy (at the beginning of the programming period, revised at mid-term) and annual priorities in their work programmes and plan relevant activities, which can be adapted in the course of the

[146] Proportion of NA yearly reports that contained an inclusive dimension as part of programme implementation (across sectors): 2015: 38%, 2016: 54%, 2017: 61%, 2018: 67%, 2019: 66%, 2020: 78%, 2021: 100%, 2022: 100%. Source: 2015-2022 National Agency yearly reports

[147] For further details, please refer to Annex III NA/EACEA survey, Q24.

[148] With exception of Higher education, when TCA was introduced in 2015.

[149] Count of TCA ID: 21,429 that according to role divides as follows: 3,652 hosting, 17,777 sending.

eligibility period[150]. Between 2021 and 2022 more than 1,000[151] TCAs have been planned in the youth field and more than 250 have been realised in the E&T sectors. 2023 activities are still ongoing at the moment of the evaluation, as the eligibility period ends only in December 2025. The numbers highlight that TCAs are still prominent in the field of youth.

The review of national reports provides further insights on the type and focus of TCAs as well as key challenges encountered and outcomes realised. As for the E&T sector, common topics across the fields include inclusion, digital skills, and internationalisation. Specific to the adult education field, activities often focused on media literacy and entrepreneurship. Overall, reported objectives were well in line with Programme objectives and centred around enhancing quality and collaboration, promoting internationalisation, sharing best practices and providing networking opportunities as well as developing new project ideas. Reportedly, participants gained knowledge, skills, and new contacts for future collaborations. The activities received positive feedback from participants, highlighting benefits such as networking opportunities, knowledge exchange, and project development. Besides the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, entailing the cancellation, postponement or modification of many planned TCAs, key challenges included budget constraints, limited resources and participant selection for some events. TCAs in the youth sector show a largely comparable picture, implementing training courses, seminars, conferences, and international events focusing on themes such as social inclusion, youth participation, and non-formal education. National Agencies faced challenges like cancelled activities, low participant interest[152], and budget constraints but were able to adapt and replace some activities to ensure continuous engagement. Despite facing challenges such as COVID-19 restrictions leading to cancellations or postponements, efforts were made to adapt activities to online formats. Feedback from participants indicated positive engagement, learning, and knowledge sharing.

SALTO Resource Centres

SALTO stands for 'Support, Advanced Learning & Training Opportunities'. The aim of the SALTO Resource Centres is to improve the quality and impact of the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes at a systemic level by providing expertise, resources, information and training activities. Their offer is aimed at national agencies and stakeholders in education, training and youth fields. Albeit not asked about directly in the NA/EACEA survey, a strong appreciation for SALTO Resource centres is well-evidenced through this consultation activity. Particularly, from the National Reports, specific thematic SALTOs[153] are more frequently mentioned than others. Specifically, the support and resources provided by the **SALTO Inclusion & Diversity** is widely used by National Agencies. Examples include delivering trainings to national Erasmus+ expert assessors based on tools prepared by SALTO I&D (e.g. CY02) or capacity building activities (e.g. LT02) as well as international seminars on antiracism (e.g. RO01). Similarly, **SALTO Training and Cooperation** is widely appreciated and used by most National Agencies, as it offers valuable resources for implementing quality TCAs. Collaboration with **SALTO Participation and Information** is also evident and National Agencies report on a number of specific exchanges and events organised together with this SALTO. References to

[150] Eligibility period for TCAs was previously of 18 months, however, it was extended to 24 months, due to the heavy impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the TCAs calendar. Reference: calendar for the use of funds.

[151] Source: Erasmus+ Annual Report 2021-2022.

[152] Mostly due to screen fatigue in the shift to online activities during the COVID-19 pandemic period.

[153] Thematic SALTO Resource Centres apply to both E&T and Youth fields. They are: SALTO Participation & Information, SALTO Inclusion & Diversity, SALTO Digital, SALTO Green, and SALTO Training & Cooperation. Their objective is to ensure a strategic and comprehensive approach in their respective areas including through developing expertise and experience as a basis for formulating programme outcomes, increasing quality and impact of the National Agencies' strategies and outreach activities for cross-cutting priority fields, valorising programme experience and sharing lessons learnt inside and outside the network of National Agencies.

geographical SALTOs[154] (relevant to the youth field only) are also made, albeit to a lesser extent. Such examples include SALTO South East Europe, which implemented a range of activities such as communication, appointment of contact points, and organisation of specific events. While most of the planned activities were successfully carried out, some faced challenges related to cancellations or postponements due to factors such as insufficient participant numbers, logistical challenges, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Against this, overall, SALTO Resource Centres showed resilience by adapting activities to online formats, continuing support services, and focusing on promoting inclusion, diversity, intercultural dialogue, and youth empowerment.

Eurodesk

Eurodesk is a European youth information network created in 1990[155]. As a support organisation to Erasmus+, Eurodesk makes information on learning mobility comprehensive and accessible to young people and those who work with them. As such, its main aim is to raise awareness on European opportunities and to encourage young people to become active citizens. National Agencies' yearly reports offer a comprehensive overview of the activities undertaken, main achievements and key challenges encountered.

Between 2015 and 2021, Eurodesk offices implemented a range of activities including organising training sessions and events, creating content and disseminating information, promoting youth mobility, collaborating with partners and stakeholders, , supporting young people in accessing educational and volunteering programmes, and participation in campaigns like Time to Move[156] and the European Youth Week[157]. Challenges reported concern insufficient funding, changes in management and staff, resource constraints, difficulties in engaging multipliers and youth networks, technical issues, delays in activities, and organisational changes. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Eurodesk offices increasingly moved towards online activities.

National VET Teams

Under the current Programme, national VET teams have been introduced to advance the development and internationalisation of the VET field, facilitate collaboration with other National VET Teams for the exchange of best practices, and provide guidance and support to EU-funded projects under the Erasmus+ programme. As a new initiative, there is limited evidence on key outcomes. Of the seven National Agencies that gave related input on VET Teams as part of the NA/EACEA survey, six emphasised the importance and benefits of the action. These include quality and thus impact improvement; more visibility and enhanced opportunities (i.e. taking part in thematic trainings, capacity building activities, etc.); VET providers; and enhanced opportunities for VET providers. Against this, one National Agency flagged that the national VET has difficulties in identifying and selecting key focus teams.

Further to this, the review of National Agencies' yearly reports found a high level of engagement, with numerous activities carried out and strong interest from stakeholders. This indicates that the action is an important tool that has the capacity to contribute to the quality implementation of the programme in the field of VET. The key activities that were reported in 2021 included organising workshops, events, training sessions, and virtual/online meetings to support VET initiatives. The VET Teams collaborated to enhance VET systems, promote EU VET tools, address challenges due to COVID-19, and engage

[154] They are SALTO EuroMed (implemented through the French youth National Agency), SALTO Eastern Europe and Caucasus (implemented through the Polish National Agency) and SALTO South East Europe (implemented through the Slovenian youth National Agency).

[155] https://eurodesk.eu/about/

[156] https://timetomove.eurodesk.eu/

[157] https://youth.europa.eu/youthweek_en

stakeholders. Commonly reported challenges included staff turnover, pandemic-related restrictions, and cancelled events.

DiscoverEU learning cycle

Through the DiscoverEU learning cycle, the Erasmus+ programme supports participants with activities that enhance the educational impact of their experiences. To this end, National Agencies have implemented pre-departure information meetings, post-travel meetings, meet-ups and coordination meetings with multipliers. Launched in 2021, the learning cycle has since seen a steady increase in implementation across National Agencies. Youth National Agencies responding to the NA/EACEA survey were strongly positive, with 82.1% of them stating that the Cycle is an effective tool to support, inspire and ensure a high-quality experience for the DiscoverEU participants. Concurrently, 66% of respondents from the youth sector who were already very familiar with the Erasmus+ programme to the Public Consultation agreed that DiscoverEU provided a high added value for 18 years-olds, allowing them to learn about Europe and acquire skills of value for their future[158]. Demonstrating effectiveness, the analysis of the beneficiary survey data detected a positive impact of participating in the Erasmus+ programme through DiscoverEU on several of the outcomes explored. The evidence suggests that, as a direct result of this participation, youth experienced an increase in their sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, positive feelings towards the EU, active citizenship, likelihood of feeling fully responsible for being successful in education, training or job, and learning propensity. Against this, three position papers (two from the youth and one from the E&T sector) submitted in response to the PC suggest that there is room for improvement with regard to DiscoverEU's intercultural preparation, learning component, and promotion of inclusion through greater flexibility of eligibility criteria (i.e., age group).

The review of the 2022 NAs' yearly reports points out a few minor challenges that have arisen during the implementation process. One such issue was the delayed sharing of selected participants' contact details with the National Agencies. In addition, National Agencies needed to find the most effective arrangements for events; for example, online pre-departure meetings proved less effective in some countries, like Malta and Sweden, prompting a shift to in-person gatherings. Some National Agencies, such as HU01 and SE02, have developed specific info-kits with travel tips and reflective tools to enhance participants' learning experiences. Others, like RO01, have created digital resources, including a dedicated section on the Eurodesk website to provide future travellers with essential information.

EQ 2.2: To what extent are Programme results adequately disseminated and exploited?

Dissemination and exploitation (D&E) of results is an integral part of the Erasmus+ programme and a core requirement for each project implemented. Among others, D&E aims to[159]:

- Increase the visibility of the Erasmus+ programme and the opportunities it offers;
- Increase the visibility of specific projects and key results;
- Promote examples of good practices that may inspire future applicants or be utilised further;
- Strengthen the visibility of the coordinator and partner organisations;

[158] Note that 30% of respondents selected the answer category 'No opinion.'

[159] Based on analysis of Erasmus+ Regulation, Work Plans and specific Programme guidance documents.

- Enable the creation of future partnerships.

D&E also aims to contribute to the transparency and accountability of the programme, offering citizens information as to how the budget allocated to Erasmus+ is utilised. The adoption in 2015 of a dedicated strategy for D&E of Erasmus+ programme results (thereafter D&E strategy) paved the way for a considerably more systematic and integrated D&E approach compared to predecessor programmes. In the 2021-2027 programme generation, there has been a continued evolution and professionalisation of D&E efforts, also integrating the findings of an external evaluation carried out in 2017[160]. While building upon key mechanisms, responsibilities and resources in place, the current programme reflects a commitment to refining and enhancing D&E processes. Key informant interviews conducted with European and national stakeholders also confirm an increasing emphasis on effectively disseminating programme results and ensuring transparency. Yet, recurrent criticism points at the lack of sufficient financial resources for effective communication and dissemination, the need for better monitoring with a view to identifying best practice examples *(see also EQ12 on monitoring indicators)* as well as better communication channels for actions under indirect management.

Given the complexity and size of the Erasmus+ programme, D&E happens at four distinct yet mutually supporting levels: i) programme level, ii) national level, iii) action level, and iv) project level. The table below outlines the main objectives, tools and actions of D&E at various levels.

Table 5: Overview of Erasmus+ dissemination and exploitation activities

D&E level	Objectives and rationale	D&E tools and actions
Programme level	• To enhance transparency and accountability • To showcase good practices from projects and actions • To inform EU and national policy-making and supports other stakeholders	• DG EAC and EACEA websites, social media, collaborative and online platforms (such as the European Education Area Portal, European School Education Platform, EPALE, Youth Portal • EPRP
Action level	• To share good practices from specific types of actions funded by the programme across various levels (project, local, national, EU) • To inform the work of stakeholders like practitioners, researchers, social partners, organisations, and policymakers	• EPRP, DG EAC and EACEA websites (for actions under direct management) • National Agencies (for actions under indirect management), social media, dissemination events, and written publications.
National level	• To select and share good practices from projects or actions that are particularly relevant to the country's context • To raise awareness of the programme's funding and results, guide potential applicants, and inform key stakeholders	• NA websites and social media channels, dissemination events, and publications
Project level	• To disseminate and exploit results of specific projects' activities. Dissemination takes place	• EPRP, project websites, online and social media platforms of the coordinator and partner organisations, as well as traditional

[160] The external evaluation recommended a thorough revision of the D&E Strategy in order to link dissemination to support the overarching communication planning of DG EAC; to improve the project result platforms' user-friendliness, attractiveness and quality of information; and to revise entirely the approach to identify and showcase project examples for communication.

D&E level	Objectives and rationale	D&E tools and actions
	throughout and beyond the project lifetime	media (i.e. local newspaper), multiplier events and written publications.

Source: ICF elaboration

D&E at programme level

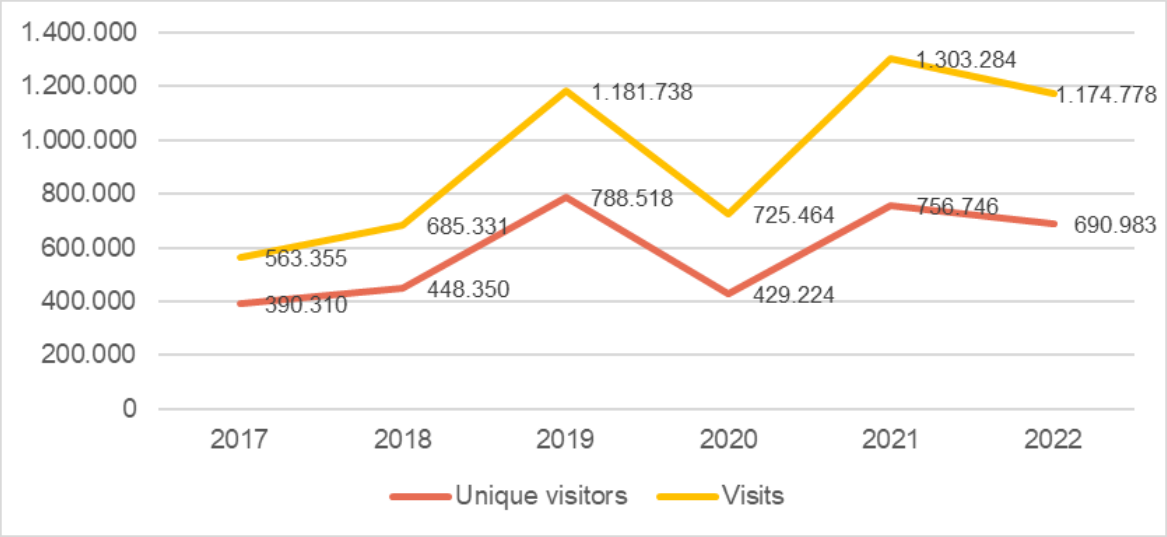
DG EAC is responsible for the coordination and oversight of D&E activities at Programme level which is implemented by dedicated units of DG EAC and EACEA. Dissemination is ensured through: DG EAC; EACEA websites; the Erasmus+ Project Results Platform (EPRP); a network of social media platforms; online platforms (European School Education Platform (ESEP), which includes eTwinning and the former School Education Gateway, Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe (EPALE), European Youth Portal, SELFIE, Europass, Youthpass); and specific communication products (e.g. videos, press releases, info graphics). Programme and project results are also presented during specific events (e.g. Erasmus+ Infodays, ErasmusDays). The level of communication activities and the variety of channels used are, overall, assessed positively. The adoption of DG EAC's dedicated Erasmus+ Communication Strategy for 2021-2027[161] also shows impact and contributes to a more systematic, professional and harmonised communication and visual identity.

The EPRP is a central pillar for D&E at programme level which has recently been revamped to enhance its functionality, navigation, and layout, reflecting a commitment to maximising the impact and effectiveness of Erasmus+. When asked about the effectiveness and usefulness of the EPRP, National Agency/EACEA survey respondents expressed a rather positive opinion, with results being largely comparable to the findings of the previous Erasmus+ evaluation. Nearly three in four respondents agreed that the platform helps increase the visibility and awareness of the programme towards potential applicants[162]. The EPRP is the central platform hosting general information and details all Erasmus+ projects (with approximately 240,000 projects included at the time of writing the report). The website traffic analysis indicates a relatively increasing positive trend in annual visits as presented below.

[161] https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/promo/Erasmusplus-Communication%20Strategy_2023.pdf

[162] For details, please see Annex III NA/EACEA survey, Q26

Figure 6: Unique visitors and visits to the EPRP portal between 2017-2022



Source: Data provided by DG EAC

Further analysis reveals some limitations in the information available on projects in the platform. A sample analysis of 180 projects highlighted the following issues:

- **Inconsistent summaries:** Whilst the introduction in 2019 of a standard structure of project summaries has increased readability, due to the user-generated nature of the summaries these still vary in style and tone, sometimes making it difficult to understand whether the activities and results listed have been achieved or are intended.
- **Limited usage beyond project consortia and participants**: There is insufficient evidence that project results are used beyond the respective project consortia and participants. Although the main purpose of the platform is not exploitation, this might also raise some concerns about the effective uptake and exploitation of developed project results. This finding is also confirmed through the analysis of the National reports. These note that while awareness of Erasmus+ is generally high within educational sectors, public awareness beyond direct beneficiaries remains often limited, as reported in 20 reports[163].
- **Unlisted project websites**: Although ensuring that project websites are listed on the EPRP is the responsibility of project beneficiaries, it appears this is not systematic. Specific project websites are often developed but not systematically listed on the EPRP.

D&E at national level

The analysis of the National Agencies' yearly reports demonstrates that most of the agencies complied with minimum requirements described in the Annual Work Programme for National Agencies regarding dissemination of programme results[164]. As presented in the

[163] BEde, BEnl, BG, CY, DE, DK, EE, FR, IE, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SI, NO, RS.

[164] The minimum requirements for the communication and dissemination activities listed in the National Agencies' Annual Work Programme template include: i) Maintaining the 2021-2027 Programme(s) website(s), in compliance with the Guide for National Agencies; ii) Maintaining the 2014-2020 Programme(s) website(s), in compliance with the Guide for National Agencies; iii) Organising an annual event of the programme(s) at national level (covering all programme sectors, including sport if appropriate, managed by the National Agency); iv) Promoting programme(s) opportunities and results through press/media/social media at national, regional and local level; v) Promoting European School Education Platform, including

below table, performance remained rather consistent over the years, suggesting that the D&E responsibilities are well understood and duly implemented.

Table 6 Overview of NA compliance with minimum standards for dissemination and exploitation of Programme results 2015-2022

2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
92%	95%	96%	98%	95%	93%	96%	97%

Source: 2015-2022 National Agency yearly reports (N=374)

National reports indicate that National Agencies implemented various D&E activities, including[165]:

- Dedicated websites and social media campaigns
- Information events, seminars, and conferences
- Publications showcasing project outcomes and best practices
- Engagement of Erasmus+ ambassadors and alumni networks.

Whilst these dissemination activities significantly contribute to awareness and understanding of the Erasmus+ programme, National Agencies also report a number of issues, also concurrently mentioned through the survey with NAs/EACEA. Most recurrent issues are structured around:

- Insufficient resources for long-term dissemination activities
- Lack of systematic approaches to sharing project outcomes, reported by 27 countries
- Difficulties in quantifying and demonstrating long-term impact, reported by 27 countries
- Limited reach beyond immediate beneficiaries.

As regards exploitation, the review of the National reports demonstrates this varies significantly across countries and sectors. For instance, some report successful integration of project outcomes into institutional practices and national policies[166], others indicate limited sustainable impact beyond individual projects[167]. Key factors influencing successful exploitation include:

- Effective dissemination strategies: For instance, in Austria, active dissemination efforts through websites, social media, and targeted events contribute to the programme's impact.
- Integration of results into institutional practices: For example, in the Dutch speaking part of Belgium, beneficiary organisations with long-term involvement in Erasmus+ have integrated aspects of the programme into their regular operations, leading to positive organisational change.

eTwinning, EPALE, European Youth Portal (as applicable) and contributing to their content; vi) Ensure the dissemination of the projects' results, including excellence recognition tools such as the European Language Label and the European Innovative Teaching Award; vii) Performing an annual selection of national good practices; viii) Ensuring the quality and completeness of the project and results information displayed on and promoting the Erasmus+ Project Results Platform and the European Solidarity Corps Projects platform (as applicable); and ix) Promoting direct management actions in line with the Memorandum of Understanding between EACEA and the National Agency (this last point was only added in the 2024 template).

[165] Further details are provided in the Synthesis Report of the National Reports. For instance, France reported over 1,900 ErasmusDays events in 2023, while Italy highlighted the success of initiatives like the European Innovative Teaching Awards and the Erasmus Orchestra.

[166] For example, DE, ES, FI, NL

[167] For example, BG, EE, HR, RO, SK

- Alignment with national policies and priorities: For instance, in Spain, Erasmus+ is well integrated with national policies, particularly in the fields of internationalisation and inclusive education.
- Adequate resources for follow-up activities: For example, in France, there is a recognised need for increased budget allocation to support follow-up activities and ensure the long-term impact of projects.

D&E at action level

D&E at action level consists of awareness raising and disseminating good practice examples from a certain type of action funded by the programme at different levels (project, local, national or EU) and exploiting those to inform the work of different stakeholders (e.g. practitioners, researchers, social partners, organisations, policy makers). Dissemination channels include all of those used for direct and indirect management. These D&E activities are less systematic and typically take place around application periods (e.g. Info days of a specific action).

D&E at project level

Dissemination and exploitation are a core element and requirement of each Erasmus+ funded project. Depending on the specific action, scale and scope of the project, such activities differ strongly and follow the principle of proportionality. Practically, a large-scale project (e.g. KA2 Partnerships for Innovation) will have a more complex and systematic D&E component than of a smaller initiative (e.g. KA1 Youth exchange). D&E at project level typically makes use of dedicated multiplier events, online and social media, as well as traditional media.

Key informant interviews with stakeholder organisations and case studies reveal that dissemination is indeed implemented systematically. A key benefit of these activities is the awareness-raising of the Erasmus+ programme and motivating potential applicants and participants (both learners and individuals) to get involved.

EQ 2.3: How has the perception and reputation of the programme changed among stakeholders since the mid-term evaluation of Erasmus+ 2014-2020 and what were the key factors in that change?

The perception and reputation of the Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027 are positive and suggest a comparable pattern to the one observed during the mid-term evaluation of Erasmus+ 2014-2020. The data collected indicate that the integrated format of the programme and the multitude of opportunities it provides have been and continue to be one of the key success factors. The single 'Erasmus+ brand' bringing together activities that were previously carried out under different programmes contributes to increased awareness, greater visibility and enhanced effectiveness.

Positive stakeholder views are also supported by the results of the social media analysis. Between August 2021 and January 2024, over 91% of the 71,182 posts reviewed were classified as expressing a positive sentiment.

The programme's structure and its stability over the two generations *('evolution rather than revolution')* are strongly appreciated. The current offering under the Erasmus+ programme is considered diverse and comprehensive in terms of priorities, objectives, target groups and available actions. The programme provides an adequate distinction between the various opportunities for participation that it offers. It is thus recommended to ensure continuity in relation to the programme structure, and time should be allowed for the further development of current actions before considering new ones or applying significant changes. Further analysis of the programme's internal coherence is provided in EQ18.

Besides the overall positive perception, views collected in scoping interviews, EU-level KIIs and the workshop with National Agencies of June 2023 revealed concerns that the Erasmus+ programme risks becoming overly broad, both in terms of its objectives and the opportunities it provides. They argued that it is important not to lose sight of the core aim of Erasmus+, which, in their views is to provide learning mobility opportunities for individuals (learners and staff). Stakeholders involved with Jean Monnet Actions (JMA) expressed support for integrating them into the structure of KAs, rather than keeping them separate. According to these stakeholders, this integration would improve both internal coherence and communication efforts. Consulted stakeholders widely recognised the value of Jean Monnet in higher education, viewing it as a well-established initiative with recognition in academic circles. Nonetheless, while recognising progress in terms of the number and quality of proposals received, the new JMA introduced in the current programming period and targeting school education have not yet fully met initial expectations.

Regarding the programme's visibility, the 'single Erasmus+ brand' supports communication efforts and is recognised across participating countries. However, despite improvements in programme awareness over time, stakeholders reported that the broader range of funding opportunities within the programme is not well understood by the general public. Erasmus+ is still primarily associated with higher education mobility only, a notion repeatedly found in interviews with national and European stakeholders, case studies and exchanges with National Agencies. Only expert audiences are fully aware of the various components and opportunities available within the expanded scheme (see also EQ15, sub-question 15.3 for more information). Related to this, the synthesis of National Reports found that while awareness of Erasmus+ is generally high within educational sectors, public awareness beyond direct beneficiaries remains often limited[168]. This suggests a need for broader dissemination strategies to reach wider audiences.

Furthermore, stakeholders (particularly National Agencies, national stakeholder organisations and case study participants) recognised that communicating about the Erasmus+ programme presents significant challenges, due to the need to reach diverse audiences and target groups. This complexity is particularly clear when it comes to JMA, for which National Agency and EC interviewees highlighted the difficulty of finding a balance between using the Erasmus+ brand and Jean Monnet-specific communication. Similarly, the social media analysis showed that stakeholders' communication about specific sectoral actions (i.e., eTwinning, ESEP, EPALE, DiscoverEU) often lacks the reference to the Erasmus+ brand. Ensuring that these sectoral actions make a wider use of the Erasmus+ brand would help to increase programme visibility beyond higher education.

3.1.3 EQ 3 Influencing factors (external)

EQ 3.1: What negative and positive factors (internal and external) seem to influence the outputs, results and impacts of the programme?

The programme has been affected by a range of positive and negative factors.

Positive factors

A key enabling factor was the relevance of the opportunities offered by the programme to learners and organisations in the respective sectors, and the fact that these opportunities relate to the interests of learners and organisations for cooperation with other European and third countries.

[168] As mentioned in 20 reports (BEde, BEnl, BG, CY, DE, DK, EE, FR, IE, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SI, NO, RS)

For socio-economic actors taking part in the programme who responded to the dedicated survey (see figure below)[169], the primary motivations for participating included providing new opportunities for learners (81%), an interest in cooperating with other European and third countries (78%), and a desire to establish partnerships with organisations from other countries (76%)[170]. Conversely, only a minority of organisations participated in the programme to address skills gaps within their organisation (42%) or in the context in which their organisation operates (34%).

Figure 7: What was the main motivation for your organisation to participate in the programme (socio-economic actors survey)?

Source: Survey of socio-economic actors (N=1,149)

When analysed by type of organisation, civil society organisations, youth organisations, companies, and sport organisations were mostly motivated to participate because of an interest in cooperating with other European and third countries, as well as the desire to create partnerships with organisations from other countries. Public authorities cited providing new opportunities for learners and enhancing the internationalisation of their organisation as their primary motivations. The main motivations for all types of organisations revolve around cross-national cooperation and internationalisation.

These motivations for participating in the programme are also reflected in the findings of case studies conducted for this evaluation.

[169] See also Annex V - Socio-economic actors survey

[170] Socio-economic actors survey conducted for the evaluation (N=1,149), see Annex V for details.

Box 6: Examples of positive factors influencing the programme success in the case studies

Case study "I Liceum Ogólnokształcące im. Henryk Sienkiewicz in Kędzierzyn-Koźle" (1 LO), school education, Poland. *The organisation, a high school located in Poland, coordinated a small-scale partnership in the school education sector[171]. They highlighted that the success of this project was supported by the fact the Erasmus+ programme's priorities and objectives align with those of the school and are highly relevant as the school has already been implementing ecological education and initiatives, and its aims include a holistic approach to educating young people. The interviewees' ambitions were for the school to become part of an international community, which is possible through participating in international programs such as Erasmus+ that offers many opportunities. Importantly, Erasmus+ projects help young people gain new experiences and competences.*

Case study "Asociatia Sprijin+", Adult education, Romania*. Asociatia Sprijin+ is an NGOs providing community development activities and support for vulnerable groups, mainly elderly citizens[172]. They consider the main strengths of Erasmus+ participation being the wider areas covered by the Key Actions, skills development and interactive/innovative methods of teaching and training, multicultural perspective, improved/new dimension in personal value, digital and green transition awareness, and career development.*

Case study Thomas More University Sportlegs partnership, Sport, Belgium*. Thomas More University coordinated the KA2 Sport project "Safe Sport Allies: Safeguarding children from violence and abuse in local sport clubs", in partnership with the sport organisation Sportieq and other 9 organisations across Europe[173]. According to Thomas More University and Sportieq, the programme success is contingent on the fact that it to helps address important subjects, such as safeguarding in sport, and yields a range of benefits on different levels. Because the programme involves working with international partners, this encourages thinking outside of the box and stepping out of the comfort zone of partnerships with familiar partners from the same country.*

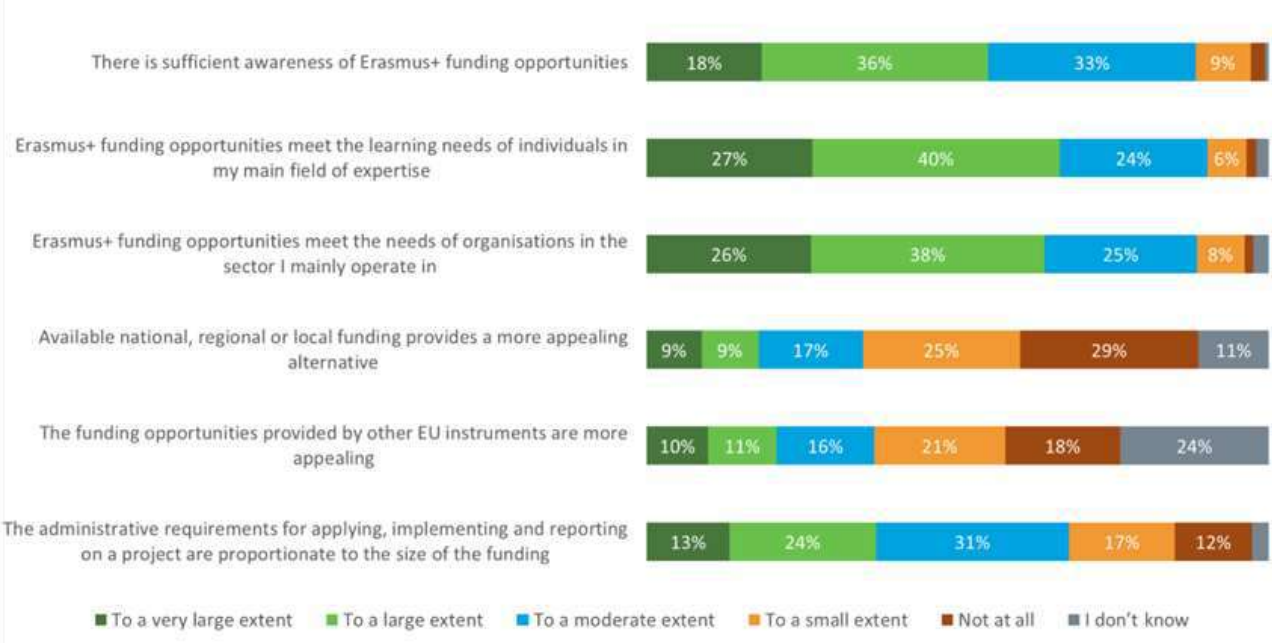
The above is echoed in the responses to the public consultation. When requested to reflect about the factors that may impact the achievement of Erasmus+ objectives, the majority of PC respondents familiar with Erasmus+ agreed that the opportunities offered by Erasmus+ meet the learning needs of individuals in their main field of expertise (67% agreed) and of organisations in their operating sectors (64% agreed), showing that alignment with needs of individuals and organisations is a key positive factor to enable the participation in the programme.

[171] The project 'My Sustainable Future' (2022-1-PL01-KA210-SCH-000081393) received a Good Practice label. The school is also running another small-scale partnership in school education 'My future in one water drop' (2023-2-PL01-KA210-SCH-000171391), always focussing on environmental issues.

[172] The organisation has coordinated two Erasmus+ projects, both under the 2021-2027 programme, i.e. a Small-scale partnership in adult education (2021-2-RO01-KA210-ADU-000049632), and a short-term project for mobility of staff in adult education (2022-1-RO01-KA122-ADU-000072483).

[173] See https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/622589-EPP-1-2020-1-BE-SPO-SCP

Figure 8: Public consultation – 'A number of factors may impact the achievement of programme objectives. Considering your experience/knowledge of Erasmus+, we would like to know to what extent you agree with the following statements' – Summary of overall responses (N = 1,092)



Finally, an important positive factor emerges from the analysis of national reports. Strong political support and strategic alignment with national priorities was identified in 15 reports[174]. These are crucial for the programme's success, evidenced by countries reporting that Erasmus+ complements national policies and receives backing from government authorities. The relationship is often two-way, so the programme's priorities influence the national strategies and vice versa.

Negative factors

For Staff a key negative factor for their participation in the programme relates to the **lack of time** to participate in programme activities. This was demonstrated in the results of the beneficiary staff survey conducted for this evaluation, showing that the top barrier reported by 60% of respondents relates to constraints faced by staff across all sectors in terms of their **workload and schedules**, which make it difficult or impossible to find time for international cooperation activities[175]. Barriers that are more related to participants themselves or their education and training institutions were considered somewhat less important by staff respondents, yet still frequently mentioned. For example, 53% considered the lack of necessary **language skills** as a barrier[176], and 39% the **lack of support for language development** from the side of the institution[177]. Importantly, 45% of staff considered the **lack of recognition** of this type of work within the institution or as part of

[174] AT, BEde, CZ, DE, EE, FI, FR, HR, IE, IT, LU, NL, PL, PT, NO.

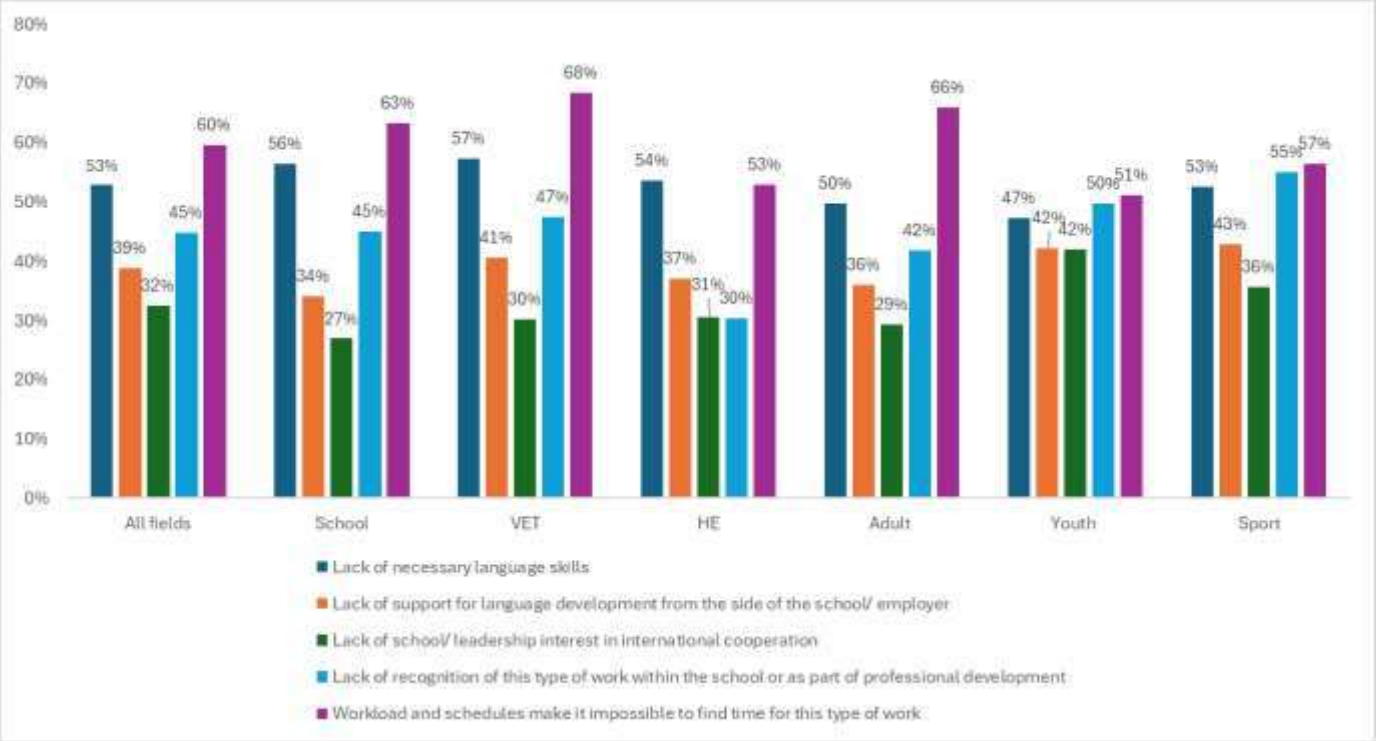
[175] Reported by 63% of beneficiary staff survey respondents in schools, 68% in VET, 53% in higher education, 65% in adult education, 51% in youth and 56% in sport.

[176] Reported by 56% of beneficiary staff survey respondents in schools, 58% in VET, 44% in higher education, 54% in adult education, 47% in youth and 52% in sport.

[177] Reported by 33% of beneficiary staff survey respondents in schools, 40% in VET, 38% in higher education, 36% in adult education, 42% in youth and 43% in sport.

professional development as a barrier[178], and 42% the lack of interest in international cooperation[179]. The figure below shows the aggregated results across all sectors as well as by sectors. Across E&T sectors, workload and schedules is the main barrier, while the lack of school/leadership interest in international cooperation registers the lower level of agreement across all fields, except higher education, where this barrier shows very close share of response to the lack of recognition for that type of work as part of professional development. In the youth sector, all types of barriers present similar results; for sport, workload and schedules and lack of recognition present very close levels of response.

Figure 9: Barriers to programme participation (Beneficiary staff survey, proportion of respondents who agree and strongly agree on the barrier)



Source: Beneficiary (staff) survey: Qa43 Do you think the following present a barrier for your peers/ colleagues to take part in international cooperation? (Multiple choices possible). Number of respondents: Total (Erasmus+ participants): 26,332. Per target group: School education 3,900, VET 3,243, HE 14,884, Adult education 1,501, Youth 2,473, Sport 331.

Other negative factors also play a significant role, such as the **complex administrative requirements**, **high co-funding requirements** and **insufficient grant size** to cover cooperation expenses. This is demonstrated in both the national reports, the beneficiary staff survey undertaken for this evaluation, the case studies and PC results. In particular in the national reports, administrative burden, especially for smaller organisations, was reported in 22 reports[180]. The complexity of the application process and IT tools was highlighted in 23 reports[181]

[178] Reported by 45% of beneficiary staff survey respondents in schools, 48% in VET, 30% in higher education, 41% in adult education, 50% in youth and 56% in sport.

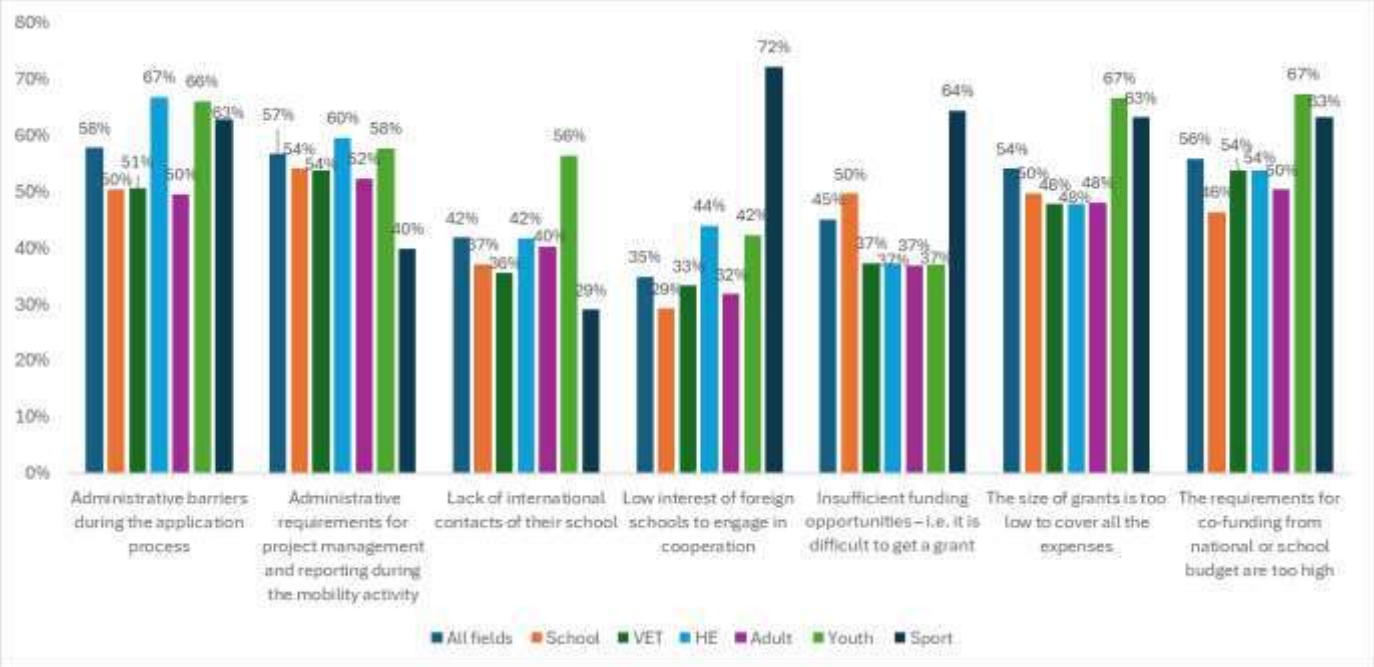
[179] Reported by 37% of beneficiary staff survey respondents in schools, 35% in VET, 42% in higher education, 40% in adult education, 57% in youth and % in 40 sport.

[180] AT, BEnl, BEde, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, HR, IE, IT, LT, LV, NL, NO, PL, SE, SK, TR.

[181] AT, BEde, BEfr, BG, CZ, CY, DK, EE, ES, FR, IE, IT, LV, LU, HU, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, NO, RS, TR.

Furthermore, 58% of beneficiary staff survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that administrative requirements during the application process were a barrier[182]; 57% mentioned the administrative requirements for project management and reporting during the mobility activity[183]; and 56% mentioned that the requirements for co-funding from national or school budgets were too high[184]. A further 54% considered that the size of Erasmus+ grants is too low to cover all expenses during the cooperation. A lower proportion of staff (45%) considered insufficient funding opportunities to be a barrier – i.e. finding it difficult to secure a grant, except in the field of sport, where it is one of the top barriers[185]. The figure below shows the aggregated results across all sectors as well as by sector.

Figure 10: Barriers to programme participation (Beneficiary staff survey, proportion of respondents who agree and strongly agree on the barrier)



Source: Beneficiary staff survey: Qa43 Do you think the following present a barrier for your peers/ colleagues to take part in international cooperation? (Multiple choices possible). Number of respondents: Total (Erasmus+ participants): 26,332. Per target group: School education 3,900, VET 3,243, HE 14,884, Adult education 1,501, Youth 2,473, Sport 331.

The administrative burden has also emerged as a barrier in several case studies, illustrated further below.

Box 7: Examples of case studies reporting administrative burden in the programme

***Case study AFEJI Hauts-de-France (AFEJI), adult education, France**. The case study notes that the administrative requirements have become more demanding, including challenges in providing employment contracts, an increasing list of requirements for verifying operational*

[182] Reported by 51% of staff in schools, 51% in VET, 67% in higher education, 50% in adult education, 66% in youth and 63% in sport.

[183] Reported by 54% of staff in schools, 54% in VET, 60% in higher education, 52% in adult education, 57% in youth and 63% in sport.

[184] Reported by 46% of staff in schools, 54% in VET, 54% in higher education, 51% in adult education, 64% in youth.

[185] Reported by 50% of staff in schools, 37% in VET, 36% in higher education, 38% in adult education, 37% in youth and 72% in sport).

capacity, and time-consuming administrative tasks that can be particularly challenging for smaller organisations with limited operational capacity to participate.

***Case study Stichting, Flik Flak, sport, Netherlands**. The administrative burden for application, project implementation and finalisation were reported as being very high and as a potentially limiting factor for smaller sport organisations.*

The PC results also confirm that the administrative burden represents a barrier to participation in the programme[186]. Only 37% of respondents (N=1,092) agreed to a 'very large' or 'large' extent with the statement that the administrative requirements for applying, implementing, and reporting on a project are proportionate to the size of the funding, regardless of its source. Over a quarter of PC respondents (N=286, from a total of 1,092) added further information on the factors that impacted the achievement of programme objectives to their response. The most cited factor was again the administrative burden, which respondents mentioned as a deterrent, in particular for potential applicants of smaller projects[187].

EQ 3.2: How did the COVID-19 pandemic impact the implementation of the two generations of the programme, and what was the effect of the measures taken in response to the pandemic?

Several large-scale external factors have had a negative impact on participation in the programme in the 2021-2023 period, at the individual and organisational level. This was especially so for the COVID-19 pandemic, although its negative impact appears to have now been largely surpassed. On the other hand, the continuing impact of rising inflation remains a significant issue of concern.

Despite the significant challenges of the early years (the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the impact of inflation increases on beneficiaries), evidence suggests that Erasmus+ 2021-2027 has managed to deliver according to plan, and that it has adapted to the external context and needs, with limited repercussions on the budget allocation planed initially for the period 2021-2023[188].

The effects of the **COVID-19 pandemic** were concentrated in 2020 (from March of that year, when lockdowns started in most European countries) and 2021 (which saw intermittent lockdowns and continued uncertainty about how restrictions on mobility would evolve). The pandemic affected programme mobility activities, and many planned projects and/or activities were cancelled or postponed. The increased focus on virtual mobilities and online cooperation proved to be very important in ensuring the continuation of programme activities. Two activities were launched in 2020 under KA2 as an immediate response to the pandemic (Partnerships for Digital Education Readiness and Partnerships for Creativity) to support digital education and creativity, reaching over 210,000 estimated participants through over 1,200 projects via funding of over EUR 224 million[189]. Other positive elements

[186] Annex II, PC report. Question: "Considering your experience/knowledge of Erasmus+, we would like to know to what extent you agree with the following statements" – Summary of overall responses (N = 1,092)

[187] This finding is also echoed in the evaluation questions 15.2 and 15.4 (relevance criterion) where continuing challenges to attract smaller organisations are noted.

[188] See: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/eu-budget/performance-and-reporting/programme-performance-statements/erasmus-performance_en#budget-performance--implementation

[189] These activities were launched via two extraordinary calls in 2020. Partnerships for Digital Education Readiness aimed at enhancing online, distance and blended learning - including supporting teachers and trainers, and safeguarding inclusiveness of digital learning opportunities in schools (school education, VET and higher education). The activity funded 630 projects reaching an estimated number of 111,126 participants (overall grant: almost EUR 132 million). Partnerships for Creativity aimed at developing skills and competences encouraging that encourage creativity and quality, innovation and recognition of

of the resilience and flexibility showed by the programme included deferral of KA1 mobility and other activities (i.e. KA2), a shift towards local education and the support given to both organisations and participants. The effects of the pandemic are visible in the data on programme activities: these activities decreased significantly in 2020, started to recover in 2021 and returned to pre-pandemic levels in 2022. Postponing projects, mobilities and activities also caused prorogations of activities (with amendments on duration and projects running over the course of the new programme), which, in turn, led to a later closure of the previous programme and fewer applications in the early stages of the new programme (see EQ3.2).

The primary impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, at the individual and organisational level, was observed in decreased participation in the mobility activities of the programme, as well as in the postponement or cancellation of projects. The programme monitoring data indicate a decline in mobilities and grants starting from March 2020, coinciding with the onset of lockdowns in European countries and beyond (in particular, the number of participants in mobilities declines from around 80,000 in February 2020 to 40,000 in March 2020 and to virtually zero in April-June 2020, and recovered to 60,000 by September 2020, with a similar pattern observed for the amount of actual grants provided)[190]. Subsequently, these figures remained notably low throughout 2020 but began to recover from 2021 onwards. By 2022, mobilities and grants had returned to levels closely resembling those before the pandemic. At the organisational level, many projects had to be postponed, and several activities were transitioned to online platforms. This negative impact was confirmed by 72% of PC respondents (N=1,092)[191], who indicated projects being postponed (29%), parts of projects' activities shifted to online implementation (24%), and some project participants experiencing limited involvement (19%).

Additional evidence from National Agencies' yearly reports and the national reports confirms the extensive adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. All 2021 yearly reports examined (N=51) highlighted the significant and predominantly negative impacts of the pandemic. National Agencies reported a decrease in programme applications across various sectors, attributing this decline to the pandemic. From the national reports, all countries reported substantial decreases in mobility activities, especially in 2020 and early 2021, due to travel restrictions and safety concerns. 10 reports also indicated that National Agencies and beneficiaries faced additional administrative challenges due to the need for frequent adjustments, contract amendments, and the implementation of new procedures[192]. The reduced mobility resulting from the pandemic's impact is also clear in the stakeholder feedback. PC respondents indicated a negative individual impact on their programme involvement, citing alterations in their projects or the postponement/cancellation of individual mobilities[193]. As reported in key informant interviews conducted in 20 countries[194], the pandemic had a negative impact on the programme and particularly on the number of mobilities. The main impact identified was on overall programme implementation, because of the scale of the cancellations and postponement of projects.

youth work (targeting youth, school education and adult education). This activity funded 572 projects reaching an estimated number of 88,781 participants (overall grant: approximately EUR 95.5 million). More information at: https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/news/coronavirus-response-extraordinary-erasmus-calls-to-support-digital-education-readiness-and-creative-skills-0

[190] Annex I - Technical Annex, Figures 5 and 6.

[191] Annex II, PC report, Question "How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your organisation's participation in the Erasmus+ Programme?"

[192] AT, BEfr, CZ, DE, HR, IE, IT, LV, PT, SK.

[193] Annex II, PC report, Question: "How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your participation in the programme?".

[194] Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Ukraine.

Rising inflation also negatively affected individual participation in the programme, as many participants and organisations had to adjust their programme activities to accommodate price increases. Nearly half (47%) of PC respondents noted that inflation had impacted their participation, with strong variations, however, between countries[195]. The most affected respondents came from Hungary (61%), Poland (61%), Croatia (60%) and Portugal (57%), while the least affected were from Austria (25%), Germany (27%) and Finland (32%). Almost two-thirds (63%) of participants indicated that they still participated in the programme, but had to rely on their own finances to complement programme funding (noting that the programme is expected to provide co-financing and a contribution to unit costs of mobility activities). A total of 37 PC respondents reported on how inflation affected their participation in the programme, and approximately half of these responses found that the Erasmus+ grants were not sufficiently rapidly adjusted to rising inflation rates, resulting in insufficient budget provision at the beneficiary organisation's level.

The rise in inflation also had negative impacts at organisational level. 47% of PC respondents from organisations stated for example that, due to the rising inflation, they had to revise the project budget internally to still be able to implement all activities, or that the funding received was/would no longer be sufficient to implement the project as planned (43%), thus requiring changes to its scope and activities[196]. The negative impact from rising inflation was reported in the national-level key informant interviews in 18 countries[197], with interviewees noting that it affected both the quality of current projects as well as future mobilities. Stakeholders highlighted that high inflation rates created challenges for people as they focused on essential living costs before considering going abroad to study. Hence, high inflation rates created financial uncertainty which, in turn, hindered mobility activities.

In relation to **programme resilience**, the response to the unforeseen external factors of recent years can be considered positive. This is especially the case in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine (discussed below in EQ3.3), less so in response to rising inflation.

The COVID-19 pandemic prompted a significant transition to online collaboration, thus supporting the horizontal priority of digital transformation, which was reinforced throughout the pandemic and continued explicitly in the 2021-2027 programme. In addition, the emergence of new mobility formats, such as blended mobilities, exemplifies the efforts made by Erasmus+ to sustain programme-related experiences through virtual components, thereby contributing to the concept of 'internationalisation at home'. Nevertheless, there is a widespread recognition of the irreplaceable value of in-person mobility experiences.

The resilience of the Erasmus+ programme during the pandemic was in particular demonstrated by its adaptation to the online environment, as evidenced by the 2021 National Agencies' yearly reports and the national reports. Many National Agencies shifted towards virtual or hybrid settings for communications, mobilities and events in response to the pandemic. The impact varied in terms of project implementation and the success levels of transitioning activities to online or hybrid formats. Conversely, negative aspects highlighted by National Agencies included challenges in implementing certain activities virtually, diminished quality compared to in-person activities, and difficulties in engaging participants in online activities. A significant share of beneficiaries faced obstacles in carrying out virtual mobilities, with slow adoption rates among some participants.

The national reports also show that the programme adapted to the pandemic in terms of accelerated digitalisation, flexibility in implementation and enhanced support mechanisms.

[195] Annex II, PC report, Question "Has inflation affected your participation in the programme?"

[196] Annex II, PC report, Question: "How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your participation in the programme?"

[197] Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Malta, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Ukraine.

Specifically, all 32 countries reported that the pandemic catalysed and accelerated the adoption of digital tools and platforms for project management, communication, and virtual learning. 28 countries reported that National Agencies and the European Commission demonstrated significant flexibility in allowing project modifications, deadline extensions, and adapted reporting requirements[198]. 24 countries reported increased efforts to support beneficiaries through guidance documents, webinars, and personalised assistance[199].

Overall, the programme received positive feedback from stakeholders for its responsiveness to the challenges posed by the pandemic. A majority of PC respondents acknowledged the support provided by the programme bodies as good or excellent, indicating a high level of satisfaction (most of the PC respondents stated that the support provided was good (40%) or excellent (31%)[200]. The programme's flexibility and resilience during the pandemic were also commended by EC staff and key informants at the national level, who noted the quick response in adapting to the crisis.

The pandemic prompted shifts in focus towards local education, Cooperation Partnerships, and virtual mobilities, with efforts to enhance local education systems and promote digital education within the existing framework of the programme. Key informants interviewed appreciated the flexibility of the programme, including fund reallocation, project duration extensions, and the introduction of hybrid mobilities. The move to online environments was recognised for fostering the use of new tools and communication channels, as well as intensifying digital communication among partners and stakeholders[201].

In contrast, the programme appears to have been less resilient to the impact of rising inflation. At the programme level, the measures introduced concerned the mobility actions, to cushion inflation, adjusting in particular the rates of individual support for the 2023 call for proposals, with a focus on supporting individual mobility participants most affected by the increase in the cost of living[202]. Views of key informants at the national level on how well the programme was responding to rising inflation highlighted persisting financial challenges for projects, particularly in activities using travel and accommodation.[203] Interviewees felt that the increases were insufficient to cover the rising costs and highlighted the need for a more proactive approach to financial planning in response to price fluctuations.

EQ 3.3: What was the effect of the measures taken in the frame of the programme implementation in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine?

When compared to the COVID-19 pandemic, the **Russian invasion of Ukraine** had less of an impact on the programme as a whole, but it did affect organisations and beneficiaries directly involved in mobilities and other projects with Russia and Ukraine. From a budget viewpoint, the programme adapted to the changes in needs and committed the resources necessary for the 2023 Calls. The 2023 Annual Work Programme included the frontload of EUR 100 million from the 2027 annual budget. These funds were allocated to reinforce activities put in place for Ukrainians fleeing the war through additional support for

[198] AT, BEde, BEfr, BEnl, BG, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GR, HR, HU, IE, IS, IT, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, SE, SK

[199] AT, BEfr, BEnl, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GR, HR, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, SK.

[200] Annex II, PC report, Question "How would you rate the support provided by your sending organisation or Programme bodies to overcome difficulties caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?"

[201] Stakeholders interviewed in Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Malta, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Ukraine.

[202] Erasmus+ 2023 Call for proposals, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ%3AJOC_2022_444_R_0007&qid=1669186801116

[203] Stakeholders interviewed in the following 18 Countries: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Malta, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Ukraine

beneficiary organisations under KA2 and for higher education under KA1[204]. The participation of Russian public bodies and related entities in all ongoing grant agreements was terminated and related payments were suspended. At the same time, participation by Ukraine was further encouraged and the KA1 mobility schemes were opened exceptionally to incoming participants from Ukraine in the fields of education and training. Additional support actions included increased flexibility in budget transfers and access to the renewed Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Online Language Support platform, with free introductions to various languages and cultures for Ukrainian participants.

From the viewpoint of programme management, the key response to the war in Ukraine at programme level was the adaptation of the 2023 Programme Guide, published on 21 December 2022[205]. It identified the main changes related to the addition of field-specific priorities under KA2 Partnerships for Cooperation, in relation to supporting those affected by the war in Ukraine, individually under each key sector. To accommodate these changes, the programme budget 2023 frontloaded EUR 100 million from the Erasmus+ financial programming from 2027, to be allocated to projects supporting Ukraine. Institutions benefiting from ongoing Erasmus+ projects in areas such as inclusion, diversity and integration of refugees may, on a voluntary basis, reallocate part of their funds in support of activities for Ukrainian refugees. The European Commission also provided guidance for participating organisations to explore various options in response to the crisis, including the possibility of invoking the *force majeure* clause for earlier termination of activities in Ukraine and neighbouring countries, and the adaptation or refocusing of ongoing projects to support persons affected by the war.

On 8 April 2022, Commissioner Mariya Gabriel announced that the participation of Russian public bodies or related entities in all ongoing grant agreements would be terminated, and all related payments suspended under Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe, Euratom, and Erasmus+[206]. At the same time, participation of people from Ukraine was further encouraged. Additionally, some Erasmus+ KA1 mobility schemes were opened exceptionally to incoming participants from Ukraine in the fields of education and training. The Commission also provided flexibility in budget transfers and announced the availability of a new Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps (ESC) Online Language Support (OLS) platform, with free introductions to various languages and cultures for participants from Ukraine.

Under KA1 (mobility), universities in EU Member States and third countries associated to Erasmus+ are able to offer long-term study mobility for up to 12 months (the funding support excludes summer holiday periods), short-term study mobility, short-term training or teaching mobility (for staff) and traineeships supported by Erasmus+ funds[207]. Students from Ukraine on long-term mobility are eligible for grants of between EUR 1,050 and EUR 1,150 per month to contribute to their travel, accommodation and subsistence costs (the top-up is included in the amount). The receiving institutions are expected to take on the tasks of the sending institutions where needed, for example in offering preparation courses, general assistance and the signature of mobility documents. A special call was organised in 2023 under capacity-building for higher education, in order to support the creation of an open

[204] Funded activities in support to Ukraine under Key Action 2 ranged from linguistic and cultural integration courses, language learning tools, addressed to educators or learners, to scholarships or general financial support in all Erasmus+ sectors for learners and educators. See: https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/news/reviewed-erasmus-2023-budget-brings-overall-eu443-billion-to-support-the-education-sectors-with-specific-support-for-ukrainian-learners-and-staff

[205] European Commission. 2022. Erasmus+ programme Guide. https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2022-12/Corrigendum%201_%202023-Programme-Guide_en_0.pdf

[206] European Commission. 2022. Press release. Termination of cooperation with Russian public entities in research and education, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/STATEMENT_22_2391

[207] EUA. 2022. Impact of the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine on the Ukrainian higher education field. https://eua.eu/downloads/publications/briefing_impact%20of%20the%20russian%20federations%20invasion%20of%20ukraine%20on%20the%20ukrainian%20higher%20education%20sector.pdf

education digital environment to offer quality higher education for students fleeing from Ukraine and internally displaced, with a EUR 5 million grant.

Overall, the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine had a relatively lower impact on the Erasmus+ programme than the external shocks discussed above, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and rising inflation. Among the 2022 National Agencies' yearly reports, only the Polish agency mentioned the invasion of Ukraine, expressing concerns about potential applicants' anxiety in planning mobilities to or from regions bordering Ukraine. The Eurodesk Network also highlighted the impact of the war on young people and youth information services, emphasising the need for European youth programmes to adapt swiftly to evolving challenges[208]. This relatively limited impact on the programme was confirmed by the stakeholder feedback gathered for this evaluation. While most PC respondents (79%) stated that the war did not affect their participation in the programme[209], some (21%) reported the opposite, with safety concerns limiting mobility opportunities. Among those PC respondents impacted by the war, 44% had to adjust their Erasmus+ projects, and 27% highlighted challenges in participants effectively taking part in project activities.

Evidence from stakeholder consultations indicates positive feedback on the measures taken by the programme to respond to the Russian invasion of Ukraine[210]. A significant proportion of PC respondents (52%) acknowledged that Erasmus+ effectively responded to mitigate the challenges posed by the outbreak of the war. A 2024 publication from the European Commission provides concrete examples of the programme's response to the war in Ukraine and how this positively affected the lives of people in and from Ukraine[211].

The national reports also show that the programme offered increased support for Ukrainian participants in terms of increased mobility opportunities for Ukrainian students and staff, flexibility in recognition of their qualifications and prior learning and support for their integration. Specifically, 11 countries reported efforts to facilitate the participation of Ukrainian students and staff in Erasmus+ activities, often through additional funding and simplified procedures[212]. 6 countries reported reallocating funds or accessing additional budgets to support Ukrainian participants and related initiatives[213].

Key informant interviews at the European and national levels indicated that the programme demonstrated resilience in various ways in the face of the Russian war against Ukraine. For instance, they appreciated that the programme adapted to the needs of Ukrainian participants through initiatives like international credit mobility (ICM), and mobilised additional funding to enhance support. The budget originally allocated for Russia was indeed redirected to benefit Ukraine and the Eastern Partnership. Furthermore, stakeholders welcomed the fact that the deadlines for calls aimed at Ukrainian universities were extended. At the national level, key informants in 17 countries[214] also highlighted unmet support needs among Ukrainian higher education students, particularly in terms of

[208] Eurodesk. 2022. Annual Overview Report, https://eurodesk.eu/annual-overview-2022/

[209] Annex II, PC report, "Has the war in Ukraine impacted your participation in the programme?"

[210] From the viewpoint of programme management, the key response to the war in Ukraine at the programme level was the adaptation of the 2023 Programme Guide, published on 21 December 2022. See European Commission (2022) Erasmus+ programme Guide. https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2022-12/Corrigendum%201_%202023-Programme-Guide_en_0.pdf

[211] European Commission. 2024. Building Hope. Europe's solidarity with Ukraine: 15 inspiring Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps projects providing support to people affected by the war, https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/60f108ce-be59-11ee-b164-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-303681777

[212] AT, CZ, DE, EE, FI, IE, IT, HU, LT, PL, RO

[213] AT, CZ, DE, FI, IE, PL

[214] Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Malta, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Ukraine.

financial aid and scholarships for studying abroad, echoing the findings from a recent ESN report[215].

3.1.4 EQ 4 Unintended effects

EQ 4.1: What, if any, have been the unintended effects (and their magnitude) on Erasmus+ 2021-2027 and Erasmus+ 2014-2020?

Based on the evidence available, few unintended programme effects could be detected, and those that could be identified are predominantly positive.

National-level key informants interviewed in five countries (Belgium, France, Poland, Türkiye, Ukraine) highlighted some unintended consequences of the programme, both positive and negative. Amongst the positive unintended effects, interviewees made references to increased healthy competition among the institutions to form partnerships to participate in the programme activities and be more prominent on the international stage, to the attraction of more learners to those institutions that carry out programme activities (via creating and advertising specific incentives for learners through programme activities), to the accelerated digitalisation of activities funded by the programme in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and to the introduction of flexibility measures to address participant hesitation in the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine (demonstrating the programme's resilience). One of the case studies indicated a positive unintended effect where the Erasmus+ project attracted a broader group of participants than initially planned[216]. Interviewees at the international and EU level did not identify any unintended effects[217].

Amongst the negative unintended effects, two single interviewees mentioned the prioritisation of certain types of projects over others following the programme priorities (although this could be considered as an intended effect given that the programme priorities influence the types of projects prioritised), and the potential for reinforcing existing patterns of cooperation (whereby institutions tend to cooperate with known partners). The latter could also be considered as an intended effect as repeat cooperation is a programme feature and is not discouraged (as one of the spillover effects, see EQ1.5).

3.1.5 EQ 5 Programme impacts on people with fewer opportunities

EQ 5.1: What are the differences in the impact of Erasmus+ 2021-2027 actions on people with fewer opportunities (including people living in remote regions such as the EU outermost regions and overseas countries or territories) who traditionally do not engage in transnational or international activities?

The participation of individuals with fewer opportunities[218] in the programme has increased during the 2021-2023 period compared to the previous programme. Amongst participants in KA1 during this period, 15% were individuals with fewer opportunities[219], vs. around 10%

[215] ESN Ukraine. 2022. Survey 2022: Ukrainian students abroad. Number of respondents 258. https://esnukraine.org/sites/default/files/news/survey_2022_ukrainian_students_abroad.pdf

[216] Case study Pilot PoVE Water, CIV Water (NL)

[217] Only 1 out of 26 international-level key informants interviewed commented on the topic of unintended effects, to indicate that there were none observed, and none out of 55 European level interviewees referred to unintended effects.

[218] The programme considers the fact of facing one or more of eight types of barriers in accessibility and outreach as leading to have 'fewer opportunities': disabilities, health problems, barriers linked to education and training systems, cultural differences, social barriers, economic barriers, barriers linked to discrimination, geographical barriers.

[219] Annex I – Technical Annex, Table 31

in the 2014-2020 period[220]. The participation rates for individuals with fewer opportunities varied across different sectors/fields, ranging from 9% in school education and sport to 28% in the youth sector.

Based on the programme data extracted in January 2024 from the DG EAC dashboards for the purpose of this evaluation, the targets set for 2021-2023 regarding the participation of people with fewer opportunities have not been fully achieved yet, and the numbers lag behind in particular in the adult and school education fields. The number of individuals with fewer opportunities participating in Erasmus Mundus activities remained quite stable between 2021 and 2023 (keeping in mind that 2023 data are provisional and justify the slight decrease registered between 2022 and 2023 at the time of the evaluation)[221].

Table 7: Key performance milestones for the indicator number of people with fewer opportunities taking part in activities under Key action 1, MFF 2021-2027

	Milestones			Programme participants with fewer opportunities, 2021-2023
	2021	2022	2023	
Higher education	24,000	35,000	37,000	93,351
VET	15,000	17,000	18,000	44,273
School education	12,000	15,000	16,000	30,959
Adult education	9,000	9,900	12,150	6,979
Youth	25,000	30,000	35,000	70,110
Sport	N/A	N/A	250	31
Total (all fields)	**85,000**	**96,900**	**128,400**	**245,703**

Source: European Commission, Programme Performance Statement 2024 and Annex I – Technical Annex, Table 31 containing Erasmus+ "Programme Results" Dashboard, extracted by ICF on 5 January 2024.

However, these figures are based on data that were not complete at the time of extraction. The numbers are indeed refined once all projects are closed (between 2 and 4 years after the project starts, depending on the type of action), and the estimations of participation are thus revised yearly in the Erasmus+ Programme Performance Statement (PPS) published by the European Commission. The most recent PPS published in June 2024[222] shows that this indicator is on track in all fields, except adult education[223], as shown in the table below.

[220] This is an estimate, as the definition of fewer opportunities was different in the previous period.

[221] Annex I – Technical Annex, Table 32

[222] https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/eu-budget/performance-and-reporting/programme-performance-statements/erasmus-performance_en

[223] As detailed in the published PPS, for the adult education field, the numbers are below targets as the sector in general had low numbers during 2021 and 2022, partially due to the pandemic and partially due to the field adapting to the new programme. Together with the development of the field, accompanying measures, and the uptake of the programme, the number of participants with fewer opportunities have been also increasing. However, the targets have been adapted to reflect the broader definition of adult learners as learners participating in adult education programmes instead of learners with fewer opportunities enrolled in adult education programmes, and, as a consequence, the lower share of participants with fewer opportunities.

Table 8: Key performance milestones for the indicator number of people with fewer opportunities taking part in activities under Key action 1, Erasmus+ PPS, June 2024

Field	Milestones			Actual participants		
	2021	2022	2023	2021	2022	2023
Higher education	24,000	35,000	37,000	43,600	53,600	27,000
VET	15,000	17,000	18,000	21,800	34,200	36,930
School education	12,000	15,000	16,000	11,400	28,200	40,040
Adult education	9,000	9,900	12,150	1,550	4,700	7,840
Youth	25,000	30,000	35,000	23,500	47,200	63,800
Sport			250			275
Total all fields	**85,000**	**106,900**	**118,400**	**101,850**	**167,900**	**175,885**

Source: European Commission, Programme Performance Statement 2024

Despite this progress, **challenges remain to the participation of people with fewer opportunities and hard to reach groups**, and the situation varies across countries as shown by the mixed picture arising from the analysis of the national reports. On the positive side, all national reports indicated an increased emphasis on inclusion and diversity within Erasmus+, stating the development of specific strategies by National Agencies and the appointment of inclusion officers. This demonstrates a growing commitment to addressing the needs of people with fewer opportunities and hard-to-reach groups. 26 reports note a general increase in participation from hard-to-reach groups[224], though the extent varies significantly between countries and sectors. Such a trend suggests that inclusion measures are having some positive effects, even if there is still room for improvement. 11 reports indicate that the youth sector consistently demonstrates the highest engagement with hard-to-reach groups across countries[225], while higher education and adult education often lag behind. 16 reports indicate that additional funding and 'top-ups' for participants with fewer opportunities are widely implemented[226], though their effectiveness varies, depending on the cost of living in the host country. While this indicates a recognition of financial barriers, it also suggests that a more nuanced and targeted approach to the provision of supplementary financial support may be needed.

Overall, the programme has progressively placed more emphasis on inclusion. A number of strategies and mechanisms have been implemented to support the inclusion of individuals with fewer opportunities and ensure that the diversity of this group is reflected amongst participants, including additional funding and the requirement for National Agencies to develop inclusion plans, appoint inclusion officers and for SALTO Resource Centres to share knowledge and evidence on promoting inclusion and diversity.

Consulted stakeholders generally viewed the participation of individuals with fewer opportunities in the programme in a positive light, with some reporting higher participation rates compared to similar initiatives (as demonstrated in the NA/EACEA survey, PC results and KIIs). In the NA/EACEA survey[227], 47% of respondents considered that the Erasmus+ programme is exhibiting higher or comparable rates in relation to the participation of people with fewer opportunities, compared to other similar initiatives. The beneficiary staff survey suggests that engagement in activities focusing on individuals with fewer opportunities

[224] AT, BEfr, BEnl, CZ, CY, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, IE, LV, LU, HU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, IS, LI, RS, TR.

[225] AT, BEfr, BEnl, EL, ES, IT, MT, PL, SE, NO, RS.

[226] AT, BEfr, BEnl, CY, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, HR, IT, LU, PL, PT, RS, TR.

[227] Annex III, NA/EACEA survey, Question 22 When considering the monitoring data available in your sector, how do you judge the level of participation of people with fewer opportunities in Erasmus+?

varies across sectors, with higher percentages in schools, VET, sport, and the youth sector compared to higher education.

Among PC respondents, 44% considered that Erasmus+ is effectively reaching out to individuals with fewer opportunities (n=1,231)[228], including 45% of EU citizen respondents. When evaluating the inclusivity of the Erasmus+ programme, most PC respondents highlighted its success in enabling the participation of individuals facing barriers such as cultural, social, and economic differences[229]. On the other hand, a significant share of PC respondents expressed uncertainty or had no opinion regarding the programme's ability to include individuals dealing with health issues and challenges within education and training systems. Key informants interviewed expressed the view that the remaining challenges relate to insufficient funds to address the often complex[230] needs requiring also more targeted forms of support[231].

An additional issue often reported relates to the need for a clearer definition of 'fewer opportunities'[232]. This is also noted in the national reports, 16 of which mention difficulties with defining and identifying 'hard-to-reach' or 'fewer opportunities' groups, hindering targeted support[233]. This challenge underscores the need for clearer operational guidelines at the programme level.

Whilst people with fewer opportunities still face challenges in participating in Erasmus+, **the majority of those who do take part in the programme benefit from a range of positive impacts**, which vary to some extent by sector. The programme has a positive impact on its participants (both those with fewer opportunities and those who do not fall into this category) in terms of improving their understanding of inclusion and diversity[234]. However, the differences between the fields are significant: the proportion ranged from 39% in VET to 48 % in youth.

The beneficiary learners survey results show that respondents with fewer opportunities overall reported a high level of benefits from their participation in the programme (78.3% of respondents indicated this). However, at the same time they reported a slightly lower level of impacts from their participation than other programme participants (the difference being 1.5 percentage points). Small differences however exist across sectors: learners with fewer opportunities reported slightly higher positive results from their participation in adult education (84.5%) and the youth sector (83%) than in school (77.3%), VET (79.3%) and higher education (79%).

This is further evidenced in the national reports. While comprehensive data on the specific impact of Erasmus+ on participants with fewer opportunities or from hard-to-reach groups is limited in most cases, several countries report positive outcomes as follows:

[228] Annex II, PC report, Question "To what extent do you agree with the following statements: Erasmus+ is an inclusive programme as it facilitates participation of people with fewer opportunities facing the following barrier(s)"

[229] Annex II, PC report, Question "To what extent do you agree with the following statements: Erasmus+ is an inclusive programme as it facilitates participation of people with fewer opportunities facing the following barrier(s)"

[230] 2 international organisations, 4 European level organisations. Also expressed by key informants in Albania, Austria, Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Spain, Sweden.

[231] 7 European level stakeholder organisations.

[232] 2 SALTOs (SALTO Inclusion Diversity Resource Centre, SALTO Information & Participation Resource Centre), 4 European Commission stakeholders, European level stakeholder organisations. In national KIIs, Stakeholders in around a third of the countries report a broader understanding of the target group falling under the definition of 'fewer opportunities' , encompassing socio-economic factors, geographical location, and social backgrounds, beyond other definitions focused on disabilities only. This was the case in Belgium, France, Germany, Latvia, Malta, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, Türkiye.

[233] AT, BEnl, BG, CY, DE, EE, FI, FR, IE, LV, HU, NL, RO, SE, SI, NO.

[234] Annex I - Technical Annex, Table 73.

- **Personal development**: 10 reports mention increased self-confidence, autonomy, and motivation as frequently cited benefits for disadvantaged participants[235].
- **Skills enhancement**: 19 reports mention improvements in language skills, intercultural competence, and digital literacy as commonly reported benefits[236]. This indicates that the programme contributes to the development of key competencies for disadvantaged participants.
- **Career prospects**: 21 reports indicate enhanced employability and clearer career aspirations as benefits, particularly in the field of VET[237].

3.1.6 EQ 6 Sustainability

EQ 6.1: To what extent are the effects likely to last after the intervention ends, both cumulatively and the level of each implemented grant?

Evidence collected for this evaluation demonstrates a number of sustained effects from participation in the programme on both individuals (learners and staff) and organisations, as summarised in the table below.

Table 9 Sustained effects from participation in the programme on individuals and at the organisational level

	Sustained effects in terms of:
Learners	• Continuing international networking with people from abroad • Labour market premium of the mobility experience and the skills gained during mobility • Higher willingness to move to another EU country in the future
Staff	• Continuing international networking with colleagues from abroad • Career boost from the international experience • Further development of transnational partnerships
Organisational level	• Deployment of new methods/approaches for teaching, learning and assessment developed in the programme

Source ICF elaboration, based on the key findings in this evaluation question presented below.

Learners benefit from the programme's mobility opportunities. 71% of learners reported that their mobility experiences positively impact their job prospects (reported by 76% of VET learners, 71% of higher education learners, 57% of youth learners and 56% of adult learners). 88% believe that employers valued the personal skills gained through the mobility experience (reported by 85% of VET learners, 90% of higher education learners, 79% of youth learners and 79% adult learners).

These sustained benefits for learners are further illustrated in several case studies.

Box 8: Examples of programme sustained effects on learners from the case studies

***Istituto comprensivo Manzoni-Radice, school education, Italy**. Through the KA210 project (2021-1-IT02-KA210-SCH-000031431[238]), the organisation achieved in-person mobility and a high participation rate among the pupils and teachers, underpinning the success of the initiative. For example, most pupils and teachers suggested lessons/activities about IT, coding, and robotics to foreign teachers. The initiative also saw the participation of the local community/parents of the*

[235] AT, BG, DE, EL, ES, FI, IE, LV, MT, RO.

[236] AT, BEnl, BG, CZ, CY, DE, ES, FR, HR, IT, LV, LT, LU, PL, PT, RO, SK, LI, NO.

[237] AT, BEnl, CZ, CY, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, HR, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, LI, RS, TR.

[238] https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2021-1-IT02-KA210-SCH-000031431

pupils, with events such as the Tournament of Nations, inspired by a local festival called "Torneo delle Chiavi". They also organised free visits of the city monuments, thanks to the city mayor who provided free passes for the city tour. The project was presented as best practice in Foggia and Florence. The recorded results of this KA210 project primarily pertain to the increased motivation and participation of pupils in classroom activities.

***The Upper Secondary School of Electrical and Computer Engineering and Technical Gymnasium Ljubljana (Vegova Ljubljana), VET, Slovenia**. The programme's impact is most evident at the individual level, with interviewees reporting significant gains in competencies, particularly in areas such as digital skills, and intercultural understanding.*

***Profilirana Prirodo-Matematicheska Gimnazia Akademik Ivan Tsenov, school education, Bulgaria.** The case study focused on the project "Bridge to My Europe", funded through Jean Monnet Actions in other fields of education and training (Learning EU Initiative). The interviewed staff and students reported very positive sustained changes in involved students' awareness, attitude, and knowledge regarding EU-related topics and issues. The interest of the students participating in the project was maintained through a diverse range of activities, despite some initial difficulties to enrol the necessary number of students to start the project. A difficulty that interviewed students linked to lack of interest from their peers in the school and young people in general to politics and EU issues.*

Most national reports indicate positive and lasting effects of Erasmus+ participation at the individual level, including enhanced employability and career prospects[239], improved soft skills, such as intercultural competence, language proficiency and adaptability, or increased European identity and active citizenship[240].

Employers also highly value the continuing language, professional, and personal skills gained through mobility experiences, as shown in the KIIs. For example, the programme is seen by one European-level employer organisation as crucial for attracting and retaining young talent in various sectors, especially in light of demographic changes. Also, the readiness to become mobile in the future is higher amongst programme participants in terms of plans to move across the EU, both permanently and for a temporary period. For instance, 27% of learners in the beneficiary survey indicated that the programme made them more likely to permanently move abroad (30% of school learners, 26% of VET learners, 26% of higher education learners, 32% of youth learners, and 22% of adult learners)[241].

***For staff**,* international networking is also a key benefit. 78% of School education staff surveyed in the beneficiary survey for staff maintain contact with individuals they had met abroad[242]. International experience sometimes contributes to career advancements: 35% of staff in the beneficiary staff survey (rather) agreed or strongly agreed that their international experience helped them achieve a new function/ level of seniority (with variance across sectors, as shown in the Figure below)[243].

[239] AT, BEnl, BG, CZ, CY, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, HR, IE, IT, LT, LU, MT, NL, PT, RO, SE, LI, NO, RS, TR.

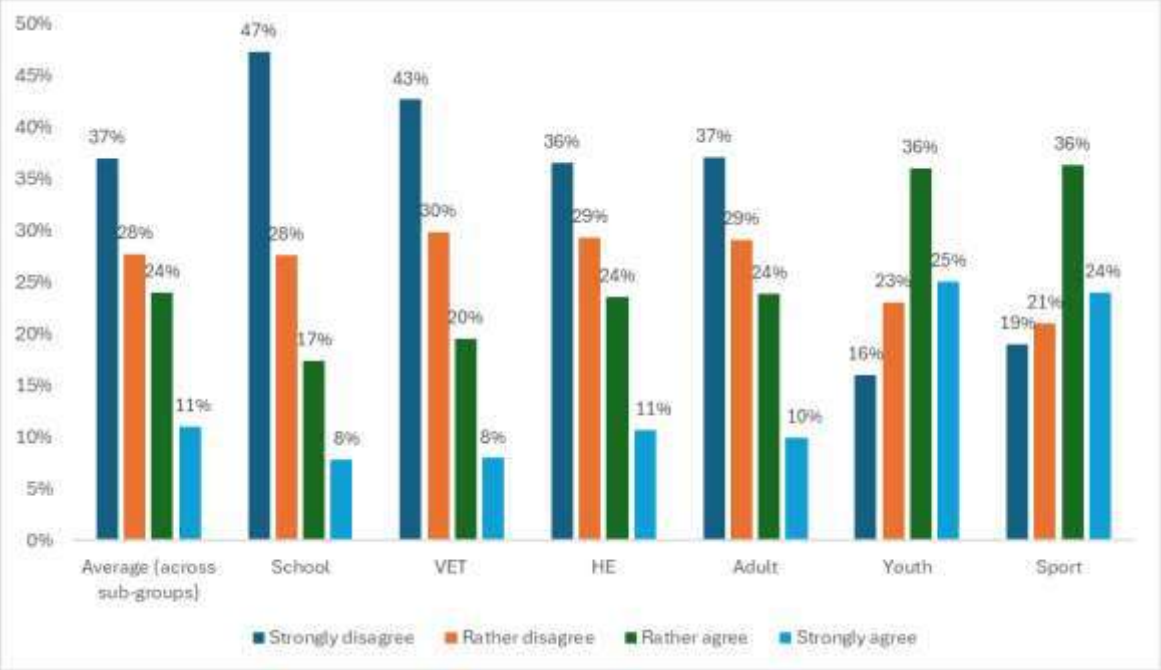
[240] AT, BEde, BEnl, CZ, CY, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, HR, IT, LT, LU, PL, PT, RO, SE, LI, RS, TR.

[241] Beneficiary learner survey: "Do you plan in the future to move to another EU country than your country of residence for the purposes of studies, training and/or work? Total number of respondents Erasmus+ participants 25,124. Per target group: school education 560, VET 5,255, HE 16,740, Adult education 90, Youth 2,479.

[242] Beneficiary staff survey: 'do you keep in touch with the people you met during your stay abroad, and if so, how often do you keep in touch? The question was asked in the Beneficiary staff survey to school staff only. Other groups were not asked this question. 22% of respondents indicated that they didn't keep in touch with the people met abroad during the Erasmus+ activity, while the remaining 78% indicated that they meet with a frequency varying from at least once a week to less than once a month. Number of (Erasmus+ participants) respondents in school education is 3,900.

[243] Beneficiary Staff survey: views on whether the international experience helped staff to achieve a new function in their organisation / level of seniority.

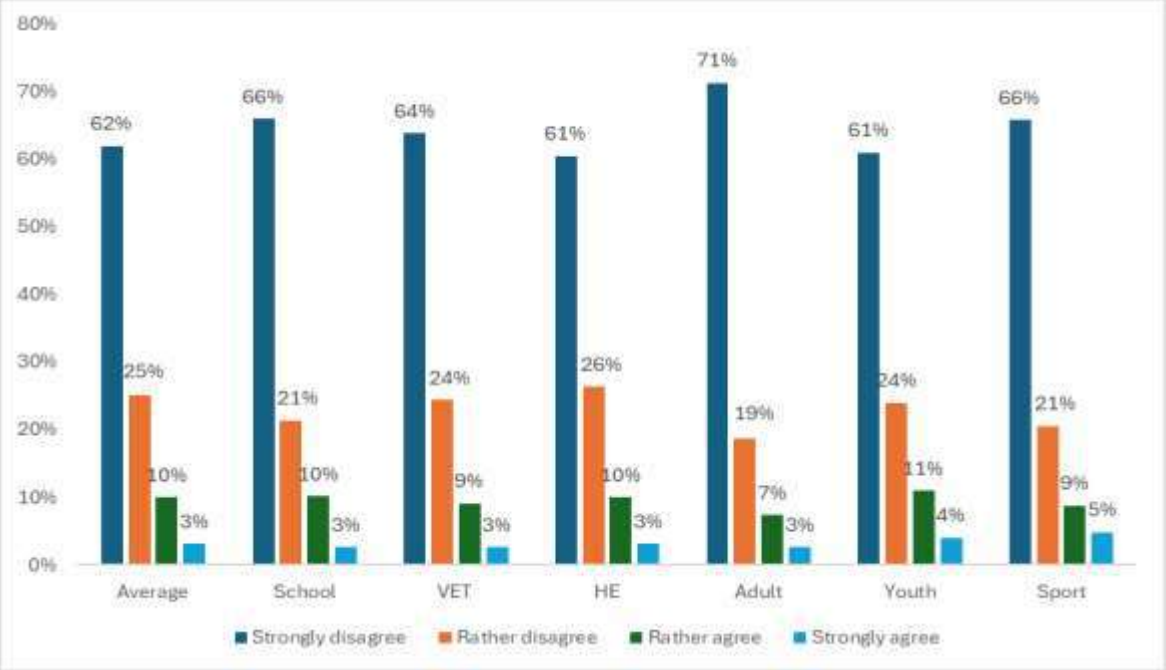
Figure 11: Beneficiary Staff survey: views on whether the international experience helped staff to achieve a new function in their organisation / level of seniority



Source: Beneficiary Staff survey. Question 31. We would like to know how your international experience was recognised by your institution, if at all. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements? 3. My international experience helped me achieve a new function/ level of seniority. Number of respondents: Total (Erasmus+ participants): 26,332. Per target group: School education 3,900, VET 3,243, HE 14,884, Adult education 1,501, Youth 2,473, Sport 331.

13% of all staff surveyed in the beneficiary staff survey indicated that the international experience had a negative influence on their career as it created envy among their peers, while an average of 62% across sectors strongly disagreed on this negative influence (see Figure below).

Figure 12: Staff survey: views on whether the international experience had a negative influence on the career in their organisations (all target groups)



Source: Beneficiary Staff survey. Question 31. We would like to know how your international experience was recognised by your institution, if at all. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements? 6. My international experience had a negative influence on my career in my institution (e.g. it created envy among my peers). Number of respondents Total (Erasmus+ participants): 26,332. Per target group: School education 3,900, VET 3,243, HE 14,884, Adult education 1,501, Youth 2,473, Sport 331.

In several case studies these benefits for staff were further illustrated with concrete experiences.

Box 9: Examples of programme sustained effects on staff from the case studies

Primary school "Anton Skala", school education, Serbia. *The school explained that, further participation in Erasmus+, the work of teachers has been improved by applying various digital applications aimed at the development of cognitive, emotional, social, and motor skills in students. These were adapted and further developed following the example of the institutions they visited during the programme activities.*

SAMK, higher education, Finland. *SAMK university has developed a very good supportive system that has put the teachers and the staff in the centre of organisational development. Teachers and staff come up with the ideas to be developed and the ideas for collaborative projects. The next tier is the supportive network of the administration that assists in the technicalities, such as filling in the applications. Finally, there is the international office, coordinating the whole thing. In the SAMK system the learners and the teachers are at the core of the content.*

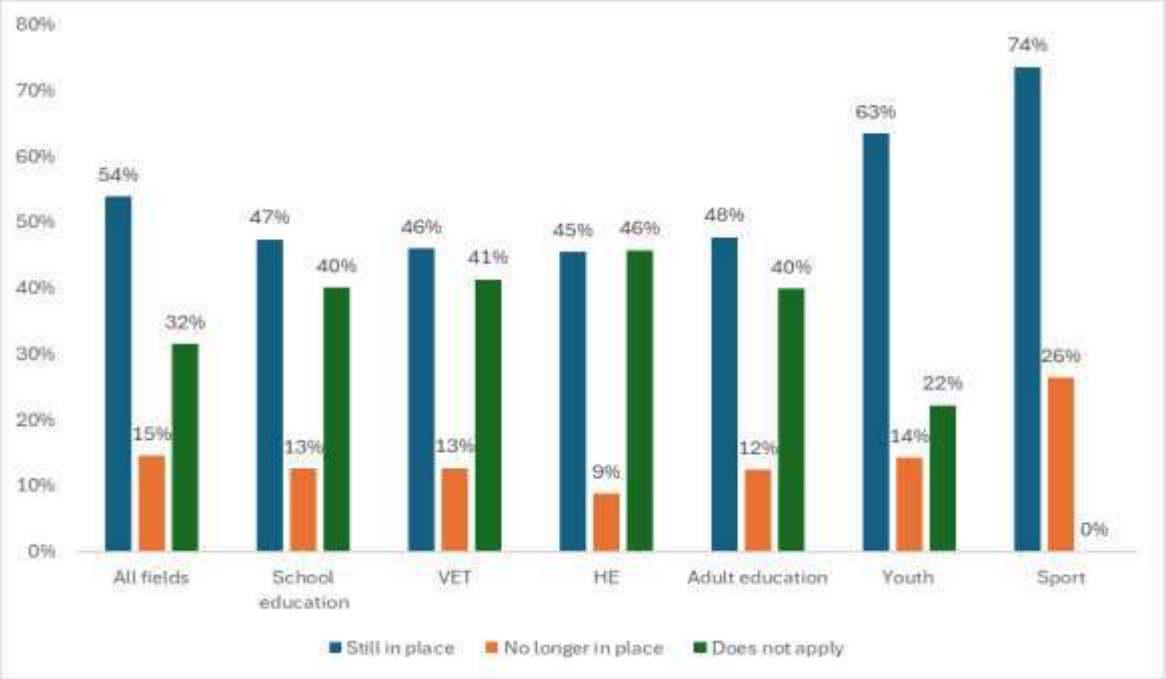
EuropeActive, sport, Belgium*. Participation in Erasmus+ projects leads to notable improvements in multiple facets of professional development. Trainers involved in the programme demonstrate a higher level of expertise and professionalism compared to their counterparts who did not engage with Erasmus+. This suggests that Erasmus+ not only supports lifelong learning but also provides substantial professional advancement opportunities.*

TAKA TUKA EV *is a Slovenian NGO, established in 2002, specialized in working with hearing impaired children and youth in the field of theatre. Practitioners, including highly experienced teachers and specialists in special pedagogy, highlighted how the programme has allowed them to gain knowledge and new perspectives in youth development and to promote new teaching*

methods in hearing impaired children education within their teaching activity. Additionally, they emphasised the value of international experience and network opportunities in their personal and professional growth.

At the organisational level, the programme's effects are considered as sustained. 54% of staff surveyed in the beneficiary staff survey (n=26,332 Erasmus+ participants) report that the benefits of their international experiences in their organisations are still in place. Only a minority of respondents (15%) indicated that the different types of benefits were no longer in place, suggesting a large extent of continuity of the programme's positive effects. Approximately one third of respondents (32%) reported that a particular type of benefit did not apply in their context.

Figure 13: Beneficiary staff survey - Views on the extent to which the benefits from international experience continue to last (all target groups)



Source: Beneficiary staff survey. Qa41a, Qb43, Qc41a, Qd42, Qe44, Qf31 - Are the immediate benefits of participating in the mobility activity still in place? Proportion of respondents per answer category. Total number of respondents (Erasmus+ participants): 26,332. Per target group: School education 3,900, VET 3,243, HE 14,884, Adult education 1,501, Youth 2,473, Sport 331.

In several case studies these sustained benefits for organisations were further illustrated with concrete experiences.

Box 10: Examples of programme sustained effects on organisations from the case studies

***Oktatási és Szakértő Bt. Adult education, Hungary**. The organisation has become very interested in transnational cooperation with other schools abroad and participation in more KA1 projects as a result of their effectiveness. Contact has been maintained with former partners, preserving the established network. These partners have shared best practices, and the new knowledge gained has been integrated into the curriculum.*

***University of Maribor, higher education, Slovenia**. Projects developed in the current programme under the Cooperation partnerships in higher education have led the university to adopt an interdisciplinary approach to education, engaging employers, other universities and*

private sector stakeholders, integrating diverse fields of study to equip students with versatile skills, further enhancing their employability.

University of Sevilla, higher education, Spain. *The university of Sevilla coordinates the European University Alliance 'Ulysseus'. The alliance proved its effectiveness in terms of exchange of good practices, development of innovation ecosystem and better access to new information and learning and research opportunities.*

This is also supported by the national reports. Organisational impacts like internationalisation strategies and improved teaching practices show potential for sustainability, but require ongoing commitment, as mentioned in 16 reports[244] . Systemic impacts on national policies and education systems are evident in some countries, but their longevity is less certain and requires continued support[245].

Different sectors show varying levels of sustained benefits, with higher sustained effects reported in the youth and sport sectors compared to higher education, school education and VET. The results of the beneficiary staff survey provide insights on the extent of the sustainability of a range of different types of benefits[246], which is considered high for all different types of benefits. Differences between different benefits are small, yet can still be noted. For example, the extent of sustainability reported by staff is comparatively lower for new forms of cooperation established with businesses (49% of staff reporting this is still in place) and civil society / education institutions (48%), and comparatively higher for new teaching materials developed (64% of staff) and new professional development opportunities for staff (61%).

The programme is also recognised for its long-lasting impact, particularly in higher education, supporting skills recognition, inclusiveness, academic freedom, and cooperation networks. The results from the PC conducted for this evaluation confirm these lasting effects at the organisational and system levels[247]. 17 position papers received during the public consultation mentioned the issue of sustainability, showing consensus on the fact that the programme generates tangible and long-lasting impacts, particularly in the higher education field (mentioned in eight papers).

Sustained effects at the organisational level in terms of continuing use of products developed, internationalisation and networking of organisations were identified in the national reports. Several challenges to sustainability are reported:

- Limited longitudinal data on long-term effects, mentioned in 17 reports[248] .
- Difficulty in sustaining effects beyond directly involved individuals and institutions, indicated in 26 reports[249].
- Uneven access and participation across different regions and socio-economic groups, indicated in 23 reports[250] .

Some of the challenges associated with ensuring lasting effects of Erasmus+ projects are also evidenced in the project sample analysis. Out of 180 sampled projects analysed for this evaluation, evidence could be found about their continuing citations or references to

[244] AT, BEnl, CY, DE, DK, ES, FI, IE, IT, LT, MT, NL, NO, PT, SE, SK

[245] This is mentioned in all reports except BEde, BEfr and LU

[246] Beneficiary staff survey: views on the extent to which the benefits from international experience continue to last (by sub-groups of staff).

[247] Annex II PC report.

[248] BEde, BG, CY, DK, EE, ES, FR, IE, LV, LT, LU, MT, PL, SE, SK, NO, RS

[249] AT, BEde, BEnl, BG, CZ, CY, DE, DK, EL, FI, FR, HR, IE, IT, LV, LU, NL, PL, RO, SE, SI, SK, LI, NO, RS, TR

[250] AT, BG, CY, DE, DK, EE, FI, FR, HR, IE, IT, LV, LT, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, NO, TR

project outputs for only 10%[251]. Taken together, this evidence indicates a continuing need to work towards a greater sustainability of the effects of programme participation.

3.1.7 EQ 7 Counterfactual

EQ 7.1: What if the Erasmus+ programme had not existed? Would the relevant sectors (higher education, school education, adult education, VET, youth and sport) be supported to a comparable extent?

The evidence analysed for this evaluation demonstrates that without the existence of the Erasmus+ programme, the activities currently funded via the programme in the relevant sectors would not be supported to a comparable extent and the level of relevant activities taking place would be significantly lower. Also, the positive results achieved for learners through the programme would not be achieved to the same extent, as exemplified below. A 'No Erasmus+' scenario would mean a significantly lower extent of support and positive outcomes observed across the participating countries and sectors.

As part of the analysis to reply to this evaluation question, the size of programme funding (2021, KA1 and KA2, indirect management only) was compared to national budgets in respective policy fields across the participating countries and across the school education, VET and higher education fields[252]. The analysis focused on the school, VET and higher education fields, as Eurostat data on funding for adult education, sport and the youth sector does not exist. The comparisons should be considered with caution, as national expenditure encompasses all elements related to the operation of education systems (such as the costs for educational infrastructure for example), while the Erasmus+ programme specifically funds certain system aspects, such as learning mobilities.

The comparison points at a large significance of the programme's funding in certain countries and in certain fields (VET, higher education - and less so in school education). Erasmus+ funding accounted only for around 0.2% of total school education expenditure in the EU in 2021, varying from below 0.1% in Sweden to 0.5% in Bulgaria, Romania, and the Baltic states. The share of Erasmus+ funding was higher in VET (approximately 1.8% of total vocational education expenditure, ranging from 0.2% in Norway to 6.3% in Malta) and in higher education.

In 5 countries, Erasmus+ funding plays a crucial role as a significant source of financial support to the education system. Particularly in Baltic countries, as well as Romania and Bulgaria, Erasmus+ funding constitutes a higher proportion of total education and training sector funding (around 0.5% in Bulgaria and Romania, and the Baltic states in school education, between 3% and 5% in VET, and around 3% in higher education) compared to other countries (where the proportions tend to be below 1% for all three fields), underscoring its importance in sustaining these sectors.

Moreover, stakeholder perspectives from the surveys of socio-economic actors and National Agencies and from the PC systematically highlighted the critically important role of Erasmus+ in supporting mobilities and other programme-funded activities. Stakeholder feedback consistently indicates a very strong demand for the Erasmus+ programme, with a majority expressing that without its funding, the activities and projects implemented would not have been feasible or would have been significantly altered. In particular, 70% of respondent organisations to the socio-economic actors' survey (N=1,145) stated that their

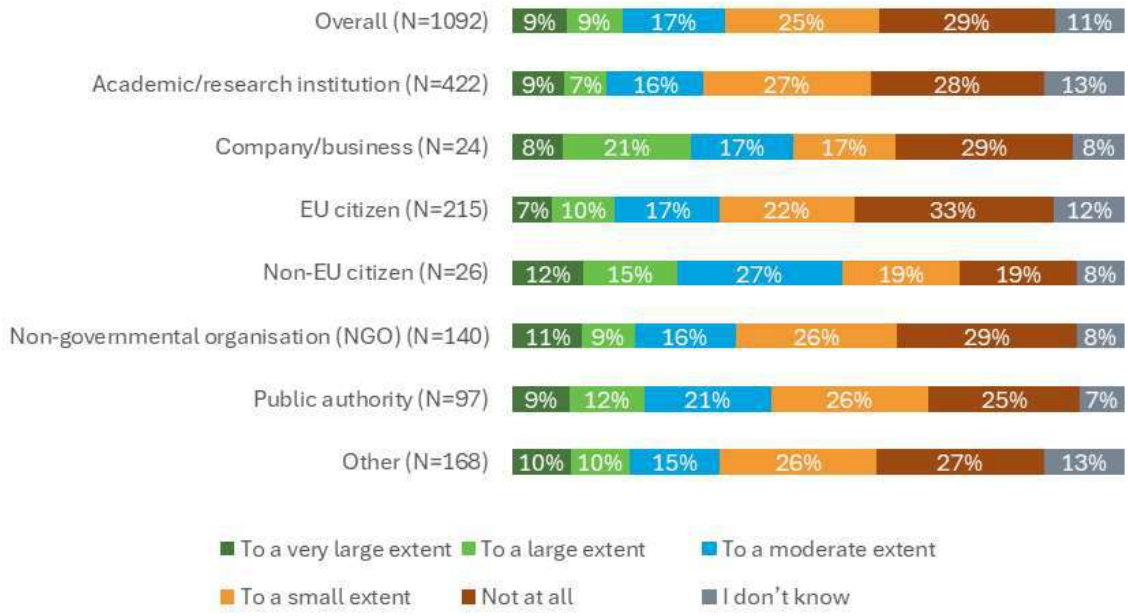
[251] Project Sample Analysis conducted as part of this evaluation.

[252] Annex I – Technical annex, Tables 45 to 47

projects would not have been undertaken without Erasmus+ funding[253]. 28% indicated that the projects would have been carried out, but in a modified form, while only 2% stated that the projects would have proceeded. Results from the NA/EACEA survey also support the view that without the programme, support for the activities would have been much lower[254]. Where other programmes and schemes were operating, respondents indicated that most mobilities in the sectors covered by National Agencies were supported by Erasmus+. This suggests that, without the programme, the scale of learning mobilities opportunities would be much lower.

Respondents to the PC confirm the importance of Erasmus+[255]. As shown in the figure below, PC respondents familiar with Erasmus+ (N=1,092) were invited to reflect on their experience/knowledge of the programme to identify the factors impacting the achievement of programme objectives (see Figure below). A minority of respondents agreed that the funding opportunities provided by other EU instruments (21%) and the funding available at national, regional, or local levels (18%) would provide a more appealing alternative to Erasmus+ funding opportunities. On the other hand, 29% did not agree that available national, regional, or local funding provided a more appealing alternative.

Figure 14: Public consultation - Considering your experience/knowledge of Erasmus+, we would like to know to what extent you agree with the following statement: 'Available national, regional, or local funding provides a more appealing alternative' – Overall and breakdown of responses by stakeholder category (N=1,092)



Finally, a comparison of the outcomes for learners participating in Erasmus+ versus those who did not, further suggests positive impacts of the participation in the programme. The analysis of the data collected through the beneficiary learners survey indicates that participating in the Erasmus+ programme had positive and significant impacts for

[253] Annex V Socio-economic actors survey, "What would have happened to the project if it had not been funded by Erasmus+?"

[254] Annex III, NAs/EACEA survey: "Taking into consideration other programmes/ funding schemes operating in your sector, what proportion of the learning mobilities are supported by Erasmus+?"

[255] Annex II PC report: "Considering your experience/knowledge of Erasmus+, we would like to know to what extent you agree with the following statements?"

programme participants, as compared to non-participants[256]. In particular, the survey analysis suggested significant impact of the programme on learners in terms of improving their problem-solving skills, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, sense of European identity, positive feelings towards the EU, digital competence, confidence in their efforts in education, training or work, perception that employers value mobility experience and completion of studies/other activity.

Similar positive outcomes were found from the beneficiary staff survey. The analysis of data collected through that survey indicates that participating in the programme generated significant impacts for staff participants, as compared to non-participants. In particular, the survey analysis suggested significant impacts in terms of continued exchanges with their international network (development of other projects; keeping abreast of developments in the professional community; writing social emails or letters; continued exchange of information related to their profession); on further developing transnational partnerships in terms of their strategy, cooperation and network size; and on addressing barriers to (participation in) teacher mobility and barriers to (participation in) international cooperation.

These findings underscore the value and benefits that Erasmus+ brings to its participants, suggesting that without the programme, these positive outcomes may not have been achieved.

3.2 Efficiency

3.2.1 EQ 8 Cost-effectiveness of different actions

EQ 8.1: What is the cost-effectiveness of various actions (clusters of actions) of Erasmus+ 2021-2027 and Erasmus+ 2014-2020? How do the relative costs and outcomes (effects) of various programme actions compare within and across the programme fields? (including quantifications)

The overall approach to assessing the cost-effectiveness of the Erasmus+ 2021-2027 and Erasmus+ 2014-2020 programmes is synthesised in the table below.

Table 10: Overall approach to assess cost-effectiveness

Main aims	Overview	Data sources used
▪ Analyse whether activities funded under both generations of Erasmus+ generated reasonable changes or effects in relation to their costs ▪ Identify which of the relevant interventions is/was the most cost-effective	▪ Comparison of costs vs outcomes ▪ Analysis of whether the same outputs and effects could have been achieved at lower costs (cost minimisation) or whether the highest level of outputs and effects were achieved for a given level of resources (yield maximisation)	▪ Data on costs based on programme data ▪ Data on outcomes based on effectiveness analysis ▪ Relevant information from stakeholder consultation activities carried out as part of the study ▪ Desk research (Statistical annexes to the programme's Annual Reports)

The cost-effectiveness analysis (CEA) performed for the previous combined evaluation of Erasmus+ has shown that:

[256] As indicated in the methodology section, some degree of caution should be exercised when interpreting the impact estimates calculated on the basis of the beneficiary survey data, which should be considered as only indicative of the real impact exerted by Erasmus+ on the outcomes explored.

- A 'one size fits all' CEA approach is not appropriate given the diversity and specific characteristics of actions supported under Erasmus+ over two programming periods, meaning that different approaches need to be applied to different actions/clusters of actions.
- Different types of CEA can be performed for the different types of actions supported by the programme. For mobility actions at individual and organisational level, a full CEA can be undertaken, incorporating internal benchmarking that offers granularity (analysis at the level of sectors/fields, distinguishing between short-term and long-term actions). For other programme actions (e.g. aimed at organisations and systems), only a partial CEA can be carried out, based on a case study approach and offering a more limited level of granularity.
- A classic CEA calculation of cost per unit (output or result achieved) is not meaningful across the programme. All Erasmus+ actions generate a multiplicity of effects, and it is typically not possible to identify a single main one, nor to identify and isolate the costs of the specific effects generated by an action.
- The effects of cooperation and policy support projects and activities cannot always be aggregated. These projects generate a diversity of effects that are often of a 'soft' or intangible nature and are therefore neither measurable nor comparable across projects.

The depth and breadth of analysis undertaken for each action/cluster of actions is proportionate to their budget allocation, resulting in a primary focus on mobility actions (under KA1). Cooperation activities (under KA2) and policy support activities (under KA3) generate a multiplicity of effects that cannot always be aggregated and compared, calling for a 'lighter' CEA approach relying more on qualitative evidence and evaluators' judgement, as well as on case studies.

Both approaches still follow broadly the same main steps, namely:

- Identifying inputs,
- Gathering evidence of achievements against the key effects or set of effects,
- Gathering evidence of European added value,
- Identifying any evident inefficiencies and identifying the potential to improve the efficiency,
- Determining whether the volume of expenditure appears reasonable and cost-effective,
- Identifying comparable examples,
- Determining whether the volume of expenditure appears reasonable and cost-effective relative to comparators,
- Drawing conclusions based on the previous steps.

Key Action 1

Inputs

The Erasmus+ programme has allocated a budget of EUR 6.28 billion to KA1 activities in the period 2021-2023[257]. This reflects a significant increase in the annual budget for KA1 activities from an average of EUR 1.56 billion per annum under the 2014-2020 programme, to an average of EUR 2.09 billion per annum for the period 2021-2023 (an increase of 34%). The share of total grants supporting KA1 activities has also increased from 71% under the

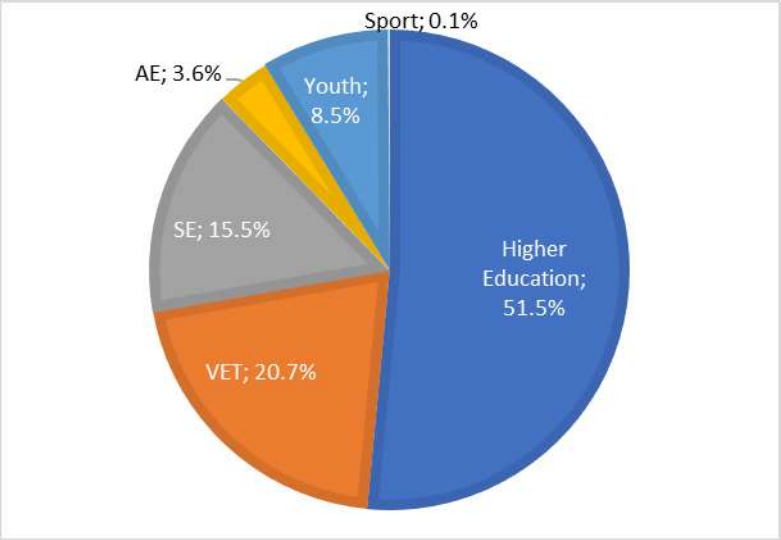
[257] Data based on KA1 budget allocation (direct and indirect management) from Erasmus+ Annual Work Programmes 2021-2023.

2014-2020 programme, to 77% for the period 2021-2023, although data for 2023 are still provisional.

Figures for individual years show that the budget allocated for KA1 activities has continued to increase over time from EUR 1.41 billion in 2021 (46% of the total annual budget), to EUR 2.35 billion in 2022 (58% of the total annual budget) and EUR 2.52 billion in 2023 (also 57% of the total annual budget). The relatively low budget for KA1 activities in 2021 reflected the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in restricting mobility activities at that time.

As shown in the figure below**Error! Reference source not found.**, more than half was provided to higher education, while a further 21% was provided to VET and 15.5% to school education. The remainder (12.2%) was shared between youth, adult education and sport[258]. These figures are broadly consistent across the individual years 2021, 2022 and 2023 and are similar to the previous programme period from 2014-2020. The most notable difference with the 2014-2020 programme has been an increase in the share of the budget provided to school education under the current programme, and a slight decrease in the share of the budget provided to the higher education and VET fields.

Figure 15: EU budget contributions for KA1 activities by field for the period 2021-2023



Source: EAC elaboration based on Erasmus+ Annual work programmes 2021-2023.

Outputs

The cost effectiveness of KA1 activities under the current programme has been assessed by analysing unit costs for the average mobility and mobility day. These have been assessed separately for learner and staff mobility and are described in the following section, while further detail is provided in Annex I, Table 20.

Learner mobility

Table 11 provides a summary of learner mobilities, grants and unit costs for the period 2021-2023 (although data for 2023 were incomplete at the time of the evaluation). It shows there were 516,000 learner mobilities in 2021 and 603,000 in 2022, while the partial data for 2023 includes a further 152,000. The average duration of learner mobilities varies between fields and is significantly higher for higher education than the other fields. The average also varies by year from 81 days in 2021 to 67 days in 2022. The higher value in 2021 is due to the relatively high proportion of mobilities in the higher education field in that year. The average

[258] Sport mobility activities only started in 2023.

grants allocated to these learners have been increasing over time from EUR 1,626 in 2021, to EUR 1,632 in 2022 and EUR 1,760 based on the partial data for 2023. The average grant per mobility day has been more consistent at EUR 20 in 2021 and EUR 24 in 2022 and 2023. The analysis also suggests some significant differences between fields.

- The higher education field accounted for just over half (53%) of all learner mobilities in 2021, but this has since fallen to 40-43% in 2022 and 2023. It also has the longest average duration and this has been increasing over time from 138 days per mobility in 2021 to 144 days in 2022 and 156 days in 2023 (based on partial data). This means that while the average grant size is the largest across all of the fields, and has increased from EUR 1,920 per mobility in 2021 to EUR 2,429 in 2023, this is equivalent to only EUR 14-16 per mobility day (the lowest of all of the fields).
- VET is the next largest field, accounting for approximately 20% of all learner mobilities between 2021 and 2023. It also has the second longest duration of learner mobilities, averaging 26-27 days per mobility. This results in relatively high average grants of approximately EUR 2,000 per mobility, which equate to an average of around EUR 71-77 per mobility day.
- The number of school learner mobilities increased by 100% between 2021 and 2022, while the average duration of these mobilities has declined from 8.1 days per mobility in 2021 to 7.5 in 2022 and 6.9 in 2023, and the average grant has also fallen slightly to just below EUR 1,000 per mobility.
- The adult education field has the shortest duration of learner mobilities, averaging seven days per mobility, and accounts for only 0.5% of all learner mobilities and 0.05% of learner mobility days between 2021-2023. The average grant of approximately EUR 1,400 per mobility therefore equates to a relatively high average of around EUR 200 per day.
- The youth sector has the lowest average grant values, ranging from EUR 600 per mobility in 2021 to 718 in 2023. This equates to an average grant of EUR 80-90 per day, based on the average duration of 7-8 days.

While the grants per mobility day differ significantly between fields and sectors, this reflects differences in both the nature and duration of the mobility activities. For example, average grants are relatively high for shorter-term mobilities, which may have higher accommodation costs per day, while travel costs also tend to account for a greater share of the overall cost for shorter activities. In contrast, the grants provided in the higher education field are relatively low due to the longer mobility durations and the fact that grants typically cover only the differences in costs that arise from learners living abroad and are more likely to be combined with other sources of income and funding.

Table 11: Learner mobilities, grants and unit costs (per mobility and mobility day), 2021-2023

Indicator	Field	2021	2022	2023 (part year)
Number of learner mobilities	Higher education	275,763	243,828	65,339
	VET	103,176	138,905	26,376
	School education	65,708	129,125	41,181
	Adult education	2,384	3,203	917
	Youth	68,672	88,281	18,184
	Total learner mobilities	**515,703**	**603,342**	**151,997**
Average duration (days)	Higher education	137.5	143.8	156.3
	VET	27.1	25.5	26.6
	School education	8.1	7.5	6.9
	Adult education	7.0	7.0	7.4
	Youth	7.4	8.1	8.1
	Total (average duration of total learner mobilities)	**81.0**	**66.8**	**74.7**
Average grant per mobility (EUR)	Higher education	1,920	2,179	2,429
	VET	1,920	1,919	2,053
	School education	1,008	966	977
	Adult education	1,401	1,438	1,402
	Youth	602	646	718
	Total learner mobilities	**1,626**	**1,632**	**1,760**
Average grant per day (EUR)	Higher education	14	15	16
	VET	71	75	77
	School education	124	129	141
	Adult education	200	207	190
	Youth	82	80	89
	Total learner mobilities	**20**	**24**	**24**

Source: 'MFF 2021-2027' Dashboard, extracted by ICF on 5th January 2024. Data corresponds to completed learner mobilities by call year. Data for 2023 is provisional and needs to be treated with caution.

Table 12 shows the average grants per mobility and presents data over time and for specific actions within each sector. It shows that **average grant values have increased by 8% between 2021 and 2023, from EUR 1,626 per mobility in 2021 to EUR 1,632 in 2022 and EUR 1,760 in 2023** (based on partial data for 2023), and are likely to have been affected by rising inflation and the increasing cost of living.

However, the data show differences between fields and sectors. Grant values increased most significantly in the higher education field and the youth sector, by 27% and 19% respectively, between 2021 and 2023. The 2023 Erasmus+ Programme Guide describes increasing grant values including a 12.3% increase in grants and eligible transport costs in the higher education field to provide additional support in response to high levels of inflation. In contrast, average grant values remained fairly stable for mobilities in the school education and adult education fields, and increased by 7% in VET. Table 12 also provides insights into the average grant values for specific actions and suggests that:

- Average mobility grants for KA131 (higher education mobilities supported by internal policy funds) are approximately half the value of grants for KA171 (mobilities supported by external policy funds).
- The average value of grants for short-term mobility projects (KA122) is higher than the value of grants for accredited projects (KA121) in both the school education and adult education fields, but there is minimal difference between grant values in the VET field.

- In the youth sector, grant values are similar for mobilities for young people (KA152) and for accredited projects (KA151) but are significantly lower for youth participation activities (KA154).

Table 12: EU costs (average granted amount) per contracted mobility of learners (EUR) per call year

Field / Action	2021	2022	2023
Higher education	**1,920**	**2,179**	**2,429**
KA131: mobilities supported by internal policy funds	1,920	2,118	2,411
KA171: mobilities supported by external policy funds	N/A	4,407	4,756
VET	**1,920**	**1,919**	**2,053**
KA121: accredited projects	1,900	1,918	2,060
KA122: short-term projects	2,000	1,927	1,977
School education	**1,008**	**966**	**977**
KA121: accredited projects	971	945	967
KA122: short-term projects	1,148	1,104	1,130
Adult education	**1,401**	**1,438**	**1,402**
KA121: accredited projects	1,280	1,394	1,260
KA122: short-term projects	1,571	1,509	1,860
Youth	**602**	**646**	**718**
KA151: accredited projects	706	692	752
KA152: mobility of young people	697	702	743
KA154: youth participation activities	232	302	349
Total learner mobilities	**1,626**	**1,632**	**1,760**

Source: 'MFF 2021-2027' Dashboard, extracted by ICF on 5 January 2024. Data corresponds to completed learner mobilities per call year. Data for 2023 is provisional and needs to be treated with caution. Data for KA155 are not included in this table because the Dashboard does not assign a participant profile to these mobilities. However, data for KA155 are included in Annex I.

Table 13 presents similar data for **average grants per mobility day** and shows that these also **increased between 2021 and 2023** (data for 2023 is partial). The increases are consistent across all fields, except for adult education where average grant values increased in 2022 but fell back in 2023 to below the 2021 levels. In the higher education field, the increases in grant values per mobility day are less pronounced than the increases in grant values per mobility, due to the increasing duration of mobilities over the period (i.e. the average duration of mobilities in the higher education field increased from 138 days in 2021 to 144 days in 2022 and 156 days in 2023).

Table 13 also provides insights into the average grant values per mobility day for specific actions and suggests that:

- Average grants per mobility day for KA131 (higher education mobilities supported by internal policy funds) are less than half the equivalent figure for KA171 (mobilities supported by external policy funds), which involve higher travel costs and longer travel duration since they cover mobility from/to third countries not associated to the programme.
- The grants per mobility day for short-term mobility projects (KA122) are higher than those for accredited projects (KA121) in the VET field, while the differences between KA121 and KA122 are much smaller for school education and adult education.
- In the youth sector, grants per mobility day are again similar for mobilities for young people (KA152) and for accredited projects (KA151) but are lower for youth participation activities (KA154).

Table 13: EU costs (granted amount) per mobility day – learner mobility (EUR)

Field / Action	2021	2022	2023
Higher education	**14**	**15**	**16**
KA131: mobilities supported by internal policy funds	14	15	15
KA171: mobilities supported by external policy funds	N/A	33	34
VET	**71**	**75**	**77**
KA121: accredited projects	67	73	76
KA122: short-term projects	91	92	96
School education	**124**	**129**	**141**
KA121: accredited projects	124	129	139
KA122: short-term projects	124	135	164
Adult education	**200**	**207**	**190**
KA121: accredited projects	209	207	186
KA122: short-term projects	190	207	201
Youth	**82**	**80**	**89**
KA151: accredited projects	86	89	90
KA152: mobility of young people	85	81	91
KA154: youth participation activities	56	49	55
Total learner mobilities	**20**	**24**	**24**

Source: 'MFF 2021-2027' Dashboard, extracted by ICF on 5 January 2024. Data for 2023 is provisional and needs to be treated with caution. Data corresponds to completed learner mobilities per call year. Data for KA155 are not included in this table because the Dashboard does not assign a participant profile to mobilities, however data for KA155 are included in Annex I.

Staff mobility

A summary of staff mobilities, grants and unit costs is provided in Table 14 for each call year in the period 2021-2023 (partial data for 2023). It shows that the **number of staff mobilities increased from 158,000 in 2021 to 177,000 in 2022**, while the partial data for 2023 includes a further 34,000. A total of EUR 476 million of grants were provided for these staff mobilities, at an average of between EUR 1,245 per staff mobility in 2021 and EUR 1,340 in 2023. This suggests that staff mobilities have a lower average cost than learner mobilities but also have a much higher average cost per day of between EUR 210-223 per mobility day. This is due to the shorter duration of staff mobilities, which cover an average of six days, compared to an average of more than 70 days for learner mobilities.

There is also greater consistency in the unit costs of staff mobilities across the different fields compared to learner mobilities. The highest unit costs are found in the school education field, where the average cost of staff mobilities was approximately EUR 1,600 between 2021 and 2023, at an average cost of EUR 260-290 per mobility day. These figures were similar for the adult education field and were only slightly lower in the higher education and VET fields. The cost per staff mobility is similar in the sport sector although the slightly longer average duration results in a lower average cost per day. The main differences are found in the youth sector, which has the lowest unit costs for staff mobilities. The average cost of staff mobilities in the youth sector was approximately EUR 860-920 between 2021 and 2023, at an average cost of EUR 123-132 per mobility day. These are approximately half the unit costs in the school and adult education fields.

Table 14: Staff mobilities, grants and unit costs (per mobility and mobility day), 2021-2023

Indicator	Field	2021	2022	2023
Number of staff mobilities	Higher education	63,591	50,467	7,413
	VET	19,404	23,501	4,632
	School education	41,995	58,655	10,736
	Adult education	8,375	10,846	2,411
	Youth	24,402	33,704	8,718
	Sport	N/A	N/A	355
	Total staff mobilities	**157,767**	**177,173**	**34,265**
Average duration (days)	Higher education	5.3	5.4	5.4
	VET	5.9	5.8	5.8
	School education	6.2	6.2	5.7
	Adult education	6.2	6.2	5.8
	Youth	7.0	7.0	7.0
	Sport	N/A	N/A	8.4
	Total (average duration of total staff mobilities)	**5.9**	**6.0**	**6.0**
Average grant per mobility (EUR)	Higher education	1,086	1,204	1,205
	VET	1,362	1,365	1,443
	School education	1,592	1,610	1,651
	Adult education	1,565	1,562	1,669
	Youth	860	871	922
	Sport*	N/A	N/A	1,575
	Total staff mobilities	**1,245**	**1,318**	**1,341**
Average grant per day (EUR)	Higher education	205	224	223
	VET	232	236	247
	School education	257	260	290
	Adult education	251	253	287
	Youth	123	125	132
	Sport	N/A	N/A	188
	Total staff mobilities	**210**	**218**	**223**

Source: 'MFF 2021-2027' Dashboard, extracted by ICF on 5 January 2024. Data corresponds to completed staff mobilities only. Data for 2023 is provisional and needs to be treated with caution. Data for sport mobilities only refer to 2023 call year, when the action started.

There is also greater consistency in the unit costs of staff mobilities of the different specific actions. Table 15 shows that the unit costs of short-term projects (KA122) in the VET, school and adult education fields are only slightly higher (by around 13-15%) than the equivalent unit costs of accredited projects (KA121). The unit costs are even more consistent in the youth sector, where the unit costs for youth workers (KA153) are only around 3% higher than for staff mobilities in accredited organisations (KA151). The one exception is in the higher education field, where there is a more significant difference between the staff mobilities supported by internal policy funds (KA131), which are about half the cost of those supported by external policy funds (KA171), which involve higher travel costs and longer travel duration since they cover mobilities from/to third countries not associated to the programme.

The average cost of grants for staff mobilities has also increased by 8% between 2021 and 2023 (based on partial data for 2023). This suggests a similar trend to that described above for learner mobilities and is likely to be due to the effects of rising inflation and the increasing cost of living. There are some differences between fields with the increases in costs ranging from 6% in the school education field up to 11% in the higher education field.

Table 15: EU costs (granted amount) per contracted mobility of staff (EUR)

Field / Action	2021	2022	2023
Higher education	**1,086**	**1,204**	**1,205**
KA131: mobilities supported by internal policy funds	1,086	1,076	1,130
KA171: mobilities supported by external policy funds	N/A	1,996	2,160
VET	**1,362**	**1,365**	**1,443**
KA121: accredited projects	1,336	1,341	1,420
KA122: short-term projects	1,538	1,536	1,649
School education	**1,592**	**1,610**	**1,651**
KA121: accredited projects	1,526	1,545	1,586
KA122: short-term projects	1,715	1,745	1,849
Adult education	**1,565**	**1,562**	**1,669**
KA121: accredited projects	1,443	1,480	1,669
KA122: short-term projects	1,726	1,649	1,669
Youth	**860**	**871**	**922**
KA151: accredited projects	848	850	893
KA153: mobility of youth workers	863	883	950
Sport	**N/A**	**N/A**	**1,575**
KA182: mobilities of sport coaches and staff	N/A	N/A	1,575
Total staff mobilities	**1,245**	**1,318**	**1,341**

Source: 'MFF 2021-2027' Dashboard, extracted by ICF on 5 January 2024. Data corresponds to completed staff mobilities by call year. Data for 2023 are provisional and needs to be treated with caution. Data for sport mobilities only refer to 2023 call year, when the action started.

The **unit costs per day for staff mobilities also increased between 2021 and 2023, by around 6%**. This is slightly lower than the 8% increase in the costs per mobility because the average duration of staff mobilities has also increased over the same period from 5.3 to 5.4 days. The data in Table 16 show that unit costs per day are also consistent across the specific actions within the VET, school education and adult education fields and the youth sector. The only notable difference is in the higher education field, where the unit costs per day are approximately 40% higher for staff mobilities supported by external policy funds (KA171) compared to those supported by internal policy funds (KA131), given the coverage by KA171 of mobility from/to third countries not associated to the programme, which typically involves longer travel duration and higher travel costs.

Table 16: EU costs (granted amount) per mobility day – staff mobility (EUR)

Field / Action	2021	2022	2023
Higher education	**205**	**224**	**223**
KA131: mobilities supported by internal policy funds	205	210	215
KA171: mobilities supported by external policy funds	N/A	289	296
VET	**232**	**236**	**247**
KA121: accredited projects	233	237	246
KA122: short-term projects	226	231	254
School education	**257**	**260**	**290**
KA121: accredited projects	254	259	286
KA122: short-term projects	262	262	303
Adult education	**251**	**253**	**287**
KA121: accredited projects	251	255	285
KA122: short-term projects	251	252	290
Youth	**123**	**125**	**132**
KA151: accredited projects	125	130	133
KA153: mobility of youth workers	123	123	130
Sport	**N/A**	**N/A**	**188**
KA182: mobility of sport coaches and staff	N/A	N/A	188
Total staff mobilities	**210**	**218**	**223**

Source: 'MFF 2021-2027' Dashboard, extracted by ICF on 5 January 2024. Data corresponds to completed staff mobilities by call year. Data for 2023 is provisional and needs to be treated with caution. Data for sport mobilities only refer to 2023 call year, when the action started.

European Added Value

The evaluation also shows that participation in Erasmus+ activities has added value and benefit compared to what could be achieved at regional/national and international level (see EQ23). For example, Eurostat data shows that Erasmus+ supported around 55% of credit mobilities in higher education at the EU level in 2022. National reports from 8 countries state that Erasmus+ supported more than 95% of short mobilities in their countries[259]. Furthermore, many of the beneficiary interviews undertaken for the case studies suggested that they would not have been able to fund the mobilities without Erasmus+. The national reports of 21 countries also reported that Erasmus+ facilitates cross-border mobilities and partnerships that would not be achievable through national schemes alone (see EQ23.3 for more details).

Comparisons between the current Erasmus+ programme and other (national and international) education and training and youth support schemes are presented in EQ23.2 and conclude that the added value of KA1 activities is significant due to the large volume and extensive scope of the programme, which could not be delivered in the absence of Erasmus+.

Inefficiencies and potential improvement of efficiency

Efforts have been made to enhance the efficiency of the Erasmus+ programme by minimising the administrative burden for participant learners and staff, as well as for implementing bodies. For example, grants were simplified under the 2014-2020 programme to focus on unit costs rather than actual costs, while funding rules were also streamlined, and these changes have been retained for the 2021-2027 programme. EQ11.4 describes the results of the public consultation, the NA/EACEA survey, workshops with National Agency and KIIs, all of which expressed support for these changes and suggested that funding models based on unit costs are the most cost-effective when considering the adequacy of funding and the user-friendliness and efficiency of the associated processes.

Further changes have been made to simplify access to KA1 funding by introducing an accreditation path for all fields in the education and training and youth sector. The results of the NA/EACEA survey and KIIs suggest that this development has been successful at improving programme efficiency by simplifying the grant application processes. However, the feedback was more varied in other aspects. For example, it was suggested that further efficiency improvements could be achieved by providing further training and guidance for National Agencies' officers; and by clarifying and simplifying what is expected of applicants and some aspects of the process, most notably relating to budget estimations and budget flexibility.

Overall, the research evidence has identified a relatively small number of areas in which inefficiencies exist or where there are opportunities to deliver significant efficiency improvements. Examples of other potential improvements that are described in EQ11.4 include simplifying and streamlining grant agreements, particularly for smaller-size grants, for which agreements are reported to be disproportionately complex.

Comparator programmes

The research activities carried out through the KIIs and case studies explored comparisons with other initiatives focused on delivering learning mobilities (e.g. the US Fulbright

[259] CY, IE, RO, BG, EL, LT, MT and SK.

programme, the DAAD scholarship programmes, etc.). The analysis is presented in EQ23.2 and shows that Erasmus+ was assessed very positively against these alternative programmes and was widely considered to be unrivalled in terms of its scale, scope and potential to foster collaboration.

The evidence presented in EQ10 also suggests that Erasmus+ stands out for its extensive coverage across multiple countries, sectors, fields and activities. Other programmes tend to have a more specific focus on particular sectors and/or geographies, and do not have the same broad scope as the Erasmus+ programme, which remains the largest programme of its kind in terms of participant numbers and coverage of different countries and sectors.

Furthermore, stakeholders were generally found to concur that Erasmus+ delivers cost-effective mobilities for learners and staff. The feedback from stakeholders, presented in EQ10, suggested that while a small number of respondents highlighted certain programmes as comparable or better in specific sectors, overall Erasmus+ was widely viewed as more comprehensive in terms of funding, country coverage, and project variety. This provides further evidence of the overall efficacy and value of the Erasmus+ programme.

Cost-effectiveness

The Erasmus+ KA1 activities are widely perceived as being cost-effective by all parties, based on their responses to the research activities that have informed this evaluation. The above analysis of unit costs also suggests that learner and staff mobility actions are cost-effective, particularly when considering the breadth, scale and types of outputs, outcomes and impacts for learners, staff and their organisations. The **average cost of supporting mobilities of learners under the current programme is equivalent to EUR 22 per day**. While the **costs of staff mobilities are considerably higher, at EUR 215 per day**, this is largely due to the shorter average duration of staff mobilities and the higher subsistence costs for staff (shorter mobilities tend to have a higher average cost per day, moreover, by design of the actions, individual support for staff is often higher than the corresponding unit costs for leaners)[260]. The short-term benefits of staff mobilities can also be seen beyond the personal development of the individual, in terms of also delivering immediate knock-on benefits for their organisations, colleagues and the learners (pupils/students/young people) they engage in their normal roles, through their new skills, contacts, knowledge exchange, etc. In contrast, the case study evidence suggests that short-term benefits and impacts of learner mobilities are very much focused on learners' skills, competences, employment prospects)[261], although longer-term and higher-level benefits are expected from supporting the development of a more skilled, cohesive, innovative and competitive society through more skilled individuals.

While the lack of directly comparable alternatives makes it difficult to draw detailed comparisons with other programmes, the unit costs of learner and staff mobilities in the period 2021-2023 appear competitive and are similar to those for the previous programming period (2014-2020), as estimated in the mid-term evaluation carried out in 2017. The unit costs of the current programme should also be considered in the context of very high levels of inflation and increasing costs of living over the period of analysis from 2021-2023. While the analysis shows that unit costs have increased between 2021 and 2023, these challenges are not unique to Erasmus+ and are not considered likely to have negatively affected the cost-effectiveness of KA1 activities relative to other similar programmes. Suggestions were also highlighted during the evaluation to further increase both the 'green

[260] It is possible that staff mobilities are used mainly for the short-term, easier to access mobilities (courses and trainings) and that the longer-term are not widely known or used (evidence is insufficient to understand whether this is due to lack of awareness or more practical reasons). Another factor influencing the lower mobilities costs for learners is the large numbers of learner mobilities in higher education, which have relatively long duration and are relatively low cost (since they are designed to supplement other sources of funding/income)

[261] Around half of the case studies provided evidence of short-term benefits for learners that were focused on the individual and this was consistent across all fields.

top-ups' and the top-ups for participants facing fewer opportunities, for a better coverage of related costs. These aspects could further improve the effectiveness of the programme with regards to its sustainability and inclusivity.

Evidence of the cost-effectiveness of KA1 activities is provided through the clear links between mobility activities and the outcomes and impacts for learners and staff; the clear evidence of European added value; the lack of evidence of inefficiencies; and the comparisons with alternative programmes. Stakeholder consultations have also suggested that the cost-effectiveness of mobility activities has improved between the previous and current programme periods. This is largely due to the accreditation scheme, which is reported to have simplified access to KA1 funding and reduced the administrative burden for learners, staff, beneficiary organisations and the implementing bodies.

Key Action 2

Inputs and outputs

The Erasmus+ programme allocated a budget of EUR 3.94 billion to KA2 activities in the period 2021-2023[262]. . This reflects an increase in the annual budget for KA2 activities from an average of EUR 764 million *per annum* under the 2014-2020 programme, to an average of EUR 1.31 billion *per annum* for the period 2021-2023 (an increase of 72%).

The analysis in this section is based on the 'Programme Results' dashboard data; it needs to be considered that data for 2023 is still provisional at the moment of the analysis. In addition, data and analysis need to be interpreted in the light of the relatively high budget for KA2 in 2021 due to Covid-19 pandemic, which then decreased in subsequent years.

Table 17: Total number of projects contracted annually for KA2 activities

	2021	2022	2023
Total Projects Contracted	4,848	4,066	2,790

Source: 'ICF elaboration from Project Results Dashboard - extracted on 5 January 2024. Data for 2023 is partial

Between 2021 and 2022 across all A2 activities there was a decrease in the number of projects contracted (-16%) whilst the average value of grants increased by 43%. This reflects the relatively high budget for KA2 in 2021, which then decreased in subsequent years.

Total Capacity Building projects across applicable sectors (higher education, VET, youth, and sport) show a year-by-year increase in the number of projects and organisations between 2021 and 2023, however data for 2023 was partial when data were extracted. In addition, the analysis for Capacity building actions in Higher education, VET and Sport in only based on Call years 2022 and 2023 (no call in 2021).

[262] Source : Erasmus+ Annual Work Programmes 2021-2023. Data include budget allocation for all KA2 actions under both direct and indirect management.

Table 18: Total number of projects contracted annually for all Capacity Building activities

Field / Sector	2021	2022	2023
Capacity Building in Higher Education	N/A	149	142
Capacity Building in Sport	N/A	4	5
Capacity Building in VET	N/A	58	61
Capacity Building in Youth	45	28	27
Total Capacity Building	**45**	**239**	**235**

Source: 'ICF elaboration from Project Results Dashboard - extracted on 5 January 2024. Data for 2023 is partial

Capacity Building projects in the Youth field over this period show a trend towards the concentration of funds in fewer but larger projects with fewer organisations joining between 2021 and 2023 (as shown by a decrease in the number of projects from 45 to 27[263] but an increase in the average grant from EUR 226,000 to EUR 247,000, which points to a consolidation of such activities).

Between 2022 and 2023, when Capacity Building projects were funded also in higher education, VET and sport fields, total Capacity Building activities showed tiny decreases in the number of projects (from 239 to 235) and small increase of grant levels (from EUR 549k to EUR 558k, +2%) and organisations involved (from 1,575 to 1,604, +2%). There were increases across all metrics in the sport sector between 2022 and 2023, however this is from a low base level (four to five projects), so that only the coming years of the programme could clarify whether this tendency will continue. Capacity Building in higher education shows a small decrease in the number of projects (from 149 to 142, -5%) and a slight increase in grant size (from EUR 688,000 to EUR 712,000, +3%), and VET experienced a slight increase in the number of projects (from 58 to 61, +5%) and a minimal change in grants (from EUR 367,000 to EUR 366,000).

Overall, Partnerships for Cooperation activities[264] experienced a significant reduction in the total number of projects undertaken (from 4,430 to 3,302, -25%) between 2021 and 2022.

Small-Scale Partnerships represent a novelty of the current programme introduced in the adult education, school education, VET and the youth sector, whilst they already existed for sport, funded through two possible grant sizes (EUR 30,000 or 60,000) in the form of a lump-sum.

Table 19: Total number of projects contracted for all Small-Scale Partnership activities

Field / Sector	2021	2022	2023
Small scale partnerships in adult education	500	476	234
Small scale partnerships in school education	541	549	260
Small scale partnerships in VET	306	309	173
Small scale partnerships in Youth	376	449	247
Total Small scale partnerships	**1,723**	**1,783**	**914**

Source: ICF elaboration from Project Results Dashboard - extracted on 5 January 2024. Data for 2023 is partial

Cooperation Partnerships show a consolidation trend between 2021 and 2022, i.e. a concentration of funds in fewer but larger projects with fewer organisations joining per sector

[263] Provisional data for 2023

[264] Including ''Cooperation Partnerships' and 'Small-scale Partnerships'

and field (slightly less evidence in the field of higher education compared to other sectors and fields, but still present).

Table 20: Total number of projects contracted for all Cooperation Partnership activities

Field / Sector	2021	2022	2023
Cooperation partnerships in adult education	516	242	151
Cooperation partnerships in higher education	437	302	266
Cooperation partnerships in school education	589	358	282
Cooperation partnerships in VET	688	286	272
Cooperation partnerships in Youth	477	331	182
Total Cooperation partnerships	**2,707**	**1,519**	**1,153**

Source: ICF elaboration from Project Results Dashboard - extracted on 5 January 2024. Data for 2023 is partial

Cooperation partnerships in the field of VET experienced the largest reduction in the number of projects between 2021 and 2022 (from 688 to 286, -58%) between 2021 and 2022, with an increase in the average grant (from EUR 252,000 to EUR 275,000, +9%) – this can be partly explained due to the transfer of budget to KA2 in 2021 due to the pandemic and subsequent normalisation of budgets.

The activities funded under the Partnerships for Innovation[265] are large-scale projects with an average grant of EUR 1.3 million over the period 2021-2022. The average grant decreased from EUR 1.9 million in 2021 to EUR 1.33 million in 2022. There is a trend of consolidation between 2021 and 2022, with an increase in the number of projects (from 32 to 72, +125%) with an associated decrease in the average number of organisations involved (from 412 to 376, -9%).

The flagship actions funded under the Partnerships for Excellence[266] are large-scale projects with an average grant of EUR 3.6 million over the period 2021-2022. The average grant increased between 2021 and 2022 from EUR 2.26 million to EUR 5 million, with an accompanying increase in the number of projects from 91 to 141 and average number of organisations from 150 to 180 over the same period, given the implementation, of an additional Call (European Universities) in 2022 compared to 2021 .

Not-for-profit European sport events show an increase in the number of projects (from 12 to 20) and organisations (from 30 to 63) funded between 2021 and 2022, with a decrease in the average grant from EUR 392 000 to EUR 328 000. This indicates increased competition for such activities (with organisations willing to receive lower funding for individual projects) and a larger share of demand met.

Results and Impact

Although there is some variation in the effectiveness of KA2 activities across sectors and fields, the overall results are positive, leading to improved internationalisation, improved networks and knowledge-sharing and enhanced cultural integration (as reported in European-level and National-level KIIs, case studies, NA/EACEA Survey and National reports). The main effects for organisations have been the increased internationalisation and visibility and enhanced cooperation and networking opportunities. Cooperation partnerships and Small-scale partnerships are consistently identified among the most effective actions of the programme from respondents in the NA/EACEA survey across all

[265] They include the “Alliances for Innovation” and the “Forward-looking projects”. There was no Call for Forward-looking projects in 2021.

[266] They include: European Universities (no Call in 2021), Centres of Vocational Excellence, Erasmus+ Teacher Academies (no Call in 2022) and Erasmus Mundus.

sectors and fields[267] Among the specific benefits for individuals associated with the 'most effective' actions under KA2, respondents listed networking opportunities, and partnership building for Small-scale Partnerships, and enhancing staff skills and boosting innovation for Cooperation Partnerships. When considering broader effects on the organisations, results of the NA/EACEA survey emphasised how organisations benefit from the open and adaptable format of Small-Scale Partnerships, and how these actions are helpful for less established and experienced organisations in developing their capabilities. In addition, the Centres for Vocational Excellence (CoVE) and the European Universities are seen as the most effective actions for organisations and systems across all of Erasmus+ activities, in the VET field and Higher Education sector respectively.

Cooperation activities under KA2 (and partially those under KA3) saw a major change in the 2021-2027 programme, with the introduction of simplified grant rules and lump sum models. This was received largely positively across beneficiaries in all sectors and fields as it simplifies the process, reduces administrative burden and introduces greater flexibility in project management (as reported in European-level and national level KIIs). Despite these improvements, there are still concerns that the application process is overly burdensome and should incorporate more flexibility and agility to adapt to changing circumstances. There are mixed views on the funding levels, which some beneficiaries argue do not match the ambition of the overall programme. This has been exacerbated by increased inflation in recent years which has made it more difficult for some organisations to participate as they have to complement EU grants from the programme with additional funding. Furthermore, there are cases (reported in national-level KIIs) where the perceived financial limitations of the programme reduced the interest of potential participant organisations.

European added value

Evidence suggests that Erasmus+ provides added value compared to what could be achieved at a national/regional and international level (see EQ23). Case Studies across KA2 participants consistently state the positive added value of Erasmus+, as some projects would not be implemented[268] without the programme and, for others, the projects may have proceeded with a smaller scope[269].

Inefficiencies and potential improvement of efficiency

Whilst the introduction of the lump sum model was received positively and reduces the administrative burden, there are additional measures that could be introduced. The analysis of national reports highlighted the feedback from some respondents that the lump sum model encourages "application factories" to submit more proposals for financial gain[270], and stressed the importance of fraud prevention procedures for participating countries[271]. Some reports indicate that the use of the lump sum model has introduced uncertainty regarding activity eligibility, justification and flexibility, potentially reducing its advantages, with further clarifications needed[272]. Examples of these issues are reported in relation to different activities. During the workshop held in July 2024, representatives from stakeholder umbrella organisations in the youth and sport fields highlighted that they welcomed lump-sum funding but stressed that the requirements for application, implementation and reporting should be

[267] Annex III NA-EACEA survey, Q25 In your sector, which actions do you think have strongest and weakest results for beneficiaries and participants, organisations and systems? (Note: Respondents were asked to select up to 3 most effective and 3 least effective types of action)

[268] Case studies FH Joanneum (VET, AT), Kauno technologijų mokymo centras (VET, LT).

[269] Case studies BHAK/BHAS Oberpullendorf (SCH, AT), I Liceum Ogólnokształcące im Henryka Sienkiewicza w Kędzierzynie-Koźlu (SCH, PL), Pädagogische Hochschule Freiburg (SCH, DE), TU Berlin - ENHANCE Alliance (HED, DE), Univerza v Mariboru (HED, SI), Universidad de Sevilla (HED, ES), Satakunnan ammattikorkeakoulu (HED, FI), AKMI Anonimi Ekpaideftiki Etairia (VET, EL), CHARM-EU, University of Barcelona (HED, ES).

[270] AT, IE, NO.

[271] AT, DE, IE, LI, NO.

[272] DE. LV, NL.

further simplified; in particular the Sport small-scale partnerships were mentioned[273]. Amongst the key informants interviewed, representatives from Commission services (four) and EU agencies (two) called for greater flexibility in budget allocations to meet evolving needs, given the increasing demand for Capacity building projects in youth and VET.

Comparator programmes

The outputs and outcomes under KA2 are multifaceted and it is therefore difficult to draw meaningful comparisons with other programmes. Drawing on evidence from EQ10 and EQ23.1 comparing with programmes which have similar objectives, it appears that except for the EEA and Norway Grants, other programmes only support cooperation in specific sectors or fields, whilst Erasmus+ has broader coverage. Due to the limited availability of data on key metrics such as budget and participation numbers, it is not possible to draw conclusions from such comparisons.

Cost-effectiveness

The synthesis of National Reports suggests cost-effectiveness of KA2 is more mixed than KA1. It is also challenging to assess costs due to the diversity of the actions; however, t the analysis suggests that there are strong arguments to support a positive cost-effectiveness judgement. Cooperation Partnerships are broadly viewed as effective across a broad spectrum of stakeholders (including National Agencies, learners, staff and organisations)[274], in particular in school education, VET and sport. Small-scale partnerships are similarly viewed as effective, in particular in school education and youth. While provisional, data for both activities show tendency towards consolidation (fewer projects, involving fewer organisations, with larger grants). This trend is more evident for Small-scale partnerships in school education and youth, and for youth and sport sectors with regard to Cooperation Partnerships. Should this tendency be confirmed in the upcoming years, it may require a revision of the amount of the grants provided, which may become insufficient to support the activities implemented. The revision could also lead to differentiated grant values across sectors and fields.

Due to their focussed nature, Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) are viewed as effective by respondents to the NAs/EACEA survey for the VET field, and not-for-profit sport events by respondents to the survey for the sport sector. For other activities of more recent start, such as Teacher Academies, it is not possible to come to a conclusion given also the long duration of these projects.

Furthermore, evidence suggests the activities show additionality, which suggests these positive effects would not have occurred in the absence of Erasmus+. Further, as the programme develops, each sector, field and activity are adapting and responding to the specific circumstances in their context.

Two national reports suggest that the time investment required for application and implementation can have a negative impact on overall cost-effectiveness. The demand for KA2 activities has exceeded the initial funding allocated in the 2021-2023 period, despite the larger funding allocated for KA2 activities by the 2021-2027 programme compared to its predecessor, especially in school education, adult education and in the sport sector, while Small-Scale Partnerships have been used largely in the youth sector (see also EQ9.3). The COVID-19 pandemic re-directed funding to KA2 activities in 2021 to face mobilities restrictions; still the high demand for cooperation and Small-Scale Partnerships continues, calling for possibly an increase in budget allocations.

[273] Stakeholder Workshop 4 on Draft Final Report, held on 9 July 2024.

[274] Evidence from the NAs/ECEA survey, KIIs, and case studies.

Key Action 3

Inputs and outputs

The available data across years for KA3 activities reflect the variety of its funded activities, which include:

- Actions funded through Calls for proposals such as Policy experimentations, European Youth Together (action grants), and Civil Society Cooperation in the Youth and Education and Training field (operating grants to individual organisations).
- Grants awarded to identified beneficiaries in line with the programme Regulation and financing decisions. These are mainly:
  - Policy networks such as Europass, Eurydice or Youth wiki network, which benefit from one grant per participating country[275];
  - Contribution agreements to some international organisations for research or cooperation (Council of Europe, International Education Association in charge of ICILS or ICCS, UNESCO, OECD);
  - Actions for the quality implementation of the programmes, implemented by the National Agencies through grants included in their respective contribution agreements (i.e. under indirect management). These include TCA, DiscoverEU learning Cycle, SALTO Resource centres, Eurodesk, national VET teams;
  - Operating grant to the European Youth Forum.
  - Operating grant to the Eurodesk Brussels Link

KA3 also includes actions and activities funded through procurement (e.g. support to studies and research activities). Furthermore, support to some actions is multi-annual, some is awarded to partnerships (e.g. policy experimentations), or to individual beneficiaries (e.g. Eurydice, Europass).

Because of this, KA3 available data are very diversified and it is difficult to draw robust conclusions applicable to every type of action. This diversified nature is reflected in the absence of a consolidated data source reporting on either input or output data. The analysis is based on data from the Programme Results Dashboard[276], integrated when possible with additional sources (data on budget from the statistical annexes to the Erasmus+ annual reports and data of budget transfers provided by DC EAC for actions under indirect management)[277], with the caveat that data for 2023 is still partial. The diversity of activities and heterogeneity of sources limit the comprehensiveness of the analysis, which to a large extent remains qualitative.

The available data for KA3 activities under direct management show that in the 2021-2023 period the programme has allocated almost EUR 505.4 million across the different strands[278].

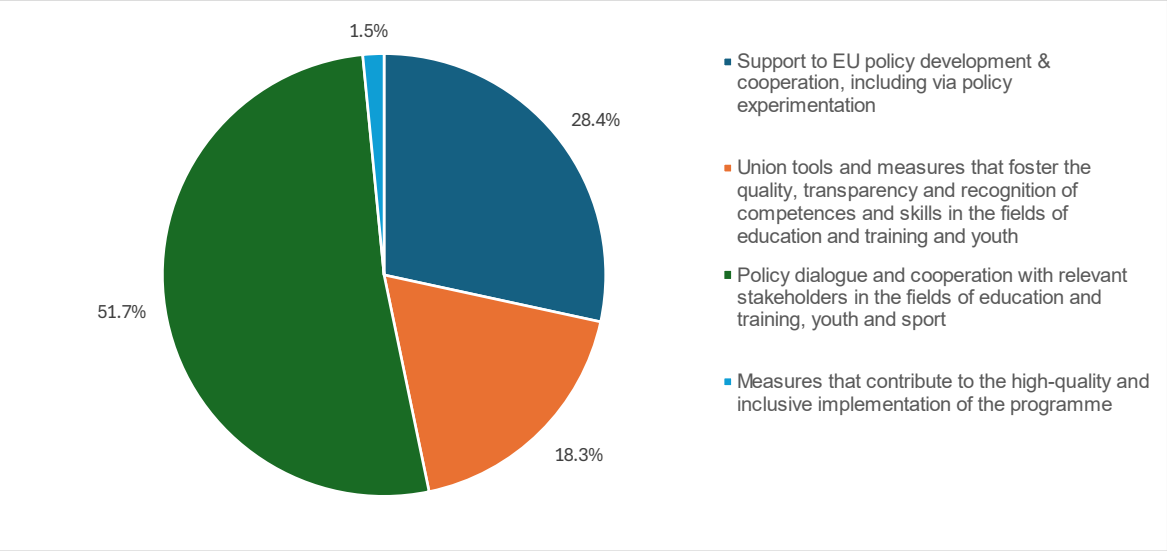
[275] For example, Eurydice is network for better knowledge and research in the education sector: every country receives one grant to support the country contact point for the network, sometimes in the Ministry for education itself, sometimes in a research institute, etc.

[276] Annex I – Technical Annex, Table 64

[277] Annex I – Technical Annex, Table 65

[278] Based on Erasmus+ Annual Work Programmes 2021-2023. The figure includes also activities funded through procurements which are not covered in the analysis.

Figure 16: Distribution of contracted grants among KA3 activities under direct management (2021-2023)



Source: ICF elaboration from Project Results Dashboard- extracted on 5 January 2024. Data for 2023 is partial[279]

The distribution of grants among KA3 activities under direct management for the 2021-2023 period can be broken down as follows:

- Almost half of grants was provided for **Policy dialogue and cooperation with relevant stakeholders in the fields of education and training, youth and sport** (EUR 74.2 million in the period considered). The biggest share of funding under this set of activities went to Civil society cooperation in the field of education and training and in youth (EUR 19.6 million), Dialogue with stakeholders (EUR 14.8 million) and European Youth Together (EUR 18.8 million). Other large funding was provided for the European Youth Forum (EUR 8.6 million) and Structured Dialogue activities (EUR 4.5 million).
- Activities under **Support to EU policy development and cooperation**, **including via policy experimentation** received EUR 40.8 million in the period considered). Within this group of activities, National Coordinators for the implementation of the European Agenda for Adult Learning received the largest funding (EUR 13 million). Other large funding was provided for the Eurydice Network (EUR 9.1 million), Peer Learning Activities linked to Presidency conferences and meetings (EUR 5.7 million) and to initiatives supporting the EHEA reforms (EUR 5.6 million).
- **Union tools and measures that foster the quality, transparency and recognition of competences and skills** in the fields of education and training and youth received grants for EUR 26.3 million in the period under consideration, the largest shares of which went for the EQF, Europass and Euroguidance (EUR 15,7 million), and the EQAVET Network (EUR 8.7 million).
- Under the strand of activity of **Measures that contribute to the high-quality and inclusive implementation of the programme**, the Eurodesk-Brussels link received EUR 2.2 million in the period considered.

[279] Additional details are provided in Table 64 of Annex I – Technical Annex

Among KA3 activities under indirect management, against a total allocation of around EUR 163 million in the period 2021-2023, about EUR 135 million were absorbed by the National Agencies (83% of the total allocation), as follows[280]:

- Networks received EUR 21.7 million EUR, which went to national VET Teams (EUR 5.7 million), Eurodesk (EUR 6.9 million), SALTO resource centres in the Education and Training field (EUR 2.1 million) and SALTO resource centres in the youth sector (EUR 6.9 million)[281].
- Within the youth sector, TCA activities received EUR 62 million in the period considered[282], but only absorbed EUR 58.6 million at the time of this evaluation[283]. Similarly, DiscoverEU Learning Cycle activities absorbed only EUR 13.3 million out of the EUR 15 million initially allocated.
- Similarly, TCA activities in the field of education and training were allocated EUR 60 million in the 2021-2023 period, absorbing only EUR 41.2 million[284] at the time of this evaluation. Those issues are largely due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on the programme activities (see EQ9.3).

Results and impacts

Some variation is noted in the effectiveness of KA3 activities across fields and sectors with less evidence for its overall effectiveness compared to KA1 and KA2. As reported in European-level and National-level KIIs, case studies, National Reports and the NA/EACEA survey, the key effects of activities in KA3 include improvements in networks and knowledge sharing and opportunities to engage with diverse perspectives. Learning and understanding new practices and methodologies is also a key benefit.

Generally, the NA/EACEA survey results suggest that activities in KA3 are perceived as less effective by National Agencies for individuals and organisations compared to other KAs. Policy Experimentations were ranked least effective for VET, school education, adult education, and youth. Policy Dialogue and Cooperation activities were ranked in the 3 least effective for staff and learners across school education, higher education, and adult education. However, this seems linked to the policy-related character of these activities being predominantly institutionally focussed and as such are perceived as having a low impact at an individual level. 5 staff respondents in the NA/EACEA survey shared that they may have limited direct impact on individual participants but they hold sector-wide benefits. One interviewee in the adult education sector stated that *'Policy related activities probably have a smaller direct impact on individual participants, but in higher perspective they are beneficial to the sector and in the end to adult educational staff.'*

The NA/EACEA survey results suggest that KA3 activities are perceived as more effective from a policy and systems perspective than at the level of learners, staff or organisations, which is in line with the type of results expected from KA3 activities which are mainly aimed to support policy development. 18 respondents (21.2%) provided insights into the positive effects of Policy Dialogue and Cooperation with stakeholders at the system level. 11 of them highlighted the potential impact of involving political decision makers and stakeholders. Further, one youth organisation commended the effective implementation of Youth Dialogue as a valuable tool for incorporating youth perspectives into policy development.

[280] More details can be found in table 65 in Annex I - Technical Annex

[281] Data on budget transfers to National Agencies provided by DG EAC. Data for 2023 is partial.

[282] EUR 20 Mio per year, except in 2022 when a top-up of EUR 2 Mio has been added to the budget of youth TCAs to boost activities in occasion of the European Year of Youth.

[283] The eligibility period for TCA activities is 24 months therefore, many activities were still to be implemented at the time of the evaluation.

[284] To be noted that the eligibility period for TCAs activities is of 24 months, therefore at the time of this evaluation many activities under the NAs' work programme 2022 and most of the activities under the work programme 2023 were still to be implemented.

Furthermore, the policy and support characteristics of KA3 activities makes them less well-known, reducing their perceived effectiveness.

The analysis of National Reports suggests that SALTO Resource Centres were particularly successful[285]. The evidence suggests that they have led to improvements in the quality and impact of the programme by providing expertise, resources, information and training (ES). They have served as hubs for collecting and exchanging best practices (HR) and are potential sources of inspiration and information.

From the KIIs, one Erasmus+ international organisation highlighted the collaborative efforts with the EU under Erasmus+, especially under KA3 including digital transformation, micro-credentials, and influencing EU initiatives. Five representatives from the Commission Services highlight that the Erasmus+ programme, particularly through KA3, plays a significant role in shaping the European Education Area (EEA). This includes promoting internationalisation, fostering cooperation among Higher Education institutions, and supporting the development of qualification frameworks.

Evidence from case studies suggest that organisations view them as positive and effective. In the adult education field, benefits include engagement of staff and partners as both implementers and active learners, while thanks to the involvement in the project, the consulted organisation had an opportunity to acquire new skills and knowledge. Further, there were improvements and growth in networks, improvements in best practices, and the project has influenced EU initiatives[286].

In the youth sector, case studies suggest that KA3 activities have brought benefits in bringing learners and policy makers together, improved engagement and participation, and have led to increased knowledge and skills. The outputs of KA3 activities have helped in developing and shaping strategies and policies at both an organisational level and wider[287].

European added value

Generally, evidence from EQ23.1 suggests that Erasmus+ fills a gap in funding and there is strong evidence, both from the public consultation and directly from beneficiary organisations, that activities would not have gone ahead without Erasmus+ funding, or would have proceeded at a different scale. Specifically for activities under KA3, evidence suggests European added value, with four of the case studies suggesting activities under KA3 would not have gone ahead without Erasmus+ funding[288]. One case study suggests that parts of activities may have gone ahead but with a smaller scope[289].

Inefficiencies and potential improvement of efficiency

The variety of activities and management types under KA3 makes it difficult to identify clear areas of inefficiencies and of potential improvement. Based on views and experiences of stakeholders, simplification measures could include a broader adoption of lump-sum payments. Stakeholders also suggested to further reinforce SALTO resource centres for continuous exchange and dissemination of best practices[290].

Comparator programmes

The analysis of comparator programmes was unable to identify comparable activities for the KA3, due to the diverse nature and scale of the activities covered.

[285] SALTO Resource Centres were referenced in 5 national reports (ES, HR, FR, HR, SK).

[286] Case study Regional Capacity for Adult Learning and Education, EAEA (BE)

[287] Case studies Youth for Exchange and Understanding International (YOU, BE), Edlab, Universidad de Granada (ES), Youth Wiki (MT, FR, CY).

[288] Case studies Agenzija Zghazagh (YOU, MT), Youth for Exchange and Understanding International (YOU, BE), Regional Capacity for Adult Learning and Education, EAEA (BE), Youth Wiki (MT, FR, CY)

[289] Case study Edlab, Universidad de Granada (ES)

[290] Workshop on the Draft Final Report, held in July 2024

Cost-effectiveness

Policy support actions in the education, training, youth and sport sectors under KA3 were considered cost-effective by 35% of the PC respondents, while 62% stated that they had no opinion or were uncertain in relation to their cost-effectiveness[291].

In the current programming period, several actions moved from one funding mechanism to another. In the case of the networks under indirect management, such as Eurodesk and national VET teams, and SALTO resource centres, the change from real cost to lump sum was applied in 2022, while TCAs are still implemented with real cost. It is important to note that the assessment of the implementation of Networks based on lump sums was carried out for the first time in 2023, in the context of the evaluation of the 2022 National Agency yearly reports. While evidence is still preliminary, the adoption of simpler funding mechanisms such as lump-sums seems to have increased the cost-effectiveness of those activities, reducing the administrative burden for National Agencies.

The analysis suggests that there are improvements that could be made to the effectiveness of these actions which would help improve overall cost-effectiveness, such as broadening the use of lump-sum.

Jean Monnet Actions

Inputs and outputs

The JMA aim to support teaching, learning, research and debates relating to the European Union (EU). The activities funded through the JMA are varied and can be grouped under four categories:

- **JMA in the field of higher education**, which supports teaching and research in the field of EU studies through: Jean Monnet Modules providing short teaching programmes or courses; Jean Monnet Chairs providing teaching posts that specialise in EU studies; and Jean Monnet Centres of Excellence to create pools of knowledge and competence on EU subjects.
- **JMA in other fields of education and training**, which offers new funding opportunities under the 2021-2027 programme to support teachers in schools and vocational education and training institutions to inform young people and develop critical awareness about the EU. It covers: Jean Monnet Teacher Training to support teachers to teach about the EU; Jean Monnet Learning EU Initiatives to provide specific teaching content on EU subjects; and Jean Monnet School Networks to engage schools and VET institutions to gather and discuss teaching methodologies and share good practices.
- **Jean Monnet policy debate**, supports the academic and public "debate on European integration matters through the collection, sharing and discussion of research across large thematic Jean Monnet Networks in Higher Education.
- **Jean Monnet Designated Institutions (JMDIs)**, which are specific institutions referred to in Article 8(c) of the 2021-2027 Erasmus+ Regulation that work in education and training and receive operating grants to support their administrative

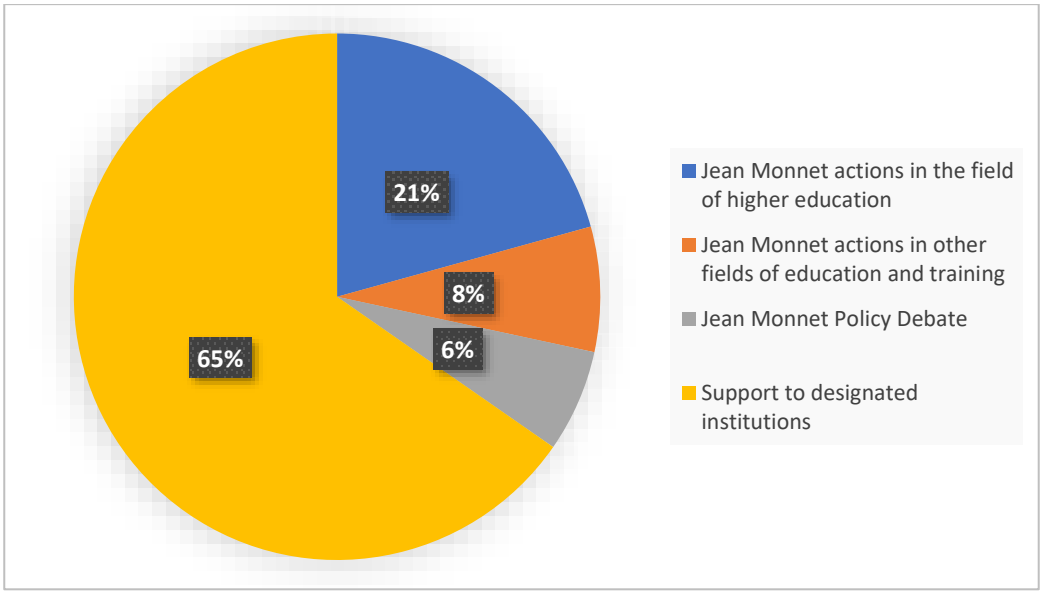
[291] Out of 1,092 respondents to the public consultation, 35% agreed' or 'fully agreed' that support policy reforms in the education, training, youth and sport sectors (KA3) are cost-effective. Among the most represented stakeholder categories that responded to this question, 18% of academic/research institutions (N = 422) and 25% of EU citizens (N = 215) shared the same view. Noteworthy, a higher share of academic/research institutions (72%, N = 422) and EU citizens (56%, N = 215) either had no opinion or were uncertain about this matter.

and operational costs, enabling them to offer activities that are of European interest[292].

The Erasmus+ programme has allocated a budget of EUR 180.6 million to these Jean Monnet activities over the period from 2021 to 2023, at an average of EUR 60.27 million per annum. The annual budgets have increased over this period from EUR 52.2 million in 2021, to EUR 63 million in 2022 and EUR 66.8 million in 2023, although the overall distribution of funds for JMA has not substantially changed since the previous programme period[293].

The figure below provides the breakdown of the grant distribution across the four groups of Jean Monnet Actions.

Figure 17: Distribution of funding across Jean Monnet Actions (2021-2023)



Source: ICF elaboration from Project Results Dashboard - extracted on 5 January 2024. Data for 2023 is partial.

The figure above presents budget executed for the period 2021-2023 for each of the JMA categories listed above. It shows that the operating grants for designated institutions represent the majority of the overall JMA budget (65% on average in the period considered). The rest of the JMA budget supports higher education (21%), activities in other fields of education and training (schools and VET, 8%) and the Jean Monnet Policy debate (6%). While the budgets have increased between 2021 and 2023 across all four categories, the most significant increases are associated with budgets for the Jean Monnet Policy Debate and actions in other education and training fields.

Results and impacts

Jean Monnet Actions produce outputs and outcomes for individuals, organisations and at the system level. While there is some evidence and insights into the effectiveness of JMA, overall, there is currently a lack of data available to assess their outputs and results. It should also be noted that some areas, such as JMA in school and VET education and policy

[292] Operating grants provided between 2021 and 2023 have supported seven institutions: College of Europe, Bruges and Natolin campuses; European University Institute, Florence, including its School of Transnational Governance; Academy of European Law, Trier; European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA), Maastricht; European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, Odense; Centre international de formation européenne (CIFE), Nice. – Same designated institutions as in the 2014-2020 programme.

[293] Data from Erasmus+ Annual Work Programmes and amendments for the period 2021-2023

debate are relatively new (no final project results available yet) and that there is little information available on performance in these areas. It is therefore difficult to provide a comprehensive assessment of the extent to which output targets have been achieved for JMA in terms of delivering policy dialogue and cooperation, policy debates, or teaching and learning about objectives, values, and functioning of the EU.

While there are no quantitative output targets for JMA, qualitative evidence of their effectiveness was received through the KIIs, public consultation, surveys and case studies. Insights from stakeholders indicated that the activities delivered under JMA were generally perceived as being effective[294]. For example, Jean Monnet in higher education was widely viewed by consulted stakeholders as a well-established initiative with recognition in academic circles. Several stakeholders[295] in the scoping interviews and KIIs suggested that the JMA in higher education were working well, and the number of applications and projects supported had increased in 2023 (and 2024, based on preliminary data), following lower levels in 2021 and 2022[296]. This is likely to have been due to both the COVID-19 pandemic and adjustments to changes in JMA activities, as some actions were discontinued in the latest programming period (e.g. Jean Monnet Projects), while others were added (e.g. Jean Monnet Policy Debate). Other stakeholders highlighted their appreciation for the role of JMA in improving cross-sectoral cooperation, fostering dialogue between academia and policy-makers, promoting civic participation and citizenship education, creating international networks, and promoting teaching and learning about the EU[297]. For example, the case studies with the European University Institute (IT) and European Institute of Public Administration (NL) (Jean Monnet designated institutions), highlighted the role of JMA funding in supporting collaboration across different institutions and representatives from academia and policy makers and across a range of policy areas. This had supported a number of outcomes, such as increased levels of cooperation with other academic organisations and national ministries, and funding from sources other than the JMA for specific initiatives implemented by Jean Monnet designated institutions in relevant policy areas. For instance, the Dutch Ministry of Interior funded the establishment of the European Housing Policy Network (EHPN) implemented by EIPA, which held its first conference in June 2024[298].

The number of JMA applications in the school education and VET fields were somewhat lower in the first years of the programme, likely due to the combined effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and of the novelty of the actions. However, some actions had received sufficient applications to fully utilise the available budgets (e.g. the Teacher Training Action and Schools Networks), while Learning EU Initiative received in the first two calls (2022 and 2023) a low number of quality applications. However, 2024 data, falling out of the scope of this evaluation, show a significant increase.[299]. Interviewees at EU levels also indicated that the new JMA in school education had not fully met the initial expectations for the number and quality of the proposals, although improvements could already be seen, and this was not generally considered a major cause for concern. These issues were put in relation to a

[294] Case studies: European University Institute (IT, #36), European Institute of Public Administration (NL, #37), and Casa do Professor (PT, #30).

[295] These included scoping interviews with EACEA, the European Parliament, and a National Agency from an EU country, and a KII with DG EAC.

[296] Data from the 'Programme Results' dashboard (frozen on 5 January 2024) show that the number of projects funded under the JMA in the field of higher education increased from 251 in 2021 to 357 in 2022 and 332 in 2023 (data for 2023 is still partial – it is thus likely that the final figure will be higher than in 2022), See also Table 66 in Annex I and EQ1.

[297] These included interviews with the EC (1), an EU delegation (1), a national stakeholder organisation (1); Case studies with Scuola superiore di studi universitari e di perfezionamento Sant'Anna (IT), Alma Mater Studiorum - Università di Bologna (IT), College of Europe (BE, PL), European University Institute (IT), European Institute of Public Administration (NL).

[298] Case studies 36 (European University Institute) and 37 (EIPA)

[299] Data from the 'Programme Results' dashboard (frozen on 5 January 2024) show that projects funded under JMA in other fields of education and training increased from 20 in 2021, to 38 in 2022 to 44 in 2023 (data still partial). It needs to be taken in mind that Teacher Training and School Networks activities started in 2021, while Learning EU initiatives only started in 2022. See also Table 66 in Annex I and EQ1.

lack of capacity and capability in preparing applications within schools, as well as to legal issues making difficult for public sector schools to sign grant agreements. The stakeholders consulted for the case studies provided similar findings and indicated that the activities performed under JMA in schools had generally yielded effective results. Given the early stage of JMA in schools, it is not possible to draw firm conclusions on effectiveness of these new actions, although the case studies[300] reported some early success and good prospects for the future in terms of:

- Some effective results at the learner, professional and organisational levels.
- Project outputs that were considered superior (in terms of depth and scope) compared to conventional approaches available within their country (e.g. through civic education, history classes).
- Suggestions that it would not have been possible to realise the same activities and outputs without the JMA for schools actions.

European added value

There is evidence that the Jean Monnet Actions deliver European added value. For example, JMA play a key role in supporting Erasmus+ to raise awareness, knowledge and understanding of the EU and increase participation in democratic processes, both within Europe and beyond. It provides enhanced opportunities to support European integration through teaching, research and policy debates. There is also evidence that they fund activities that would not have been possible otherwise because they are not typically covered by other institutional and national funding:

- The JMA supports enhances EU literacy and supports teaching and learning of European integration topics in higher education. An example is provided by the Alma Mater Studorum project, funded by Jean Monnet Modules, which introduced a new course at the University of Bologna on laws regulating digital platforms. This provided an opportunity to study and gain knowledge of digital strategies and policies in the EU and benefit from a broader perspective beyond national borders. The project was reported to have strengthened students' connection to the EU and was identified as good practice by the National/Italian Conference of Communication Courses, while dissemination activities helped raise awareness and build capacity beyond the university community.
- Another example is provided by the Jean Monnet module on Europe Regulates Robotics (ERR) and the Centre of Excellence on the Regulation of Robotics and Artificial Intelligence (EURA) at the Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies, linked to the University of Pisa. The case study interviews suggested that the JMA had provided unique opportunities that supported research, while emphasising a European dimension that would not have been possible through national grants.
- The European University Institute (EUI) reported that the Erasmus+ grant had been instrumental in securing matched funding from the Italian Government to set up a public policy school (the School of Transnational Governance – STG).
- The JMA operating grant is also reported to be critical in allowing the College of Europe in the Natolin and Bruges campuses to operate and implement their activities, collaborate with project partners, and share good practice[301].

[300] Relevant case studies and their action types are Casa do Professor (PT) - Teacher Training Action, Profilirana Prirodo-Matematicheska Gimnazia Akademik Ivan Tsenov (BG) - Learning EU Initiatives, and Istituto Statale d'Arte - Liceo artistico "Edgardo Mannucci" (IT) - Network for Schools, A similar example was reported also by the National Agency from Romania (KIIs Intervies)

[301] Case studies Pädagogische Hochschule Freiburg (SCH, DE), College of Europe (BE and PL).

- Operating grants enable JMDIs to focus teaching and research on EU issues that they would not have the resources to do through other public or private funding. This not only facilitates specific EU-related teaching and research, but also helps engage and train policy-makers of the future. For example, the European Institute for Public Administration runs confidential one-to-one technical assistance sessions with Member State administrations on policy issues of relevance to Member States, which would not have been possible without Erasmus+ funding. Interviews with representatives of the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (EASNIE) and the Centre International de formation européenne (CIFE) indicated that these organisations would not have been able to reach such a high number of participants without the support of Erasmus+.
- Initial evidence on JMA in schools points to its crucial role in implementing activities which would have not have been possible otherwise, and in producing outputs of superior quality (in terms of depth and scope) compared to conventional approached available in individual Member States (e,g., through civic education and history classes)[302].

JMA also play an important role in supporting Erasmus+ to promote cooperation between Member States and third countries (including those associated and not associated to the programme), and enhances the benefits of such cooperation in these countries.

Inefficiencies and potential improvement of efficiency

Interviews with Commission staff and organisations involved in JMA activities (as part of the case studies) also highlighted challenges around communications for JMA, particularly finding the right balance between using the Erasmus+ brand and Jean Monnet-specific communication[303]. These challenges were felt to restrict the effectiveness of communication efforts.

The NA/EACEA survey also identified potential opportunities to improve the efficiency of JMA. Examples included the potential integration of JMA into the structure of KAs, rather than keeping them separate, in order to help improve internal coherence and communication efforts. Ten of the National Agencies responding to the NA/EACEA survey also called for the decentralisation of certain actions including the new JMA in schools, which could support improved targeting and an increased level of support for applicants, which they felt might help to influence the number and quality of applications.

Comparator programmes

The analysis of comparator programmes was unable to identify comparable activities for the JMA, due to the specific nature and scale of the activities covered.

Cost-effectiveness

It is difficult to draw firm conclusions about the cost-effectiveness of the JMA, based on the available evidence. For example, the public consultation did not explore perceptions of the cost effectiveness of JMA, as it did for the key actions. However, the budget allocations for JMA suggest that the funding distribution is similar to the previous programme period, while the qualitative evidence from interviews and case studies suggests that JMA are generally

[302] Relevant case studies and their action types are Casa do Professor (PT) - Teacher Training Action, Profilirana Prirodo-Matematicheska Gimnazia Akademik Ivan Tsenov (BG) - Learning EU Initiatives, and Istituto Statale d'Arte - Liceo artistico "Edgardo Mannucci" (IT) - Network for Schools, KIIs interviews (one international organisation, one National Agency – Romania)

[303] Relevant case studies include Casa do Professor (PT) (Case study 30), Scuola sSuperiore di Studi Universotari Sant'Anna (IT) (case study 33), KIIs Intervievs

perceived to be effective. There is also evidence of progressive improvements in areas that had not met initial expectations, such as applications for JMA in schools.

Potential improvements concern the communication and delivery processes for JMA in the other fields of Education and training, although the actions are only recently launched, and further analysis will be necessary once the activities have become more established.

3.2.2 EQ 9 Size of programme budget

EQ 9.1: To what extent is/was the size of the budget appropriate and proportionate to what Erasmus+ 2021-2027 and Erasmus+ 2014-2020 set out to achieve?

The overall size of the budget for the Erasmus+ 2021-2027 programme was set at EUR 24.6 billion from the financial programming, increased by an additional EUR 1.7 billion as a result of programme-specific adjustments provided for in Article 5 of Regulation 2020/2093[304], making an overall value of EUR 26.3 billion, with an additional EUR 2.2 billion allocated from External Cooperation Instruments, i.e. IPA III[305] and NDICI-Global Europe[306]. In total, the resources allocated are – in nominal terms – almost 74% higher than the resources available in the 2014-2020 programming period[307] [308].

The 2014-2020 programme budget was distributed through smaller annual allocations at the start of the programme period (10% in 2014, 11% in 2015 respectively) and then increased over time[309]. A similar budget profile was also applied in the current programming period, with 2021 having been allocated about 10% of the programme budget[310] and 2022 about 13% of the overall budget set by the 2021-2027 Erasmus+ Regulation, in line with the financial programming for the whole period.

Despite the significant challenges of the early years (the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the impact of inflation increases on beneficiaries), evidence suggests that Erasmus+ 2021-2027 managed to deliver according to plan, and that it has adapted to the external context and needs[311] (more details in EQ3.2).

The Erasmus+ 2021-2027 budgetary planning also included an update of the amounts of grants funded by the programme, to align the unit cost contributions of the new programme in January 2021 to current prices, and the introduction of the lump-sum approach in Partnerships for Cooperation. One of the main parameters for the update was the change

[304] Council Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2020/2093 of 17 December 2020 laying down the multiannual financial framework for the years 2021 to 2027, OJ L 433I, 22.12.2020, p. 11. See also Annex II of this Regulation.

[305] Regulation (EU) 2021/1529 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 September 2021 establishing the Instrument for Pre-Accession assistance (IPA III), OJ L 330, 20.9.2021, p. 1.

[306] Regulation (EU) 2021/947 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 June 2021 establishing the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe, amending and repealing Decision No 466/2014/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council and repealing Regulation (EU) 2017/1601 of the European Parliament and of the Council and Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 480/2009, OJ L 209, 14.6.2021, p. 1.

[307] See Article 17 of the 2021-2027 Erasmus+ Regulation.

[308] The 2014-2020 Programme's budget was EUR 14.8 billion (a 40% increase compared to its predecessors), with an additional EUR 1.8 billion from the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI), the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), the instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA2), the Partnership Instrument (PI) and the European Development Fund (EDF). Source: European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Erasmus+ annual report 2014, https://commission.europa.eu/publications/annual-work-programme-2014-erasmus_en

[309] The 2020 budget represented the 20% of the total budget of the Erasmus+ 2014-2020, and in the financial programming for 2021-2021, the year 2021 is expected to use about 17% of the total budget programme. Source: Elaboration from European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Erasmus+ annual reports 2014-2021 – Statistical annexes

[310] Elaboration from European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Erasmus+ annual report 2021 – Statistical annex, Publications Office of the European Union, 2022, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/63555

[311] See: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/eu-budget/performance-and-reporting/programme-performance-statements/erasmus-performance_en#budget-performance--implementation

in inflation between the last update in 2017 (based on 2016 data), and the last available figure for 2020. This resulted in an adjustment, based on the cumulative EU inflation rate in the period 2017-2020 of 5.8% (Eurostat data). Other adjustments compared to the previous programme were made for each budget category based on historical data, expert judgement and stakeholders' feedback collected during the previous programming period. A further assessment of the adequacy of the programme contributions took place later on in the programme life cycle.

However, the inflation surge that followed the energy crisis and the Russian invasion of Ukraine affected many programme participants and organisations. They had to find additional resources and/or revise planned activities in response to the increases in costs. To alleviate these difficulties, additional adjustments to the lump sum and unit costs contributions under the 2021-2027 programme were made in 2022 and 2023, including, for instance:

- a further specific adjustment for some unit costs (e.g. individual support rates taking into account subsistence costs such as housing and food) for mobility activities under KA1; and
- a further adjustment of 18.89% to the amounts provided per participant for preparatory visits in the fields of VET, school education, adult education and Youth under KA1[312].

These adaptations became effective from the 2023 and 2024 Erasmus+ calls, and therefore their effects were not perceived yet by the vast majority of the stakeholders consulted for this evaluation. Most national level KIIs reported that while the programme budget had increased in recent years, it was not keeping pace with rising costs – this was a frequent observation across countries. 32% of respondents to the PC (N=188) commented on the inability of the programme to adjust the amount of funding to accommodate large, rapid cost increases, and suggested that the programme should increase funding to compensate for inflation surges[313]. Most of the consultation activities however preceded the Decision containing the further adjustments to the financial contributions due to the inflation surge (dated end of November 2023) as well as its implementation. Since some of these adjustments will take effect from 2024 onwards, it is not possible to ascertain whether those changes are or will be deemed sufficient by stakeholders within the scope of this evaluation (which covers the 2021-2023 period of the current programme).

The financial envelope of the Erasmus+ programme was not deemed sufficient to fully satisfy demand. Despite the Erasmus+ 2014-2020 programme budget being 40% higher than that of its predecessors, a large share of the public, and many National Agencies consulted in the context of the mid-term evaluation of the 2014-2020 programme, viewed the resources allocated as insufficient for most of the sectors[314].

As such, the increase in the funds available for the 2021-2027 period has been welcomed by stakeholders. Still, key informants from six countries see additional funding to be necessary to achieve the programme's objectives, and especially to improve the engagement of participants with fewer opportunities and those from remote areas,

[312] Decision authorising the use of lump sums and unit costs under the Erasmus+ Programme 2021 – 2027, Ref. Ares(2023)8102133 – 28/11/2023. available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/erasmus/guidance/ls-and-unit-cost-decision_erasmus_en.pdf

[313] Annex II PC Report - Question 'Has the inflation impacted your organisation's ability to participate in the Erasmus+ programme?' – Question addressed to respondents well familiar with the programme, responding on behalf of their organisations.

[314] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Combined evaluation of Erasmus+ and* predecessor *programmes – Final report – Evaluation of the student loan guarantee facility (Volume 2)*, Publications Office, 2017, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/2

particularly in school education, adult education and youth[315]. The consultations show a sizeable minority of stakeholders indicating that the funding level of the current programme remains inadequate, despite the very significant budget increase[316]. At the same time, 82% of public consultation respondents agreed from 'a very large' to a 'large' extent that increasing the overall programme budget had to be addressed to maximise the impact of a possible successor programme to Erasmus+[317]. Frequently, key national-level informants from 25 countries (from Member States and third countries associated to the programme) reported that, despite its increase in recent years, the programme budget is still not sufficient to meet all demand, leading to concerns about the programme's ability to meet its objectives[318]. These views are confirmed also by the analysis of national reports: while the current programme's increased budget was largely welcomed, concerns were raised on the adequacy of the programme's budget to meet its ambitious objectives, with demand for funding surpassing resource availability mentioned in 13 reports[319].

EQ 9.2: To what extent is/was the distribution of funds across the programme fields and key actions appropriate in relation to their level of effectiveness and utility?

Comparisons between the 2014-2020 programme and the initial years of the 2021-2027 programme need to be made with some caution, considering that complete data for 2023 are not yet available and the first two years of the new programme (2021-2022) were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian invasion of Ukraine and inflationary pressures.

Of the Key Actions, KA1 is by far the largest in funding terms (with approximately 50% of the total programme budget in the years considered). Some new mobility activities were introduced under KA1 for the 2021-2027 period[320] while a few other activities that existed in 2014-2020 were discontinued[321]. The relative weight of KA2 slightly increased in the earlier stages of the 2021-2027 programme due to the impact of COVID-19 on mobilities, but KA1 then recovered a significantly higher share. A number of new activities were introduced or redesigned into KA2 for the 2021-2027 programme:

- Small-scale Partnerships in the education and training (except higher education) and youth sectors (in addition to sport, where they already existed),
- actions under the Partnerships for Excellence (except for Erasmus Mundus which already existed in the previous programme),

[315] Austria, Czechia, North Macedonia, Portugal, Serbia and Spain

[316] Half of the public consultation respondents with a good knowledge of the programme (N=1,092) indicated that the financial envelope is sufficient to the objectives of Erasmus+ (9% fully agreed and 41% agreed,) while 38% disagreed or fully disagreed with this assessment (32% and 6% respectively). National Agencies and EACEA expressed similar views - 17% and 46% of respondents to the survey (N= 164) deemed the financial envelope fully or partially appropriate and proportionate to Erasmus+ objectives, compared to 36% that disagreed entirely (21%) or part (15%).

[317] Annex II Public consultation report. Question "To what extent do you think the following aspects need to be addressed to maximise the impact of any successor to Erasmus+?" (respondents well or partly familiar with the programme (N=1,231)). Other aspects where respondents expressed agreement to a large or very large extent were: i) simplifying the administrative requirements to access funding (82%); ii) increasing the level of individual grants (76%); iii) providing better access to people with fewer opportunities (74%), iv) increasing the opportunity for international mobility and international cooperation with countries outside Europe (74%).

[318] Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, Türkiye out of the countries included in the Key Informant Interviews (21 EU Member States, 4 associated counties).

[319] BG, CZ, CY, DE, ES, EL, HR, HU, IT, MT, NL, PT, TR

[320] Mobility of pupils (school education) and of adult learners (Adult education) , youth participation activities and DiscoverEU activities (Youth sector), and mobility of sport staff.

[321] Student Loan Guarantee Facility, Volunteering Charter, EVS card and EVS insurance

- actions under the Partnerships for Innovation: 1) Alliances, including the Alliances for Education and Enterprises, and the Alliances for Sectoral Cooperation on Skills (implementing the 'Blueprint'); and 2) Forward-Looking Projects (changed name and redesigned),
- Capacity-Building in the VET field and sport.

The distribution of funds under KA3 and JMA did not substantially change between the two programmes.

Regulations for both the 2014-2020 and 2021-2027 programmes set specific targets for the distribution of funds by sector and field[322], with variances allowed for individual years.

For the 2014-2020 programme, the funding share for most sectors is consistent with the targets set in the relevant Regulation. Regarding the education and training sector, all the field-specific budget targets set for the 2014-2020 programme were met. Higher education received the largest share of the funds (50% of the funds for the entire sector). The difference between the target and the actual funding received by the education and training sector is likely to be explained by its lower relative share of the overall programme budget in the initial years of the programme, and by the disruption of some activities caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (which significantly affected activities in 2020).

The commitments made to the Student Loan Guarantee Facility were lower (-0.76%) than the target level set by the legislation throughout the programme lifespan[323]. Since the start, the uptake of this initiative was much lower than had been expected. It proved to be effective in supporting the needs of disadvantaged students who were willing to go abroad for a full master's programme[324], but it never attracted enough financial intermediaries offering student loans for studying abroad nor a sufficient number of beneficiaries[325]. The Facility was discontinued in the current programming period.

The fund allocations set for the 2021-2027 programme were, overall, similar to those of the previous programme period. For education and training, they were, however, higher at 83% (as compared to 80.8% in the amended 2014-2020 Regulation), which is at least partly due to the inclusion of the budget allocation for the JMA within education and training, while it was a separate entry in the previous programme (representing 1.9% of the total budget). The differences for individual fields within education and training range from –9.7 percentage points for higher education to +0.9 percentage points for adult education, (see Article 17 of the 2021-2027 Erasmus+ Regulation). Article 17(3)(vii) of the Erasmus+ Regulation also includes a margin of flexibility (set at 4.1%) that allows deviations from the set targets to support the education and training sector, as referred to in Chapter II of the legal basis[326]. However, in the 2021-2027 programme horizontal and direct management actions have a separate budget of 17% (Article 17(3)(vi)), while they were included under the different education and training fields in the previous programme[327].

[322] Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 was amended in 2018, when most of the budget distribution targets were revised. The analysis is done with respect to the amended targets.

[323] The distribution target for the Student Loan Guarantee Facility was more than halved with the amendments to Regulation 1288/2013, from 3,5% to 1.5% of the overall Programme budget.

[324] The "social inclusion" dimension of the EU-guaranteed loans is supported by the "2018 annual report on beneficiaries of the Erasmus+ Master Loans and summary of developments 2015-2018: summary report" (which is already referred to in the 1st section on SLGF. https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/444828c6-7151-11e9-9f05-01aa75ed71a1

[325] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Combined evaluation of Erasmus+ and predecessor programmes – Final report – Evaluation of the student loan guarantee facility (Volume 2), Publications Office, 2017, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/2

[326] Learning mobility (Key Action 1), Cooperation among organisations and institutions (Key Action 2), Support to policy development and cooperation (Key Action 3) and Jean Monnet Actions in the education and training sector.

[327] Annex I – Technical Annex, Tables 67 and 68

When looking at the distribution of funds for the current programme compared to the targets set in the Regulation, in 2021 and 2022, the distribution of funds was consistent with the Regulation targets for the youth and sport sectors, JMA, management fees for National Agencies and administrative expenditure (all with variations of less than 1%). There were larger variations (as compared to target) in the education and training sector and the fields within it. Higher education, school education and adult education allocations varied from target by less than 1.5% (there is a relatively high degree of continuity of activities in the higher and school education fields). The adult education field included new activities and opportunities for both learners and organisations that, so far, have not translated into a comparable increase in budget share[328]. VET on one side, and trans-sectorial activities on the other, are below target (-4.2% and -12.8% respectively).

During the PC, respondents were asked whether distribution of funds across the three Key Actions and the Jean Monnet action was appropriate; however, most of them (73%) had no opinion or were uncertain about it, a topic that is probably too specific for the broader public, even if they have a good knowledge of the programme[329]. Feedback collected during the KIIs suggests that overall, across the different interview levels (international, European and national), there is a general appreciation for the budget increase of the new programme, and the opportunities it provides to fund more mobility projects, but also cooperation and capacity-building initiatives, both larger and smaller ones.

The positive effectiveness of the programme points to an overall appropriateness of the funds distribution across Key Actions, which has benefited from the general increase in the programme budget compared to the previous programming period. Nevertheless, stakeholders, and especially National Agencies, pointed out to difficulties in meeting demand in KA2 and KA1[330], pointing to needs for further funds for the programme and a for a possible recalibration of the distribution, strengthening the funds for both KA1and KA2.

When looking at the appropriateness of funds distribution across sectors and fields in relation to effectiveness, the degree and nature of impacts of the programme (and of its funding) varies across countries. Three of the five international organisations interviewed indicated that in the case of larger-scale projects, higher funding allocations would be appreciated. Key informants (eight) representing organisations from third countries not associated to the programme highlighted remaining challenges with funding for capacity-building activities, and with ensuring participation from countries with unfavourable and volatile exchange rates, such as Latin American countries. On the other hand, six European-level interviewees stressed the growing demand for increased funding for capacity-building initiatives, particularly in sectors like youth and VET, with a call for greater flexibility in budget allocation to meet evolving needs. Most national-level interviewees commented that demand still exceeds available funding, despite the budget increase, and questioned the ability of the programme to meet rising demand in most sectors[331].The analysis of national reports highlights strong and consistent positive outcomes for higher education across the board, largely due to the long history of participation, high budget

[328] However, the absolute figure of commitment allocated to the Adult education field for the 2021-2022 period is higher than the value of funds allocated to the same sector in the previous Programme altogether (EUR 325 million compared to EUR 128 million).

[329] When asked whether the distribution of funds across the three Key Actions and the Jean Monnet action was appropriate, most respondents to the public consultation who had with a detailed knowledge of the programme (N=1,092) had no opinion or were uncertain (73% of the respondents), 21% agreed or strongly agreed, and 16% disagreed or strongly disagreed[329]. EU institutional stakeholders indicated that the newly introduced Jean Monnet Actions in school education is not meeting expectations for the number and quality of the proposals as quickly as expected, but improvements can be observed over the years. (Question 34 of the public consultation).

[330] See Synthesis report, Workshop n. 5 on Findings from the National Reports on the implementation and impact of Erasmus+, held on 19 September 2024 and EQ9.3.

[331] Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, Türkiye, Ukraine. This type of feedback concerned all Erasmus+ sectors, except Sport.

allocation, and in general more developed structure for implementation[332]. Similarly, strong positive outcomes are also reported in the VET sector, with many reporting an increase in all actions in the VET sector in the current programming period[333]. Positive effects are reported also for school education[334] and adult education[335], however to a somewhat lower extent and with more mixed results[336]. The youth sector demonstrates varied effectiveness levels across countries, with strong outcomes outlined in many reports[337] and challenges in a few others[338]. Concerning the sport sector, evidence from national reports is very limited given the very recent start of sport mobility for staff, which is also the only sport action implemented under indirect management. Nevertheless, there are some indications of positive effects, mixed with cases of low funding available, which hinders participation.

The funding needs and appropriateness of distribution are strongly related to needs, priorities and specificities of each country, and unmet demand is found in many sectors and fields. As such, general considerations on the appropriateness of distribution of funding across key actions and fields in relation to their effectiveness needs to be taken cautiously, as the general picture available for the programme as a whole can hide nuances specific to specific sectors and fields in individual countries. Still, the analysis shows that all sectors and fields achieve positive results to different degrees, with the available funding – an indication that the distribution of funds in relation to the effectiveness of key actions and sectors/fields can be considered overall appropriate, with some elements to consider for future improvement. Higher education and VET achieve the most positive effects, and also received the highest proportion of funds; despite this, they also have unmet demands (see EQ 9.3). Other sectors and fields have positive results (albeit more mixed) with notably lower shares of funding. The general increase in funding available across the sectors and fields coupled with more emphasis to sectors and fields other than higher education emerges as a positive element of the current programme, to be strengthen. School education emerges from different sources as an underfunded field; the upcoming years of the programme will provide further indications on the appropriateness of funds distribution towards the sport sector.

EQ 9.3: What are the budget absorption rates and capacity per sector and key action, and how do they affect the quality of proposals?

The absorption rate measures the extent to which EU commitments from the programme budgets are utilised to fund projects and activities under the programme. To support optimal budget absorption in indirect management, flexibility rules have been introduced to allow National Agencies to transfer amounts between different budget items (entailing an increase or a decrease compared to the initial budget allocations) according to certain rules and ceilings.

When analysing the absorption rates across Key Actions for actions under indirect management, data from both the previous and the current programme show some common tendencies[339]. Across the two periods, absorption rates for both the education and training

[332] AT, BEfr, BEnl, CY, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RS, SE.

[333] AT, BEnl, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT RS, SI, SK.

[334] AT, BEnl, BEfr, CY, DE, DK, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, IE, IT, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SK.

[335] BEfr, BEnl, DE, DK, FI, HR, IE, HU, PT, SE, SK, LI.

[336] For instance, reports such as DE, EE, FI or IE consider later introduction of adult mobilities in the programme and their low uptake coupled with the heterogenous landscape of adult education including applicants such as libraries, museums and adult education centres, which often work on a voluntary basis among the reasons for lower effects.

[337] AT, BEde, BEfr, BEnl, BG, CZ, CY, EE, ES, FI, FR, HR, IE, IT, LV, LT, LU, MT, PL, PT, PT, RO, SK, IS, LI, NO, RS, TR.

[338] AT, BEde, BEfr, BEnl, BG, CZ, CY, EE, ES, FI, FR, HR, IE, IT, LV, LT, LU, MT, PL, PT, PT, RO, SK, IS, LI, NO, RS, TR, challenges reported in DK, HU, NL.

[339] Annex I – Technical Annex, Tables 69 and 70.

and youth sectors are close to full, with limited differences due to interest rather than transfers (within the current programme +0.02% for education and training and full absorption for youth, compared to 0.46% in the 2014-2020 period, including both education and training and youth). However, the average values for the two periods hide year-by-year differences across key actions and fields. In particular, the years 2020 and 2021 present larger differences in absorption rates compared to other years of the respective programmes, largely as an effect of the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to restructure part of the activities already planned. Data for 2020 and 2021 show a generalised transfer of funding from mobility activities under KA1 to cooperation activities under KA2 across all sectors and fields, particularly marked in higher education and VET in 2020 (-4.82% and -4.73% for mobility activities and +30.12% and +13.93% for cooperation activities respectively). The same trend of cooperation activities having much higher absorption rates compared to mobility activities remained in 2021 in school education and adult education (for Cooperation Partnerships and to a slightly lesser extent for Small-scale Partnerships)[340]. Data for 2023 show smaller variations in absorption rates across all sectors and fields, signalling a normalisation of the activities. However, it has to be noted that figures are not yet fully stabilised for 2023 at the moment of this evaluation.

Data for the years 2022 and 2023 show that mobility actions in higher education tend to have positive absorption rates (+0.47% in the 2014-2020 period, +1.72% in the 2021-2023 period), even if year-by-year trends show a more composite picture, with peaks and lows, showing overall unmet demand[341]. Mobility actions in VET and school education are also positive overall, with VET showing an average absorption rate above 95% in the current period, and school education over 100% in 2023, despite initial difficulties (-17.7% in 2021). Adult education showed difficulties in absorbing the full allocation of funds for mobility actions, at the beginning of the new programme, but has shown considerable improvement since (moving from -44.12% in 2021 to -25.44% in 2023).

On the other hand, data for KA2 (specifically on Cooperation Partnerships) show how all sectors received significant transfers, with the largest transfers being in school education and adult education (7.65% and 35.86% respectively for the years 2021-2023 combined). Small-scale Partnerships (still under KA2) showed some problems in absorbing initial fund allocations in 2021, but they received progressively increasing transfers in 2022 and 2023, signalling a growing demand for such activities, especially in school education and adult education. The youth sector shows positive absorption rates for Small-scale Partnerships (+9.95% in the 2021-2023 period) signalling additional demand not met by the initial allocation of funds (see EQ1.7). Absorption rates are close to 100% for Cooperation Partnerships and Mobility projects, which are stable over time.

Regarding KA3, the youth sector shows difficulties in absorbing funding (-6.83% transfers for Training and Cooperation Activities (TCA) and -6.07% for DiscoverEU Learning Cycle under KA3 in the 2021-2023 period, although the implementation of the latter was not compulsory in 2021), albeit to a much lower level than education and training sectors (TCA). In the initial years of the programme implementation response to COVID-19 pandemic required the extension of the eligibility period of 2020 and 2021 TCA funds and consequent postponement of many activities. This produced a higher volume of transfers from TCA to other actions[342].

[340] Mobility activities under KA1 show a -17.7% in school education and -44.12% in adult education for 2021, compared to +8.65% and +32.45% for cooperation partnerships, and +14.39% and -2.72% for small-scale partnerships respectively.

[341] Following negative rates in 2020 and 2021, mobilities in higher education showed a modest positive absorption date in 2022 (+0.35%, possibly still am aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and other external factors), with an increase in 2023 (+16%) – however, data for 23023 is not consolidated yet).

[342] Data for the current programme show negative absorption rates over the period (-31.27%), albeit improving over time (from in -39.37% in 2021 to -20.85% in 2023).

Based on the data available some elements emerge. In the period 2021-2023, high KA2 demand was able to take over the unused KA1 budget and keep the overall adult education absorption in line and the sector actively involved in Erasmus+[343]. Similarly, unused TCA and DiscoverEU learning cycle funds (KA3) were in great part used to fund additional demand for cooperation activities under KA2.

The current programme shows larger values of transfers compared to the previous one, as an effect of the greater flexibility allowed under the current programme for indirectly managed activities under KA1, KA2 and KA3 (funded under Heading 2 of the EU budget). A standard 35% variation rule is applied to all budget headings in the context of the contribution agreements signed between the Commission and National Agencies (higher than the standard 25% variation in the Commission's contribution agreement template to be used for other EU programmes implemented under indirect management)[344].

Furthermore, National Agencies can request a change in the budget allocation (increase or decrease) above the 35% threshold via an amendment procedure to the contribution agreement. Since 2021, numerous amendments to contribution agreements have been processed.

Together with a general appreciation of the flexibility allowed under the programme, 15 national-level key informants[345] interviewed expressed concerns about the distribution of funds across programme fields and key actions, arguing that some sectors are disproportionately funded while others face significant budget constraints. The concerns were expressed especially for the adult education (especially in Ireland and Romania, where competition for funding is high) and VET fields, as well as for sport and youth. Calls for more equitable budget distribution to address these imbalances are frequent, with some countries[346] suggesting adjustments to funding indicators or reallocation of resources to better align with very different national needs. Combining these findings with those on transfers described above suggests a possible need to shift to some extent the initial budget allocation, allowing for greater flexibility to meet needs at the national level.

The analysis of national reports identifies concerns over the limitation of funds for KA1 and KA2. 11 reports[347] explicitly mentioned the lack of sufficient funding for KA1. Furthermore an equal number of reports[348] share particular considerations on KA2 budget being insufficient with the volume of applications often exceeding the available funds, leading to underutilisation of good-quality project proposals, discouragement of new applicants and missed opportunities for generating systemic change impacts.

Views on the adequacy of funds by sector vary across countries, with 14 reports sharing insights[349]. Full utilisation or even excess demands (calling for additional funding) is

[343] Data show increasingly large differences between EU budget commitments and budget use by National Agencies (EUR 5.4 million in 2022 and EUR 12.3 million in 2023).

[344] In 2021, a higher threshold of 50% was possible for in the 2021 Contribution Agreement at the level of Erasmus+ Key Action sub-totals, as an exceptional measure introduced to respond to COVID-19 circumstances. This was possible for the education and training sector (KA1 for higher education, school education, and adult education, KA2 for higher education, VET, school education and adult education), in the youth sector (for KA1 and KA2) and for the European Solidarity Corps Actions (KA1 and KA2).

[345] Austria, Belgium, Czechia, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Malta, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, Türkiye, Ukraine.

[346] Austria, Belgium, Czechia, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, Türkiye, Ukraine.

[347] BEnl, CY, DE, EL, HR, HU, IT, MT, NL, NO and SI (for the latter, the information was provided in the Workshop with national coordinators in September 2024).

[348] BEnl, DE, EE, EL, LU, MT, NO, PL, PT, RO and RS.

[349] BEfr, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FR, HU, IE, LT, MT, PT, RS, SI.

reported for school education[350], VET[351] and higher education[352], while underutilisation for school education and adult education is reported in very few cases[353]. Views are especially divergent about the adult education field. While adult education participation has increased significantly due to budget increases, concerns arise about overfunding, which may be misaligned with the actual demand in some cases[354]. Conversely, in other instances, the limited funding allocated to this sector suggests a need for greater investments to reach its critical target group[355]. Both the youth and the sport sectors are considered underfunded in several cases[356], indicating a need for greater financial allocations to those sectors.

Due to the very different national needs and priorities, it is difficult to have a more equitable budget distribution that can fulfil the expectations of stakeholders across all sectors, fields and countries. The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic makes the absorption rates for 2021-2023 more difficult to interpret. TCA and DiscoverEU learning cycle funds (KA3) also were largely transferred to fund cooperation activities under KA2. However, it is unclear whether and how much such transfers are an effect of the COVID-19 pandemic or reflect a structural extra allocation. Data for the coming years can help understand whether a reallocation of some of those funds under KA2 is more consistent with the needs of the programme.

Similarly, a recalibration of funding within adult education, increasing funding for Cooperation Partnerships over mobilities, seems advisable. National Agencies also asked for additional flexibility to transfer budget between KA1 and KA2 and across specific actions to better align with demands, beyond the increased flexibility introduced in the current programme[357].

It is difficult to determine the relationship between absorption rates, transfers and the quality of proposals (as measured by the success rates – i.e. the share of proposals contracted over the total number of proposals received) and whether it has changed in the current programme compared to the previous one due to:

- Timespan: data is available only for a limited number of years (and only for two years of the Erasmus+ 2021-2027 programme since the 2023 data is incomplete).
- The structure of the data currently available: data on success rates has been analysed only at aggregate level for KA2 actions (by sector), which is not indicative of the overall distribution. Available evidence indicates that the success rates for activities under KA2 in indirect management for the 2021-2027 programme have increased, compared to the previous programming period, across sectors and fields (especially for VET) while they have remained essentially the same for school education. This is likely an effect of the overall increase in funding compared to the previous programme, which allowed more projects with a high score to be contracted, and of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which further increased the funds available under KA2 in the early stages of the programme. However, this comparison needs to be taken cautiously, since it encompasses the entire previous programme and only the initial years of the current one (with data for 2023 still incomplete)[358].

[350] ES, FR, MT.

[351] ES.

[352] DE, HU

[353] BEfr and FR respectively.

[354] ES, FR, RS, SI.

[355] HU, IE, LT, PT.

[356] HU, IE, LT, MT in the case of youth, and CZ, EE, HU, MT in the case of sport.

[357] Workshop no. 1 with Erasmus+ National Agencies, held on 14 June 2023.

[358] Annex I - Technical, Tables 81 and 82.

It is unclear whether the increased competition under KA2 corresponded to a change in the quality of the proposals received. The average project assessment scores are between 78 and 80 for higher education, school education and adult education, and only slightly lower for VET and youth (77 and 76 respectively), only few points lower compared to the previous programme[359].

The survey of expert assessors indicates that the majority of respondents either perceive improvements or the same level of quality in the proposals assessed (with no significant differences between assessors dealing with projects under direct or indirect management) suggesting a generally positive outlook on the quality of project applications in the second generation of Erasmus+, which however needs to be confirmed over time[360].

3.2.3 EQ 10 Alternatives

EQ 10.1: What is the prospect of other policy instruments or mechanisms providing a better cost-effectiveness ratio?

To assess the prospect of other policy instruments or mechanisms providing better cost-effectiveness than Erasmus+, a benchmarking of the programme against a maximum of 6 selected comparator programmes was carried out. This benchmarking covers all the sectors and fields in the scope of Erasmus+ as well as Key Action 1 and 2, and collected qualitative and quantitative information available from desk research[361]. The six comparator programmes retained as primary benchmarks for their relevance to this evaluation question, were selected based on the following criteria:

- provision of multiway funding (over bilateral),
- availability of information; selecting those programmes for which overall grant amounts awarded or number of beneficiaries were available at least for recent years.
- source of the funding, i.e. whether the funding body was public or at least not-for-profit.
- impact on EU27 citizens.

The selection aimed to represent a balance of sectors and regions; however, this was not entirely feasible, as certain sectors/fields — particularly higher education — and regions such as Northern Europe have greater activity in funding similar actions to Erasmus+ within the broader European context.

This analysis was structured by Key Action and by sector and field. Since the data from the comparator programmes presented variations in funded action types and cost categories, a detailed approach was used, adapting to the data available for each specific sector/field, and Key Action. This enabled a more precise examination of budget allocations, grants, and participant information, allowing for a more accurate comparison with Erasmus+ comprehensive data. As a consequence, mobilities supported by a comparator programme such as CEEPUS, where information on individual grants for Austria was collected, were compared with Erasmus+ mobilities in the same year, in this case to Austria and from the

[359] Average success scores for the previous programme range between 83 (for school education) and 77 (for youth), with the other sectors and fields in between (82 for higher education, 80 for adult education and VET).

[360] Annex IV Expert assessors survey. Out of the 1,622 respondents to the question 'When comparing the two generations of Erasmus+, in my view the overall quality of project applications (for comparable types of action), 33% replied that quality has improved, 24% that it remained the same, 10% that it worsened, while 33% could hot say say/had not assesses proposals under both programme generations.

[361] The data collection process for the comparator programmes involved several steps to ensure comprehensive comparability with the Erasmus+ programme. The methodology used to gather this data is detailed in section 2.1 of this report, while the full list of comparator programmes, used across different evaluation questions, is provided in the Annex I – Technical Annex, Table 93.

same 15 sending countries than CEEPUS rather than the whole programme. This approach was taken to have a more precise and comparable cost-benefit ratio.

Finally, given the difficulty to find a suitable comparable programme with KA3 and Jean Monnet Actions, the analysis only covers KA1 and KA2.

KA1 comparator programmes/instruments

Six programmes were analysed: CEEPUS, Visegrad Fund, Nordplus, EEA and Norway Grants, ALMA and AusbildungWeltweit.

Higher education

CEEPUS[362] supports academic exchanges in Central Europe, involving 94 networks and 2,350 institutions, with 89,000 mobilities since 1995. Grants vary by country, e.g. in the academic year 2023/2024, students in Austria received EUR 1,150 per month, whereas Erasmus+ students from the 15 sending countries covered by the CEEPUS programme[363] undertaking an exchange in Austria received an average of EUR 767.82 per month for the same academic period.

Visegrad Fund offers EUR 3,000 per semester for Master's and post-Master's students plus EUR 1,500 for the host institution in Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia. In 2023, a total of 120 students participated in full-time Master's level studies or full-time post-Master's studies/research at higher education institutions. The allocated budget for this exchange was EUR 999,000[364]. When comparing this with the Erasmus+ programme for the same sending and receiving countries[365] during the 2023-2024 period, a total of 235 Master's and post-Master's level students participated in an exchange, with a total grant budget of EUR 576,864.

Nordplus facilitates student and teacher mobility in Nordic and Baltic countries[366]. A maximum of EUR 20[367] per day plus travel grants is available for students for long or short-term mobilities, and teachers can *receive* a maximum of EUR 100 per day plus travel grants. Compared to Erasmus+ for the academic period 2023/2024, higher education students received an average of EUR 43 per day when analysing the same Nordplus sending and receiving countries, and staff/teachers an average of EUR 266 per day.

EEA and Norway grants[368] has assisted higher education student learning mobility and staff mobility between donor and beneficiary countries. Between 2014 and 2021, exchange programmes facilitated the participation of 3,445 individuals, including 1,636 staff members from beneficiary states, 422 staff members from donor states, 1,004 students from beneficiary states, and 383 students from donor states. On average, this amounted to 492 mobilities per year. In comparison, the Erasmus+ programme recorded a total of 6,196

[362] https://www.ceepus.info/content/home

[363] Countries applied in this case as stated in CEEPUS programme: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Hungary, Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, Republic of North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Kosovo.

[364] https://s3.eu-central-1.amazonaws.com/uploads.mangoweb.org/shared-prod/visegradfund.org/uploads/2024/06/VF-annual-report-2023-1.pdf

[365] Countries applied as stated in Visegrad Fund programme Annual Report 2023: from: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Belarus (not in Erasmus+), Czechia, Georgia , Hungary , Moldova , Poland , Serbia, Slovakia, Ukraine, and Kosovo to: Czechia, Georgia , Hungary, Montenegro, Poland, Serbia , and Slovakia

[366] Eligible countries: Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Iceland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania - and the autonomous regions of Åland, the Faroe Islands and Greenland,

[367] https://www.nordplusonline.org/how-to-apply/handbook/nordplus-higher-education/funding/

[368] https://eeagrants.org/

mobilities in 2022 for the same sending and receiving countries under the EEA and Norway grants[369].

Youth and Sport

Visegrad Fund's V4 Gen Mini-Grants[370] support mobility for youth aged 12-30 with EUR 50-60 per person per day. For the academic period 2022-2023 in Erasmus+, youth participants received an average of EUR 95 per person per day when travelling within the Visegrad countries[371].

ALMA (Aim, Learn, Master, Achieve)[372] is an EU initiative funded under ESF+ and designed to support young people aged 18-29 by providing tailored training, work-related learning experience abroad with mentoring, and follow-up support to help them gain employment or further education. It is important to note that it specifically targets NEET youth. Participants spend between 2 to 6 months in another EU Member State, engaging in a work environment. In comparison, the average duration of mobility in the youth sector under the programme is much shorter (8.27 days in the 2022-2023 period). This difference is related to the different focus of the two activities (ALMA being more focused on social inclusion and reintegration in labour market, education or training), the different age range of beneficiaries (younger in the case of Erasmus+) and of the only partial correspondence of the target group (ALMA targets disadvantaged NEETs).

School education

Nordplus Junior supports school-level mobility and projects in Nordic and Baltic regions. A maximum of EUR 20 per day plus travel grants is available for students for long or short-term mobilities, and teachers can receive a maximum of EUR 100 per day plus travel grants. When comparing with Erasmus+ for the academic period 2023-2024, school pupils received per day EUR 230 as an average and teachers EUR 332 within Nordplus countries.

Adult education

Nordplus Adult facilitates mobility and collaboration for adult learners in the Nordic and Baltic regions. A maximum of EUR 20 per day plus travel grants is available for students for long- or short-term mobilities, and teachers can receive a maximum of EUR 100 per day plus travel grants. In comparison, Erasmus+ adult learners received an average per day of EUR 170 and staff an average of EUR 278 for the academic period 2023-2024.

Vocational education and training

AusbildungWelweit[373] facilitates international vocational exchanges for trainees and trainers originating from Germany to various destinations outside of Europe. It complements Erasmus+ by offering opportunities for vocational training experiences worldwide ranging from three weeks to three months for VET learners/trainees and two days to two weeks for VET staff. For instance, in 2021, learners traveling to Thailand received a total grant for travel and accommodation of EUR 1,670 for a 21-day exchange and EUR 3,430 for a 90-day exchange. Additionally, VET staff received EUR 950 for a 5-day exchange during the same period. Under the Erasmus+ programme for 2021-2022 from Germany to Thailand, VET learners received EUR 1,464 for a 21-day exchange and EUR 4,928 for a 90-day exchange, while VET staff traveling received EUR 1,215.

[369] Countries: Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

[370] Source: https://www.visegradfund.org/apply/grants/v4-gen/?c=conditions

[371] Sending and receiving countries: Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Austria, Germany and/or Ukraine

[372] Source: https://european-social-fund-plus.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2024-02/ALMA%20Handbook.pdf

[373] Source: https://www.ausbildung-weltweit.de/de/programm/programm.html

KA2 comparator programmes/instruments

Four programmes were analysed: 1) Nordplus, 2) EEA and Norway Grants, 3) Visegrad Fund, and 4) International Inspiration Programme. In this case, EEA and Norway Grants is present in all its applicable sectors and fields.

Higher education

Nordplus Horizontal supports workshops, seminars, and educational materials across all education levels.

Youth

International Inspiration Programme[374] partners with grassroots organisations in countries like Ethiopia and India, impacting 25 million youth and training 250,000 practitioners.

Between 2014 and 2020, the Youth Employment Programme under the **EEA and Norway Grants** allocated a total of EUR 65,525,000 to transnational projects. These initiatives involved partners from 15 Beneficiary States, alongside organisations from Ireland, Italy, and Spain, all working together to tackle youth unemployment, with focus on young people in Europe not in employment, education or training. A total of 21 organisations from donor states participated in this transnational cooperation, pooling resources and expertise to develop innovative solutions to reduce youth unemployment across Europe.

School education

Nordplus Horizontal fosters school education partnerships through workshops and seminars in Nordic and Baltic regions.

Visegrad Fund supports regional partnerships with Visegrad and Visegrad+ Grants programmes, emphasising democratisation and transformation processes among Visegrad countries[375].

Adult education

Nordplus supports adult learning through the Nordic Network for Adult Learning.

Vocational education and training

Visegrad Fund's Strategic Grants support regional partnerships and vocational training initiatives aligned with Visegrad Group priorities.

Stakeholder views

Results from the NA/EACEA survey show that 87 respondents mentioned comparable programmes to Erasmus+, among which 60 respondents mentioned 1 programme, 20 respondents 2 programmes, 5 respondents 3 programmes and only 2 mentioned 4 different programmes.

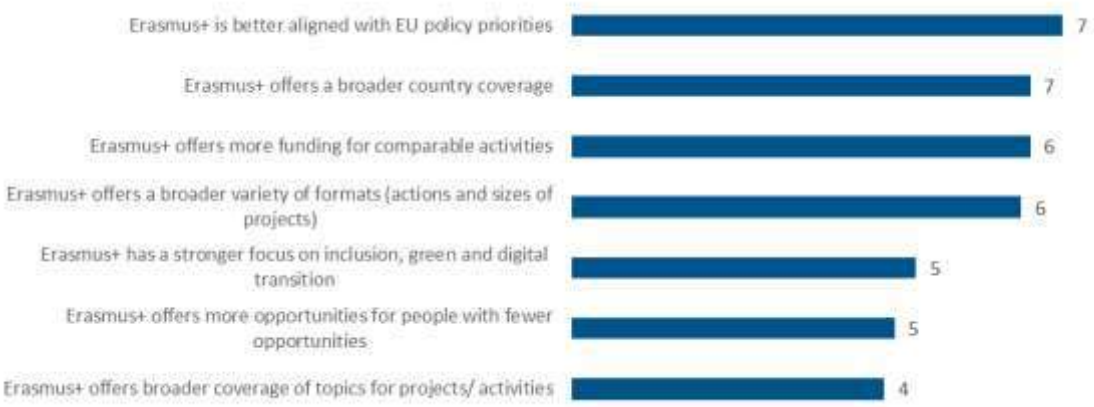
Respondents were also asked to compare Erasmus+ with up to five other initiatives. The scores shown in the graph below are normalised means, reflecting the corresponding number of initiatives each respondent chose to compare Erasmus+ with. Replies were assigned a score of 10 if respondents stated that they fully agreed with the statement about all programmes they answered about. Conversely, a score of 0 was assigned if they fully disagreed with the statement about all the programmes they answered about, in this way

[374] Sources: http://www.internationalinspiration.org/what-we-do and https://www.uksport.gov.uk/our-work/international-relations/international-partnerships-programme

[375] Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia

regardless of the number of programmes the respondent was asked about, their general view is given as a score out of 10.

Figure 18: NA/EACEA Survey Q12 To what extent do you agree with these statements about the comparison between Erasmus+ and other comparable initiatives? (N=87)



Source: Annex III NA/EACEA survey

The graph indicates a general positive perception of Erasmus+ compared to other similar initiatives. The highest ratings, at 7 out of 10, were given for alignment with EU policy priorities and offering broader country coverage. On the other hand, the aspect with the most negative perception was the broader coverage of topics for project activities, which received a score of 4 out of 10.

Analysis

When analysing other programmes across Europe for KA1, it can be observed that in the higher education field, there are numerous programme options available. However, it becomes more challenging to find comparable opportunities for adult education, VET, youth, sport, or school education. Additionally, mobility programmes are often concentrated in specific geographical areas, with Southern Europe being notably underrepresented. In some cases, either no relevant programmes were identified, or insufficient information prevented their inclusion in this analysis. Comparing grants for participants reveals that while Erasmus+ offers lower financial support for higher education compared to CEEPUS and Visegrad Funds, but it provides more generous funding for participants in other fields. In terms of the number of mobilities, the data available indicates that Erasmus+ offers a broader range of mobility opportunities across the countries covered by other programmes too.

When comparing KA2 with comparator programmes, it appears that, except for the EEA and Norway Grants programmes, other programmes only support cooperations in specific sectors or fields, while Erasmus+ has a broader coverage going from funding large-scale transnational partnerships to smaller grants to grassroot organisation. For KA3, the diverse nature of these programmes and the peculiarity of KA3 (providing support both to policy cooperation in E&T, youth and sport, and to the quality implementation of Erasmus+) makes direct comparisons difficult.

The stakeholders' perspective shows that while some alternative programmes were identified, Erasmus+ is widely seen as superior across key areas such as alignment with EU policy priorities, funding, country coverage, and project variety.

3.2.4 EQ 11 Efficiency of management architecture

EQ 11.1: a) To what extent is the implementation and management structure of actions implemented under direct and indirect management appropriate, efficient, and well-functioning? b) Are there differences in efficiency of programme management and implementation between the bodies in charge of indirect and direct management or between different programming periods? If so, what are the differences and what are the underlying reasons?

The analysis of the programme's implementation and management structure shows that the current arrangements are, for the most part, efficient and proportionate to the scale and complexity of Erasmus+. Management structures remained largely stable over the two programming periods, with clearly defined and understood roles and responsibilities.

An efficient programme structure bringing together direct and indirect management

Stakeholders and beneficiaries alike value the Erasmus+ programme for effectively integrating both directly and indirectly managed actions. One of the programme's key strengths is its dual approach: it supports shared European objectives through directly managed actions while aligning with national contexts via indirectly managed projects.

For the 2021-2027 period, around 80% of the programme's budget is allocated to indirectly managed actions. This overall distribution is widely appreciated. However, a handful of National Agencies advocate for further decentralising some elements of the programme. Examples include the newly launched Jean Monnet Actions in schools and VET as well as introducing indirectly funded KA2 sport actions. Further calls were made for enforcing budgets of specific actions where demand exceeds available funding (*for further details, refer to EQ8*).

Shifting towards more decentralisation would, however, lead to further challenges that need to be considered. The budget connected to these actions would be strongly fragmented as it would need to be distributed across all 33 participating countries and be sufficient to fund at least one project per country. In the case of the JMO and Sport actions, the current budget levels would be insufficient and would need to be further reinforced. In addition, moving towards even further decentralisation would leave rather limited budget allocated to directly managed actions.

Clear and efficient division of responsibilities

The governance of the programme, including a division of responsibilities across the Commission, EACEA, National Authorities, and National Agencies, is well understood and considered efficient. Stability in these management roles and responsibilities over the two programming periods is highly appreciated both by managing bodies and by beneficiaries. There are however some criticisms and suggestions, relating mostly to the cooperation arrangements and information flow between the National Agencies and EACEA (see EQ11.2 and EQ11.3).

Cost-effective implementation across National Agencies, EACEA and DG EAC

Management expenditure, a key indicator of efficiency, remained stable and proportionate at around 5% of the programme budget from 2014 to 2022, across the two programme generations. Administrative expenditure is comparable for both the National Agencies (4-5% between 2014-2022) and EACEA (3-6% between 2014-2022).

DG EAC's overall administrative cost stands at a much higher level, which cannot be compared directly to that of the National Agencies and EACEA. DG EAC bears responsibility for coordinating the entire programme, including developing, operating and maintaining the new IT landscape for indirect management actions. Additionally, the launch of the new programme generation required extra management tasks, contributing to the

rise in administrative costs during the initial years. These costs are expected to decrease over time and will need to be assessed in the final evaluation of the Erasmus+ 2021-2027 programme.

Efficient and improving management modalities suggested by the analysis of key administrative steps

Another indicator of programme efficiency is the average time spent on administrative steps, from notifying applicants of successful results (for KA1 and KA2 grants) to completing the final payment. Data from 2021-2023 indicate improved time efficiency for most steps[376]. The one area requiring further attention relates to the final payments, although there is an improving trend. Corresponding data exported from the Erasmus+ 'MFF 2021-2027' Dashboard show that the percentage of final payments that were processed within the deadline stood at 79% in 2021, 87% in 2022 and 75% in 2023[377]. Importantly, the share of payments made on time stand at a higher level for directly managed actions, presented in the EACEA's Annual Activity Reports[378].

Financial management data show that pre-financing payments are almost always made on time. However, final payments for indirectly managed actions are not consistently processed within the deadline, although there is an improving trend.

Strong compliance of the National Agencies with minimum standards

The functioning of National Agencies and their compliance with the minimum standards that are prescribed to them is an important element to consider when assessing the suitability and efficiency of the programme's management structure.

As stated in the National Agencies' yearly reports, the compliance with the 26 minimum standards (25 in 2015 and 2016) stood between 75% and 100%, depending on the year and on the specific standard. The highest compliance was observed for standards related to the follow-up of irregularity and fraud cases (standard 4), the listing of bank accounts for EU indirect management action funds (standard 7.1), and adherence to financial management guidelines (standard 10).

The number of National Agencies' financial reports where revisions / corrections were requested by the EC has declined significantly over the period 2015-2022, from three-quarters in 2015 to approximately 10% in 2022, thereby indicating an improvement in the efficient financial management. An overview of the number of observations by the Commission on issues of non-compliance is provided in Annex I[379].

EQ 11.2: How efficient is the cooperation between the different actors and entities involved in implementation and supervision of the programme (Commission services, Erasmus+ Committee, EACEA, National Authorities, National Agencies, independent audit bodies, international organisations), and to what extent does the Commission fulfil its guiding role in the process? How has this changed between the two programming periods? What are the reasons for potential changes? What are the areas for improvement?

The management and implementation of Erasmus+ requires strong collaboration between a wide array of actors, including organisations involved in the management and implementation of the programme on the one hand, and stakeholder and beneficiary organisations on the other. The graph below presents the main actors as well as

[376] Annex I - Technical Annex, Tables 50 to 58.

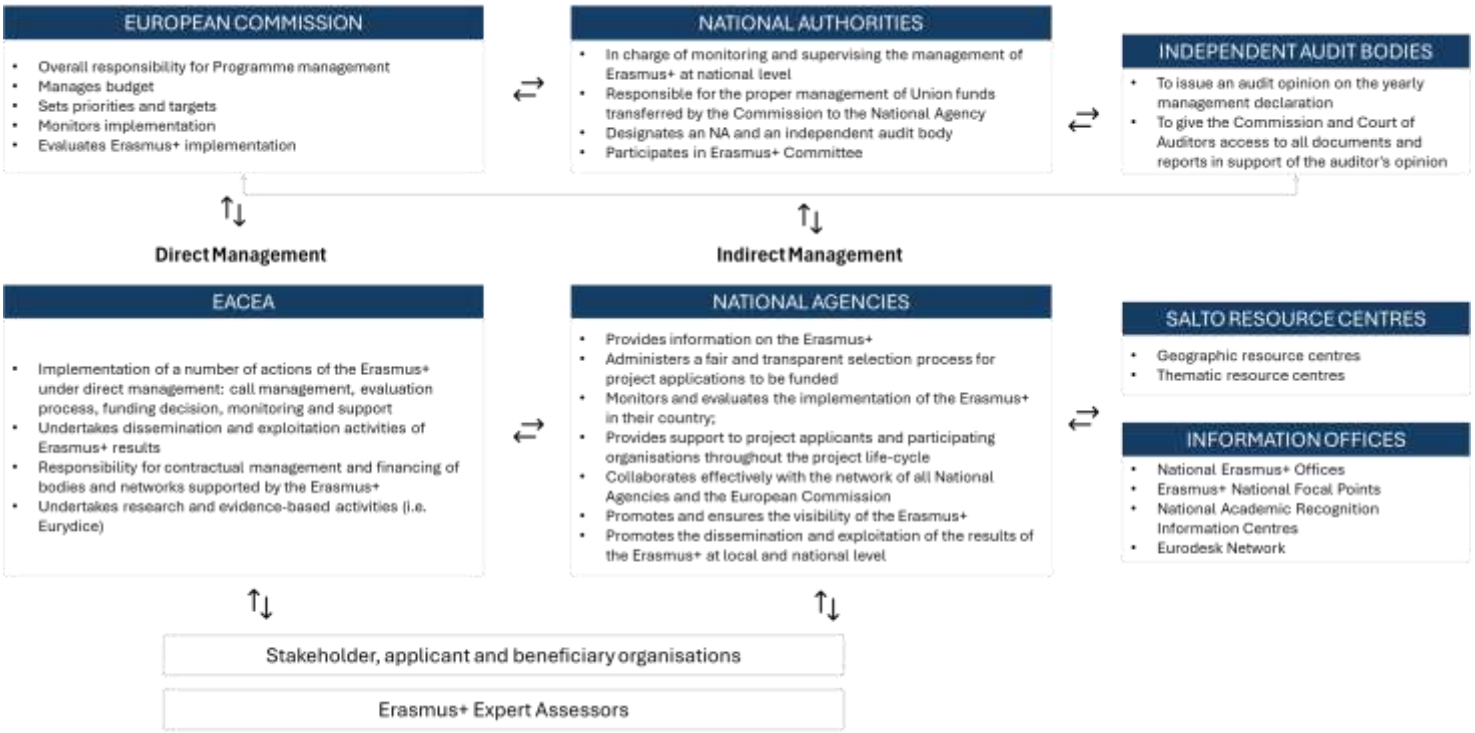
[377] Annex I - Technical Annex, Table 57. The data covers actions under indirect management.

[378] https://www.eacea.ec.europa.eu/about-eacea/document-register/annual-activity-reports-and-work-programmes_en

[379] Annex I - Technical Annex, Tables 71 and 72.

cooperation and communication mechanisms. Despite the inherent complexities of the programme's implementation and supervision, roles and responsibilities are clearly and distinctly defined, limiting the risks of overlaps or duplications.

Figure 19: Overview of Erasmus+ implementation structure



Source: ICF elaboration

Whilst some areas for improvement have been identified, the overall assessment is positive and demonstrates efficient cooperation between the Erasmus+ bodies. Communication and collaboration between the actors are well established and, for the most part, effective. Stakeholders consistently appreciate the programme's stability over successive generations, which contributes to having tried and tested collaboration methods in place.

The results of the NA/EACEA survey provide an important indication of the extent and quality of cooperation between National Agencies and other entities, as summarised in the table below.

Table 21: NA/EACEA survey results: Frequency and quality of cooperation

Erasmus+ body	Frequency of cooperation (weekly and monthly combined)	Quality of cooperation (strongly satisfied and satisfied combined)
European Commission	60%	84%
National Agencies in other countries	54%	96%
National Authority supervising the National Agency	50%	84%
SALTO resource centres	30%	64%
Other NA in the country *(if applicable)*	22%	46%
EACEA	10%	37%

Source: NA/EACEA survey data extract, including only NA respondents

National Agencies collaborate most frequently with the EC, with 60% of them engaging at least monthly. They also regularly collaborate with other National Agencies in different countries (54% at least monthly) and their respective National Authorities (50%). In contrast, collaboration with the EACEA is less frequent, with nearly half (42%) reporting that it *'hardly ever happens'*.

The quality of cooperation is rated positively with other National Agencies, the Commission, and the National Authorities overseeing the National Agencies. However, cooperation with the EACEA is viewed less positively, and identified as a key area needing improvement. When providing concrete suggestions, close to half of the National Agency respondents emphasise the need for better communication and cooperation with the EACEA, particularly regarding projects under direct management. This includes improving information flow, having a dedicated contact person, and receiving timely information on results and selected projects. Fewer than 10 survey respondents suggest an increase in the number of staff at central levels (EC, EACEA) to ensure sufficient cooperation and support. This is seen as essential for addressing queries and improving responsiveness. To address these issues, a number of actions have been put in place so far, starting from the signature of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the EACEA and each National Agency in 2023. This MoU has established the legal framework to enhance this collaboration, allowing the EACEA to share the selection results of Calls under direct management with National Agencies at preliminary stage (i.e. before the information is made public). Furthermore, since December 2023, National Agencies have full access to data on selection progress and projects under direct management via dedicated QlickSense dashboards.

The NA/EACEA survey results also indicate overall satisfaction with the EC's guiding role, with 58% of respondents noting improved guidance compared to the previous programme generation. The EC's constructive efforts in fostering effective cooperation for programme development was also highly rated. National Agencies particularly valued the co-creation process and enhanced collaboration with the EC. A combined 97% find it beneficial (strongly agree and agree). A highly appreciated collaborative process between National Agencies and the EC was indeed initiated during the previous programme, which involved a co-creation process with close involvement and consultation of National Agencies in the preparation of key programme documents, such as the Programme Guide. This approach entailed close coordination with DG EAC and the establishment of working groups with representatives from National Agencies focusing on the structure of the programme and on key areas like programme management and implementation. A few National Agency representatives interviewed specifically highlighted the EC's initiative, launched in winter 2022, to organise regular open house/informal sessions with agenda points driven by requests from the National Agencies.

Regarding the EC's guiding role in programme management, National Agencies appreciate the clarity of information about policy priorities in the calls for proposals. A significant 92% of NA/EACEA survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the information provided by the EC is clear. The award criteria for project applications, as defined by the Commission, appear to be clear for National Agencies, with 57% of respondents somewhat agreeing and 33% strongly agreeing with this statement. Additionally, the survey of expert assessors involved in the assessment of Erasmus+ proposals and projects' final reports shows that a majority (67%) echoed this positive sentiment and reported receiving improved guidance under the current Erasmus+ generation.

EQ 11.3: To what extent is the information flow and communication efficient, fast and well-organised between different actors (Commission services, EACEA, National Authorities, National Agencies, participating organisations)? What are the obstacles or challenges (if any) in the good flow of information and how can it be improved?

Similar to the collaboration assessed above, the overall information flow and communication among the actors of the Erasmus+ ecosystem is assessed positively by the actors consulted. The mode and frequency of communication are clearly defined and allow for an effective flow of information in most cases.

As for the collaboration above, the main area warranting attention relates to communication between the National Agencies and the EACEA. Particularly the timeliness of communication about selection results has been repeatedly mentioned. The 2023 signature of an MoU between the EACEA and National Agencies is a welcome step but has yet to generate practical effects, which will probably be seen in the coming years. The lengthy and complicated communication process with the EACEA has been further echoed by EU-level stakeholder organisations as part of the key informant interviews conducted for this evaluation.

Beyond collaboration among implementation bodies, the evidence collected shows that applicant and beneficiary organisations view the efficiency and clarity of programme communication in a positive way. The socio-economic actors survey offers valuable insights into the level and quality of support and communication received. Two-thirds of respondent organisations declared having received some form of support during the application process, with the vast majority (82%) receiving support from National Agencies. The assistance provided to organisations primarily included programme guides (67%), information days (65%), and helpline support, acknowledged by slightly over half of the organisations (57%). Support received both from National Agencies and the EACEA was deemed overwhelmingly positive, with slightly higher satisfaction rates for the former (78% finding National Agency support very helpful vs. 65% finding EACEA support very helpful)[380]. This suggests that there is room for improvement in communication towards stakeholder organisations by the EACEA, particularly in addressing the concerns highlighted previously.

Another aspect of communication involves Erasmus+ expert assessors dealing with actions under direct and/or indirect management. The data collected through the survey of expert assessors conducted as part of this evaluation convincingly indicates that virtually all respondent experts (99%) received guidance on assessing applications and projects. Apart from one respondent, the remaining 1% dealt with applications/projects under indirect management. Importantly, 99% found the guidance to be somewhat or very useful for their work, indicating an overall high-quality guidance system.

EQ 11.4: To what extent has the system of simplified grants resulted in a reduction of the administrative burden for National Agencies, the EACEA and programme beneficiaries and participants? Are there differences across actions or fields? What elements of the programme could be changed to further reduce the administrative burden and simplify the programme's implementation, without unduly compromising its results and impact?

Simplified forms of grants (mostly unit costs) were introduced in the 2014-2020 Erasmus+ programme to ease the administrative burden on both beneficiaries and implementing bodies. The objective was to streamline funding rules, thereby minimising administrative

[380] It is important to highlight the difference in sample sizes as: N=618 for NAs and N=37 for the EACEA.

costs associated with participation in comparison with using actual costs. This simplification aimed to enhance efficiency, contribute to the prevention of financial errors, and ensure high-quality implementation. Building on the success of the use of simplified cost options and positive feedback received, the utilisation of simplified grant modes continued in the 2021-2027 period. This extension included the introduction of additional simplified forms of grants, such as the incorporation of single lump sums for partnerships under KA2. Lump sum is now the main form of funding across the programme, except for KA1 where the largest share of the overall programme budget is allocated to learning mobility on the basis of unit costs. Details of the existing grant modalities are presented in the table below.

Table 22: Overview of Erasmus+ funding modalities

	Direct management	Indirect management
KA1	**Lump sum:** Erasmus+ Virtual exchanges	**Exclusively unit costs, with the exception of:** - Exceptional costs - Inclusion support for participants with fewer opportunities - System development and outreach activities (KA153 only)
KA2	**Exclusively lump sum,** with the exception of Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters	**Exclusively lump sum**
KA3	**Lump sum**	**Lump sum:** Eurodesk, SALTO Resource centres, National VET Teams **Real Cost:** Training and Cooperation Activities (TCAs)
JMA	**Lump sum,** unit costs for volunteers **Budget-based mixed actual cost grant with Designated Institutions**	N/A

The results of the public consultation conducted as part of this evaluation indicate that the most familiar funding mode under Erasmus+ is still 'actual cost' (68%), followed closely by 'unit costs' (65%). Fewer respondents had experience with lump sum contributions (43%), and an even lower share had used a combination of unit costs and actual costs (37%) or lump sums and actual costs (22%). 55% indicated that actual costs provide adequate funding, yet the majority of respondents either 'strongly agreed' or 'somewhat agreed' that unit costs are user-friendly (63%). When looking at both criteria (adequacy of funding and user-friendliness) concurrently, unit costs emerge as the top-performing funding model, with lump sums following closely behind, while actual costs lag in comparison. This suggests that stakeholders appreciate the efficacy of unit costs and lump sum funding, confirming the appropriateness of transitioning away from the actual cost model.

Analysis of the National reports shows that the use of the system of simplified grants is positively assessed. 20 national reports indicated in particular that the simplified grants overall have led to more efficient application and grant management, streamlined budgeting and simplified reporting[381]. Similarly, in the NA/EACEA survey conducted for this evaluation, more than a third (39%) of respondents reported that the current programme introduced a high or moderate degree of simplification in terms of funding models. The same survey included a set of questions[382] dedicated to lump sums, and the overall findings consistently portray a strongly positive perspective, emphasising the user-friendliness of lump sums. However, about one quarter of National Agency respondents (28%) indicated that

[381] AT, BEde, BEfr, BEnl, BG, CY, DE, EL, DK, LI, HU, IE, IT, MT, LU, NO, RS, RO, SE, SK

[382] The question included 6 specific statements about the lump sum system. The sum of those agreeing to a high and moderate extent are presented in brackets as: 'It simplifies the application process (84%)', 'It simplifies the administration for the NAs/ EACEA (82%)', 'It simplifies project management for beneficiaries (82%)', 'Applicants understand the use of lump sum (73%)', 'The applicable cost rates are appropriate (80%)', 'The available projects budgets are appropriate (80%)'. See Annex III NA/EACEA Survey.

applicants do not always fully understand the use of lump sums. Despite the availability of specific information resources, such as the EC Handbook[383] on the lump sum funding model, and informative events, the results suggest that applicants and beneficiaries could benefit from more guidance and training regarding the concept and precise utilisation of lump sums.

The overall positive sentiment about lump sums mentioned above was also confirmed through a dedicated workshop with National Agencies conducted for this evaluation in June 2023, as well as through KIIs. These suggest that a wider introduction of the lump sum funding model is generally appreciated and brings important simplification (for instance, quicker and straightforward resource planning, without the need to collect and submit all supplier invoices, provide payslips, etc.) for both implementing bodies (National Agencies/EACEA) and beneficiaries.

Complementing the above, further insights and recommendations on the use of lump sum and additional simplification avenues were expressed in interviews with key informants (at European and national level), in case studies and in position papers submitted by PC respondents:

- **The introduction of new types of smaller grants under the current programme is welcomed**. This notably concerns the KA2 Small-scale Partnerships. Their main purpose, offering smaller and more accessible grants to small, less experienced applicants and newcomers to the programme, is valued. Other stakeholders highlight that additional simplification measures for grants targeting grassroots and local youth organisations should be introduced. Reference is also made to the size of the Erasmus+ lump sum[384] that should be made proportionate to the size of the partnership to ensure cost-efficiency in the implementation. Several National Agency representatives called for a rethinking of the lump sum maximum amounts specifically under KA2 – Cooperation Partnerships and Small-scale Partnerships. Two dimensions were repeatedly mentioned by stakeholders:
    - First, the difference between the available lump sums (i.e. EUR 30,000 and EUR 60,000 for Small-scale Partnerships) is too large;
    - Second, Small-scale Partnership grants appear less attractive against actions with larger budgets which, in turn, receive a large number of applications with low success rates. These raise questions concerning efficiency and will need to be addressed in the future generation of Erasmus+. If doing so, a careful balance will need to be sought between re-consideration of grant sizes and maintaining fair and reasonably easy access to this action which is seen as one of its key strengths.
- The '**Erasmus Accreditation'** constitutes another important area of simplification. The scheme was introduced in the fields of school education, VET[385], adult education and youth, while in the higher education field it already existed as the 'Erasmus Charter for Higher Education' (ECHE)[386]. The 'Erasmus accreditation' is intended to provide organisations with simplified access to funding under KA1 every year. According to the National reports, key informant interviews and results of the

[383] https://www.na-bibb.de/fileadmin/user_upload/na-bibb.de/Dokumente/02_Berufsbildung_2021-2027/02_Kooperationen/03_Durchf%C3%BChrung/Handbook_on_KA2_lump_sums_2023.pdf

[384] https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-c/financial-conditions

[385] In the 2014-2020 programme, organisations could apply for the "Erasmus+ VET Mobility Charter" for simplified access to certain VET mobility actions, such as ErasmusPro. In the current programme, the 'Erasmus+ VET Mobility Charter' has been replaced by the 'Erasmus Accreditation'. More information on the 'Erasmus Accreditation in the School, Adult education and VET fields is available here: https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/opportunities/organisations/learning-mobility-of-individuals/erasmus-accreditation

[386] https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/resources-and-tools/erasmus-charter-for-higher-education

NA/EACEA survey, the 'Erasmus accreditation' is a positive development that indeed brings a certain level of simplification. National Agencies note that the use and partially new introduction of the accreditation scheme has significantly streamlined the programme management, fostering long-term planning and financial security for institutions[387]. 61% of respondents to the NA/EACEA survey agree to a high extent that it simplifies the application process[388]. Additionally, 45% agree that it simplifies project management for beneficiaries, and 29% responded that it simplifies administration for National Agencies. At the same time, 51% stated that there is a need to increase the budget available for accredited organisations. The consulted stakeholders provided further views on the current system of accreditation. Specifically, of the 100 respondents elaborating on this in the NA/EACEA survey, most indicated that the system works well in general for beneficiaries/organisations but that the workload for National Agencies has increased. Some discussed the need for further simplification, and it was suggested that more training and guidance for National Agency officers would be beneficial and that clearer rules for both National Agencies and beneficiaries would be useful. Other consultation activities offered varied views, including that the available budget for accredited organisations should be increased, that budget flexibility is difficult for beneficiaries to understand, and that the budget estimations can cause confusion. Further, the results from the Expert assessors' survey[389] show that there is room for improvement as regards the appropriateness of all award criteria, pointing towards better clarification and simplification of what is expected from applicants.

Further areas for simplification and improvement related to funding modalities gathered from consulted stakeholders include:

- **Simplification of Grant Agreements**: The need to simplify grant agreements was voiced repeatedly in national evaluation reports as well as through stakeholder consultation activities. Specifically, by two respondents to the NA/EACEA survey and in KIIs (national level, reported from seven countries). This is particularly relevant for smaller-size grants, for which agreements appear to be disproportionately complex.
- From the evidence collected (NA/ EACEA survey, Public Consultation, beneficiary surveys, KIIs), it emerges that the **green top-up for individual mobilities** is insufficient to cover the actual costs that green mobility entails. It should be increased and proportionally aligned to the distance covered. The current top-ups for participants facing fewer opportunities should also be increased to make mobility accessible for all. It is important to note, however, that as of 2024, the previously applied 'top-ups' have been discontinued and higher rates for green travel have been introduced.
- The administrative workload required for preparing and submitting grant applications for KA2 sport actions managed under direct management is too heavy for grassroots sport organisations, which discourages their participation. This view was expressed by a few specialised organisations as part of the public consultation.

[387] AT, BEde, BEfr, BEnl, CZ, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, EL, HU, IE, IS, IT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PT, RO, RS, SE, SK, SI, TR.

[388] Annex III, NA/EACEA survey: Question: To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the Erasmus Accreditation?

[389] Annex IV, Survey of Expert assessors. Question: 'Erasmus Accreditation: The current Erasmus+ Programme introduced Erasmus Accreditation in the field of school education, adult education and VET (KA120). How appropriate do you find the award criteria'.

EQ 11.5: To what extent are the management support tools adequate and sufficient to support sound management of the programme?

The analysis of management support tools focuses on two main elements. First, the Erasmus+ IT landscape for indirect management actions, which emerges as one of the most significant issues possibly hindering programme implementation and posing a reputational risk. Related to this, analysis of guidelines and documentation on the use of these tools has also been undertaken. Second, the effectiveness of specific tools, namely the Programme Guide and Grant Agreements, critical for sound management of the programme, is assessed.

Erasmus+ management support tools

The inception of the integrated Erasmus+ programme in 2014 was accompanied by the introduction of a set of new management support tools that have now been further optimised and simplified. To illustrate, PC respondents very familiar with the programme either 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' that the user-friendliness of the grant application to the programme has improved (64%); the management of the programme has been effectively simplified (61%); and the user-friendliness of the guidance and support tools (namely IT tools, Programme Guide, etc.) has generally improved over time (57%).

Erasmus+ IT landscape and related guidelines on their use

For the 2014-2020 period, a set of new IT tools were developed to support the effective management of the programme. Although stakeholders reported an initial adjustment period and awaited the full optimisation of these tools, they were ultimately deemed suitable for their intended purposes and widely appreciated for their functionality.

The rollout of the 2021-2027 Erasmus+ introduced an entirely new IT landscape for the management and implementation of actions under indirect management. The previous set of IT tools was based on outdated technology, needed to be upgraded to meet the evolving demands of the Erasmus+ programme. The introduction of the new IT systems at the start of the current programming period aimed to address these needs, but the deployment was complicated by a series of challenging circumstances. The late adoption of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), disruptions caused by the pandemic, and the evolving complexity of the programme's business rules made the implementation particularly demanding. These rules were difficult to incorporate into the system and added another layer of complexity to an already challenging rollout.

The IT tools faced a difficult launch, with modules encountering issues in succession, which compounded the challenges in the early stages of the programme. As a result, the systems were initially unable to fully support all project stages (application, project management, and reporting), which hindered the implementation of the programme.

An overview of the operational IT tools and systems for both direct and indirect management used under both programming period, at the time of this evaluation is displayed in Annex I[390].

At the end of 2023, evidence showed that there were functional problems with some crucial parts of the IT landscape for indirect management actions posing serious risks to the implementation of the programme and its reputation, in particular at the start of the current programming period. Similar observations were included in the European Parliament's 2023

[390] Annex I - Technical Annex, Table 3

Implementation Report on Erasmus+ 2021-2027[391], which called for immediate corrective actions.

Stakeholders, through surveys, interviews, and workshops[392] held for this evaluation agreed that the new IT systems offered functionalities/features which were insufficiently tested to allow full alignment with the unique and complex rules of the Erasmus+ programme. The IT systems were not fully developed to support all project stages from the beginning of the programme (application, implementation, reporting). Additionally, functional issues, such as errors, time-outs, and lack of communication between systems, hindered data collection needed for programme management and monitoring. Targeted corrective actions have been implemented in areas such as testing, data management and end-user support in order to improve the system's performance.

Statistics from DG EAC's IT ticketing system confirm that between 2021 and 2023, over 55,000 tickets were submitted. The Beneficiary Module (BM) and the Project Management Module (PMM) account for over half of all tickets, followed by the Application Form and the Organisational Registration System. Although 95% of tickets were resolved and within an average of 40 days he number of submitted tickets has not decreased over the years, with a high peak in 2023. This indicated that the IT systems still had significant shortcomings and underpinned the National Agencies' opinion that the tools were not developed for all project phases from the beginning of the programme, resulting in additional issues as the programme implementation advanced. However, improvements have been observed more recently, with the last peak registered in February 2024 followed by a decrease of the number of cases to levels significantly lower than the previous years. When assessing the number of IT tickets, it is also important to highlight that during the early years of the current Programme, National Agencies often provided feedback via internal channels (i.e. dedicated MS Teams). Reporting is now done exclusively through the central IT ticket system, which may provide a partial explanation for the high number of tickets in 2023.

In this respect, the results of the NA/EACEA survey (conducted in 2023) show that 78% of respondents rated the overall functionality of the IT landscape as 'bad' or 'very bad', and 89% expressed dissatisfaction with its implementation.

Further, 66% expressed dissatisfaction with the performance improvement of the IT modules over the preceding year. Interviews with national and EU-level stakeholders, along with case studies, further supported these findings. While some respondents acknowledged improvements in areas like IT ticketing, user interface, and data extraction for reports, the majority highlighted ongoing challenges throughout 2023. These included access issues, reliability, instability, and missing features. This resulted in higher workloads for National Agencies and beneficiaries. Respondents to the NA/EACEA survey and public consultation suggested several improvements.

- Make ticketing system more responsive (by increasing the number of supporting help-desk and IT development staff) to requests so that answers would be provided in a timely manner;
- Designing tools and platforms from user experience to provide more user-friendly tools and platforms;
- Improving the functioning of the PMM and BM;
- Including features that were available in the previous system (EPlusLink (EPL) and Mobility Tool (MT+)) - for instance, NA events function, 'stopping clock' function and shorter signing procedures.

[391] Report of the European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education (A9-0413/2023) of 6 December 2023 on the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027 (2023/2002(INI))

[392] Workshop with NAs in June 2023 and workshop on the Draft Final Report in July 2024.

Whilst National Agency representatives express an overall appreciation for the guidelines and documentation provided by the EC in regard to the functionalities and use of the new IT tools, more training, especially regarding new features and reporting would be a welcome step.

In addition, the IT tools supporting the assessment of applications and projects, (SEP for the evaluation of actions under direct management and the Assessment Module (AM) for actions under indirect management) are appreciated and considered fit for purpose. Among expert assessors, 92% perceive a positive evolution in these IT tools over the two programming periods, with 29% noting significant improvement and 63% observing moderate improvement. This positive trend applies to both directly and indirectly managed actions.

Erasmus+ Programme Guide

While the Erasmus+ Programme Guide is valued for its comprehensiveness, stakeholders frequently call for its simplification, advocating for a shorter guide and more accessible language to cater to readers with little to no experience of the programme. Key suggestions for improvement include the following.

- Better definitions and examples: Provide clearer definitions to avoid inconsistencies in the interpretation of guidelines and application procedures by applicants and different National Agencies.
- Clearer calls roadmap: Offer a detailed schedule of when specific calls will be published.
- Clarity over programme changes: Clearly outline the main changes between programme generations and any changes within the same programming period to support (potential) applicants.
- Improved translations: Ensure translations are high-quality and consistently follow the original text, even when the original English publication is the main point of reference.
- Timely publication: to give potential applicants sufficient preparation time for upcoming calls.

Grant Agreement

Some stakeholders[393], raised concerns regarding the proportionality of grant agreements compared to project size. A 70- to 80-page agreement is strongly disproportionate to a small project (e.g. EUR 20,000) and to the operational capacity of a small organisation working with a handful of volunteers. Training and information resources on the Grant Agreements Tender and Funding Portal are not systematically easy to identify and often use complex jargon which is difficult to comprehend, particularly for newcomers.

[393] Through national KIIs from 7 countries, 2 respondents to the NA/EACEA survey as part of open-text

EQ 11.6: To what extent have the antifraud measures allowed for the prevention and timely detection of fraud?

To safeguard the Erasmus+ budget and ensure it is spent according to its objectives and financial rules, robust anti-fraud measures have been an integral part of the programme since its launch in 2014.

Suitability of anti-fraud measures

The current anti-fraud measures and strategies in place appear, for the most part, appropriate and robust. Regarding directly managed actions, the EC's[394] and specifically, DG EAC's[395] anti-fraud strategy provides the overall framework for preventing and detecting fraud. In its annual Activity Report, the EACEA systematically provides an update on any possible reinforcement of anti-fraud actions and on the number of cases along with follow-up measures.

National Agencies' responsibilities and ways of dealing with fraud are defined in the 'Guide for National Agencies implementing the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Programmes'[396]. The Guide also sets several minimum requirements for National Agencies to ensure sound and efficient management of funds. Of these, the first five (and specifically, requirement 4) relate to their obligations concerning anti-fraud measures. The analysis of the National Agencies' yearly reports shows high compliance rates, particularly regarding the follow-up of identified cases of irregularity and fraud, as presented in Annex I.

Nine out of ten respondents to the NA/EACEA survey find the current anti-fraud measures completely or partially appropriate for prevention and timely detection of suspicions of irregularity and fraud[397]. This is also confirmed by the synthesis of national reports, which notes that the success of anti-fraud measures is supported by several factors, including efficient monitoring by the National Agencies[398] strong internal controls[399], strong and high quality audit procedures[400], collaboration and information sharing between the European Commission and the National Agencies and project beneficiaries[401], as well as clear and simplified rules and guidelines for implementation[402]. Against this, respondents to the NA/EACEA survey identified the following four specific concerns in detecting fraud.

- Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools to create submissions – respondents are concerned about their ability (internally or by experts, depending on the assessment process) to detect proposals prepared by AI tools. It is worth noting that plagiarism check software is available for the EACEA and National Agencies that may be further developed in this direction.
- Organisations making multiple submissions for the same grant or project.
- The new 'lump sum' grant scheme reducing the ability to detect fraud and making it more difficult to recoup losses in the event of fraud.

[394] European Commission Anti-Fraud Strategy.

https://anti-fraud.ec.europa.eu/policy/policies-prevent-and-deter-fraud/european-commission-anti-fraud-strategy_en

[395] See DG EAC's Strategic Plan 2020-2024.

https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2020-10/eac_sp_2020_2024_en.pdf

[396] The Guide for National Agencies is an annex to the Contribution Agreement signed every year between the Commission and each National Agencies. It is updated on a yearly basis and not publicly available.

[397] Annex III - NAs/EACEA survey, Q45-47. 45% of respondents find the current anti-fraud measures appropriate for preventing and timely detecting suspicions of irregularity and fraud, while remaining share consider them partially appropriate (47%) or not appropriate (9%).

[398] CZ, DE, FI, FR, IS, LT, MT, NO, PL, PT, RO, RS.

[399] CZ, ES, MT, NO, PL, PT, RS.

[400] DE, FR, NO, PL, PT, RS.

[401] ES, FR, MT, NO, RO, RS.

[402] CZ, DE, RO.

- Fraud identified too late in the process, and/or taking too long to resolve.

NA/EACEA survey respondents and national reports had the following suggestions to improve the anti-fraud measures already in place.

- Improvement of the anti-plagiarism software available for use by National Agencies.
- Provision of clearer rules and guidelines by the EC, for example as to what constitutes irregularity v fraud, and what National Agencies can do to recoup losses in the case of fraud.
- Closer monitoring of the number of projects an organisation is engaged in at any given time at European level, perhaps setting a hard limit on the number of projects one organisation can be granted.
- Increased cooperation between National Agencies across Member States and across sectors.
- Establishment of a specialised working group addressing fraud and providing enhanced guidance and training for National Agency staff[403].
- Findings from the synthesis of national reports on the impact and implementation of Erasmus+ suggests that measures to prevent fraud and support National Agencies in their control activities should be strengthened[404]. Few countries ask for clearer and more operational guidelines, including for risk assessment, inspections and controls[405], while few other advocate for improved digital infrastructure for the programme, as the backbone of data monitoring[406].

Number of fraudulent cases

The mid-term evaluation of Erasmus+ 2014-2020 found that the number of fraudulent cases was very low compared to the total number of projects. This correlates with the results of the NAs/EACEA survey carried out for this evaluation, in which most respondents from both the EACEA and National Agencies (83%) indicated that they had spotted suspicion of irregularity no more than once or twice a year.

A review of data shared by DG EAC confirms that the number of fraud and irregularity cases remain low, without much variation across the two programming periods. As for actions under direct management, the review of EACEA Annual reports 2014-2022 reveals a small number of cases and recoveries. This also holds true to indirectly managed actions, with one exception. During the period covered by this evaluation, there were two cases when DG EAC had to make major recoveries from two National Agencies for issues involving National Agency management or staff, for reasons such as conflicts of interest. The amounts involved were EUR 1.7 million and EUR 2.2 million respectively.

[403] A consultative National Agencies' working group on risk management has been established in 2024. The working group addresses the treatment of dubious cases in view of preventing fraud and irregularities.

[404] AT, BEde, BEnl, BG, CY, DK, EE, ES, FR.

[405] ES, FI, IT.

[406] FI, LT, NO.

3.2.5 EQ 12 Efficiency of monitoring

EQ 12.1: Efficiency of monitoring mechanisms: a) To what extent are the monitoring mechanisms applied by the Commission, the EACEA, and the National Agencies efficient/cost effective, and have they been simplified in the programming period 2021-2027? b) To what extent are the monitoring mechanisms of the beneficiaries and participants by National Agencies and the EACEA effective and proportionate? c) To what extent are internal monitoring mechanisms of activities of the National Agencies and the implementation of the programme at national level effective and proportionate? What are the areas for improvement, considering the need for smooth and effective implementation of the programme? Is there scope for further simplification in all programme dimensions or actions?

Overall, the monitoring mechanisms in place are found to be appropriate and proportionate, demonstrating an improvement throughout the two programme generations in terms of clarity over roles and responsibilities.

Legal basis and roles for Erasmus+ monitoring

Stakeholders in the mid-term evaluation of Erasmus+ 2014-2020 appreciated the establishment of a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework as per Article 21 of the 2014-2020 programme Regulation[407]. However, they found it overly complex and called for streamlining, particularly regarding the monitoring responsibilities of National Agencies for actions under indirect management, which amount to about 80% of the programme's budget.

For the 2021-2027 programme, the Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2023/2710[408] on establishment of a monitoring and evaluation framework for the Erasmus+ programme and its accompanying Staff Working Document[409], clarified monitoring mechanisms and responsibilities. The monitoring and evaluation framework addressed key areas aligned with the programme's intervention logic, in line with Article 23 on monitoring and reporting of the 2021-2027 Erasmus+ focusing on inclusion, simplification measures, new initiatives as well as other areas deriving from Regulation recitals such as, mobility from outermost regions (covered as part of inclusion measures), evaluation of Jean Monnet Designated Institutions, and actions supporting climate objectives.

Monitoring responsibilities are divided as follows:

- **Monitoring of actions under indirect management is the responsibility of National Agencies**, which implement a centrally defined programme of checks during and after projects to assess achievements against set objectives. These checks are verified annually by independent audit bodies and, if applicable, through Commission supervisory visits. Each National Agency must submit a yearly management declaration, along with a report on programme implementation, including data on achievement against targets defined in their annual work programmes for key programme indicators. Additionally, National Authorities overseeing the National Agencies report annually to the EC on their supervision and

[407] Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 establishing 'Erasmus+': the Union programme for education, training, youth and sport and repealing Decisions No 1719/2006/EC, No 1720/2006/EC and No 1298/2008/EC https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32013R1288

[408] Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2023/2710 of 13 September 2023 supplementing Regulation (EU) 2021/817 of the European Parliament and of the Council with provisions on the establishment of a monitoring and evaluation framework for the Erasmus+ programme, OJ L, 2023/2710, 5.12.2023 (https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg_del/2023/2710)

[409] SWD(2023) 296 of 13 September 2023
https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=SWD:2023:0296:FIN:EN:PDF

monitoring activities regarding National Agencies' performance, compliance, and programme implementation.

- **Monitoring of actions under direct management is the responsibility of the EACEA**, which reports on the legality and regularity of its spending. Regular audits on a representative sample of projects are also undertaken.

Data from actions under both direct and indirect management are fed into DG EAC's Data and Analytics platform (Qlik sense Hub), which integrates all programme data to support the analysis of monitoring indicators. Stakeholders welcome the consolidation of data into a single platform, but the process remains complex due to the multiple tools and data sources involved on the *'input side'*[410]. Despite these challenges, the clearer roles and ongoing efforts to integrate all data indicate increased professionalisation and systematisation of monitoring.

Assessment of monitoring mechanisms at national level

National-level monitoring mechanisms for the Erasmus+ programme are considered clear and effective. The NA/EACEA survey results show that National Agencies express overall satisfaction with these mechanisms. Notably, 85% of respondents agree that their agency's monitoring mechanisms for beneficiaries are effective, which is echoed by the interviews conducted with National Agency representatives, who reported on the clarity and proportionality of monitoring mechanisms for which good guidance is received from the EC. 82% of NA/EACEA survey respondents believe that the structure of the yearly reports provides a comprehensive picture of programme management. Additionally, 76% feel that the report structure has become clearer over time. Another positive indicator is the high compliance of National Agencies with their monitoring and support obligations. Between 2015 and 2022, most National Agencies met minimum standards for monitoring and supporting beneficiaries, as evidenced by their yearly reports.

Between 2015 and 2022, as another component of national-level programme monitoring, National Authorities outlined their strategies for monitoring and supervising National Agencies annually. In compliance with Article 29 of the Erasmus+ Regulation, all National Authorities' annual reports (so-called 'October reports') included a reference to a tripartite monitoring process involving National Agencies, National Authorities, and the independent audit bodies (IAB), with National Authorities overseeing audit agreements and signing off on audit reports. Nearly a third of National Authorities reported that they had created their strategies based on established guidelines. National Authorities' monitoring and supervision strategies were implemented predominantly through meetings (86%) and visits (51%), which were both formal (39%) and informal (21%) in nature. Over half of the National Authorities described the monitoring as 'regular' in occurrence. Of those that specified concrete timeframes, 12% described weekly activities, 25% reported conducting monthly activities, and 82% reported on annual activities. These proportions were generally consistent from year to year.

Besides the clear advancements mentioned above, evidence suggests (particularly, NA/EACEA survey, KIIs, case studies), some recurrent areas of concern, and hence, areas for improvement in relation to monitoring mechanisms.

- **Additional funding for monitoring activities:** EC services and National Agencies highlighted that despite the acknowledged simplification, monitoring activities are still workload-heavy and time-consuming. Hence, they pointed to the need for further funding for monitoring to make it more systematic and streamlined.

[410] Non-exhaustive list: Participants reports, Project Management Module, Beneficiary Module, e-Grants, Online Registration System, Assessment Module, European School Education Platform, Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe, European Youth Portal

- **Monitoring data is still inadequately structured:** There is a need for more consistency and clarity in the tools and templates for reporting results.
- **The need for improved monitoring and impact evaluation:** There is a need for better information on identifying and promoting good practices and developing more effective programme evaluation systems. The current system struggles to fully capture longer-term outcomes and impacts and lacks clarity in reporting results *(see also EQ12.2 concerning monitoring indicators).* The need for more regular monitoring and a deeper analysis of the data are also important.
- **There is a need to better utilise monitoring data and integrate feedback into programme design and policymaking:** Although a wealth of data is collected and consolidated into a single platform**,** the application of these findings is limited.

EQ 12.2: Efficiency of indicators: to what extent do the indicators identified for the programme in the legal base correspond to the monitoring purposes? How could the overall management and monitoring system be improved?

The mid-term evaluation of Erasmus+ 2014-2020 reported important improvements brought about by the adoption of a clearly predefined set of monitoring indicators[411], a departure from practices observed in the predecessor programmes. However, the evaluation also highlighted various limitations linked to the selected indicators. These limitations encompassed:

- The absence of explicit references to programme objectives in the chosen indicators;
- The unclear relevance of certain indicators to the overarching programme objectives;
- The inadequate coverage of specific actions, such as KA2, within the established indicators;
- The presence of target values that were either too low or arbitrarily defined, posing challenges to meaningful assessment;
- Shortcomings in the available monitoring tools, hindering their effectiveness in evaluating the extent of progress towards the specified indicators.

This underscored the need for a more refined and comprehensive approach to monitoring indicators, with particular emphasis on alignment with programme objectives, relevance, coverage of diverse programme actions, and the establishment of meaningful target values.

The adoption of the Erasmus+ 2021-2027 Regulation brought a considerable rethink and simplification of monitoring indicators, which are now structured around Key Actions, directly addressing some of the above-mentioned points (see Article 23 'Monitoring and Reporting' and Annex II of the Regulation).

As a clear sign of improvement in terms of structure and list of specific indicators, 71% of respondents (up from 30% in the mid-term Erasmus+ 2014-2020 evaluation) to the NA/EACEA survey agreed that the monitoring indicators defined in the current Erasmus+ legal framework ensure an effective measurement of the progress made in the implementation of the programme, whilst 66% agreed (comparable with the result of 67% in the mid-term Erasmus+ 2014-2020 evaluation) that they provide a good overview of programme results and impacts.

The 12 additional indicators (outputs/results/impacts) introduced in 2023 by the Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2023/2710 supplement the Regulation. The

[411] See Annex 1 to the 2014-2020 Erasmus+ Regulation.

Commission's SWD(2023) 296 on the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework and accompanying the Delegated Act provides helpful context and clarity on the rationale and applicability of the newly introduced indicators.

In doing so, the Delegated Act directly addresses most concerns shared by stakeholders and set out in the mid-term evaluation of Erasmus+ 2014-2020.

Overall, the indicators laid down in the 2021-2027 Erasmus+ Regulation and the Delegated Act adopted in 2023 provide for an effective and comprehensive monitoring framework for the programme. It is, however, too early to assess the extent to which practical implementation will deliver on this promise. It is further important to note that several National Agency representatives hold the opinion that the emphasis continues to be on quantitative data, whilst qualitative information is used to a much lesser extent. This is also frequently highlighted in the National Reports. 8 reports state that the current programme indicators are primarily financial and output-oriented, focusing on quantifiable results like participant numbers and project completions[412]. This approach is considered in the reports to fall short of capturing the impact of the programme, particularly in areas like behavioural change, development of soft skills, and long-term influence on participants and organisations. Connected to this, the meta-analyses reveal a very limited number of primary studies looking at the individual-level impacts of participating in the programme.

Desk research carried out for this evaluation shows that studies dealing with organisational and system-level impacts of Erasmus+ are also scarce. The data and research gaps identified during the evaluation can now be used to help promote more targeted data and research activities and to ensure improved programme monitoring and evaluation in the future. This should involve quantitative studies, making use of a counter-factual methodology to better assess the individual, organisational and system-level impacts of the various programme elements, relying on recent data. Cross-country comparability should be ensured by studies that either allow it by design or by several national case studies that are sufficiently comparable. Regarding the individual level, important actions have already been taken in this direction – e.g. the Learning Lab set up by DG EAC[413]. Further interventions to consider in the higher education field could potentially involve ensuring that the European Graduate Survey generates data that is relevant for monitoring the Erasmus+ programme. In addition, in all sectors and in line with the efforts of the Learning Lab, the participant surveys may be complemented with data collections that involve both programme participants and comparable control groups to start expanding the data available for future studies.

Stakeholders (National Agency representatives interviewed in the inception phase, during KIIs as well as during the workshop in June 2023, and EU-level KIIs) highlighted two additional focus areas.

- **Insufficient data on participation of people with fewer opportunities:** EU-level stakeholders suggested that there is insufficient data on inclusion-related aspects, which prevents a clear picture of how many people with fewer opportunities take part in the programme. Interviewed stakeholders from 11 countries acknowledged that the newly-introduced indicators aim to improve the situation; however, they suggested that the categories were very broadly defined, and therefore advocated for a more precise definition to ensure inclusive practices and avoid potential exclusion of individuals based on specific criteria. This would also lead to a better understanding of who participates in the programme.

[412] BEde, BEnl, BG, CY, EE, LU, NL, PL.

[413] https://education.ec.europa.eu/focus-topics/improving-quality/learning-lab

- **The need for further guidance to extract data on the number of projects per organisation:** There is a need for clearer guidance on how to approach the extraction of project and participation data in cases where an organisation uses multiple Organisation IDs. A suggestion was made to set a hard limit on the number of projects one organisation can take part in simultaneously.

3.3 Relevance

3.3.1 EQ 13 Relevance to socio-economic needs and challenges

EQ 13.1: To what extent are current and emerging key socio-economic needs and challenges that Europe is facing internally and globally reflected in the policy priorities, objectives and actions/activities of Erasmus+ 2021-2027?

Relevance of programme objectives

The evidence collected as part of the evaluation demonstrates that Erasmus+ adequately reflects the socio-economic needs and challenges faced by Europe today. Stakeholders consulted generally agreed that the objectives (and priorities) set by the current programme address well the most pressing socio-economic needs and challenges. As a national-level key informant explained: "*European mobility and cooperation will not provide solutions to the emerging socio-economic needs and challenges but is in a very strong position to help to raise reflection on how to find solutions.*"

Positive views were also expressed about the relevance of the programme in general by respondents to the NA/EACEA survey: 48% of survey respondents affirmed its full relevance in the context of today's socio-economic needs and challenges, and an additional 51% found it partially relevant[414]. European-level stakeholders in the KIIs praised the clear and ambitious objectives set by the programme, but also raised concerns about insufficient funding available to achieve them.

Considering the international aspects of the programme, it is noteworthy that key informants from EU Delegations to countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (Region 9) overall report good alignment between Erasmus+ objectives and the priorities of the countries they represent. More specifically, mobility and capacity-building in higher education and VET are central to Erasmus+ initiatives in these countries.

Regarding the specific objectives of the programme, the Public Consultation (PC) indicates a general satisfaction across the various fields; this is underpinned also by several case studies. PC respondents involved in the programme sectors report systematically positive views about their relevance – but more so in the education and training and sport sectors than in the youth sector[415]:

- In the education and training sector, "promoting cooperation, quality, inclusion and equity, excellence, creativity and innovation at the level of organisations and policies" is considered extremely relevant by 71% of respondents involved in higher education, 74% of those involved in adult education, 78% of those involved in VET and 80% of those involved in school education, while "promoting learning mobility for individuals and groups" is seen as extremely relevant by 86% of respondents in

[414] Annex III - NA/EACEA survey. Question: Overall, how relevant do you find the Erasmus+ Programme considering today's socio-economic needs and challenges? N=164

[415] Annex II - Public Consultation Report, Figures 17 to 22

higher education, 81% of those in adult education, and 84% of those in in school education and in VET.

- Concerning the objectives in the sport sector, 79% of respondents involved in the sector report full relevance with regard to the specific objective of "promoting cooperation, quality, inclusion, creativity and innovation at the level of sport organisations and sport policies" and 82% with regard to the objective of "promoting learning mobility of sport staff".
- Concerning the objectives in the youth sector, 61% of respondents involved in the sector agree that "promoting non-formal and informal learning mobility and active participation among young people" is extremely relevant, and 58% have a similar view about "promoting cooperation, quality, inclusion, creativity and innovation at the level of organisations and policies".

Examples on how the objectives set by the programme are aligned with the projects implemented in the various fields and sectors can be found in the case studies:

- Case studies in the school education field for example emphasised the contribution of participation in mobility to improving the competencies of the participants, including language skills. Language learning is also very much appreciated in the VET field[416] and so is the development of many other competencies as shown also by an example presented in the box below.
- In the adult education field, the case studies further show that the prospect of improving employability of participants is considered to be key for the organisations[417], as well as building an international network and enhancing cooperations[418].
- Internationalisation of the organisations in the sense of building transnational connections, developing a more international study programme and even an international identity were repeatedly mentioned in the case studies on higher education institutions[419]. International knowledge-sharing and the learning process involved in the collaborative partnership (involving also physical exchange of coaches, managers and volunteers) were mentioned as key elements in the sport sector[420].
- Broadening young people's perspectives are key in the youth sector[421] and so is the opportunity to develop skills that are beneficial in the labour market – both for young people and for youth workers.

[416] Case studies Chambre de Métiers et de l'Artisanat Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes (VET, FR), Kauno technologijų mokymo centras (VET, LT).

[417] Case study AFEJI Hauts-de-France (ADU, FR).

[418] Case study Oktatasi es Szakerto Bt. (ADU, HU).

[419] Case studies Univerza v Mariboru (HED, SI), Universidad de Sevilla (HED, ES), Satakunnan ammattikorkeakoulu (HED, FI).

[420] Case study Stichting Flik-Flak (SPO, NL).

[421] Case study Agenzija Zghazagh (YOU, MT).

Box 11: Examples of alignment of Erasmus+ projects with programme objectives (from the case studies)

CS Vegova Ljubljana (VET, SI): *The objectives of the Erasmus+ programme are considered relevant for the field of vocational education and training, as they contribute to the development of relevant competences and the development of quality and European-related vocational education.*

For the VET field, the Erasmus+ programme is particularly relevant from the point of view of strengthening the employability of students, to which the programme contributes in two ways: through the inclusion of students on internships abroad and through the mobility of mentors and other experts in companies.

CS EuropeActive (SPO, BE): *according to the organisation there is nothing quite like going out to look for new ideas and paradigms; it is important to establish international connections. Emphasis on research along with its practical implementation and the detailed documentation process has made learning and sharing of experiences across different cultures possible.*

CS Youth for exchange and understanding international (YOU, BE): *The Erasmus+ programme is considered useful and attractive by YEU participants, who are motivated to develop new skills that can be capitalised in their working life and offer better labour market perspectives. The multicultural dimension of the programme has opened new horizons in education and training, and participants believe they would not have developed their multicultural views, strengthened their English skills, or enhanced their environmental skills without Erasmus+.*

For youth workers, according to the participant, projects provide opportunities for professional development, establishing new partnerships, and creating innovative projects that address important issues such as body image issues. Young people are motivated to participate in the projects to develop new skills, gain international experience, and push themselves out of their comfort zones.

CS Scuola superiore di studi universitari e di perfezionamento Sant'Anna (JMA, IT): *In 2015, the regulation of robotics was an emerging field with only a few researchers/educators specialising in this area of expertise. The main need that the JM Actions aimed to address was the timely exploration of the regulation of robotics and AI that required immediate, in-depth research. The successful implementation of the JM module on ERR at Sant'Anna generated interested from other universities, promoting them to invite representatives from Sant'Anna to teach a course on technology regulation in their own institution. Applying for JM funding, instead of other national research programmes for example is appealing because JM actions allow for the integration of teaching and research. This enables practitioners to channel research into research-based teaching, which is considered a highly valuable pedagogical approach. The mark of excellence associated with JM makes it possible to offer courses that might not be otherwise available.*

Relevance of horizontal priorities

The programme's four horizontal priorities are also considered relevant to socio-economic needs and challenges. They were praised by many stakeholders as highly relevant. EU-level stakeholders in particular agreed that the programme's priorities aligned well with EU-level socio-economic goals. Indeed, there is a direct correspondence between the four horizontal priorities of Erasmus+ and four of the six priorities determined by the EC President for 2019-2024[422]. Linking these two sets of priorities, it is clear that the Erasmus+ priorities address those aspects of the broader European agenda that are most relevant from the programme's perspective, i.e. that relate to the needs of people in education, training, youth and sport.

The programme data show that between 2021 and 2023, a significant part of both the total number of projects funded and grants awarded by the programme were allocated to some

[422] https://european-union.europa.eu/priorities-and-actions/eu-priorities/european-union-priorities-2019-2024_en

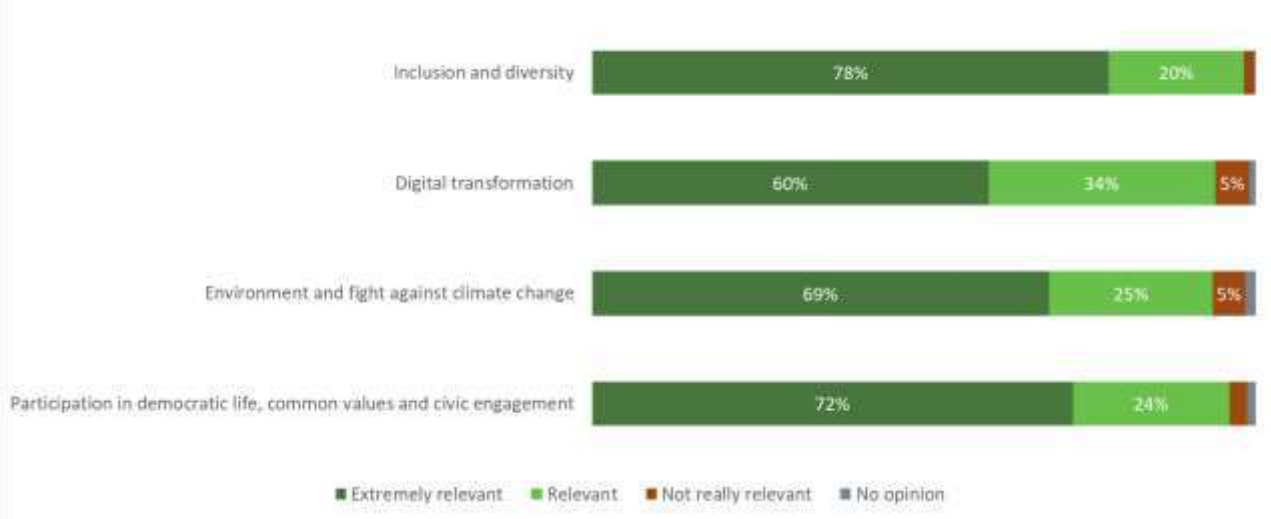
of the main EU priority areas. In particular, 12% and 17% of all the projects related to the Commission's priorities 'European Green Deal' and 'Europe fit for the digital age' respectively, with a total of 43% of the total grants spent on these two areas[423]. The relevance of the horizontal priorities is also evidenced in the national reports on the implementation and impact of Erasmus+. In particular, the importance of the programme's focus on inclusion to better address the needs of people with fewer opportunities was emphasised by 29 countries[424], with 13 describing this priority as being increasingly important[425].

For example, Austria has developed a "National Plan for the Implementation of Inclusion and Diversity within Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps", demonstrating a commitment to inclusivity – as discussed in their national report.

A mapping of the programme's priorities against public opinion, as measured in the Eurobarometer survey in 2022[426], further confirms their relevance. Respondents mentioned, "working on environmental issues and climate change" (22%) and "defending European values" (18%) as the fourth and fifth most pressing challenges facing Europe today.

Most of the PC respondents agreed that the programme's horizontal priorities are "extremely relevant" to the current needs and challenges of our societies. This applied in particular to inclusion and diversity (78%), but also to participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement (72%), environment and fight against climate change and – albeit to a lesser extent – to digital transformation (60%)[427]. However, when looking also at the percentage of those who consider them either, "extremely relevant" or "relevant", the results are more similar across all four priorities, with 98% for inclusion and diversity, 96% for participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement and 94% for both digital transformation and environment and fight against climate change.

Figure 20: In your view, to what extent are the Erasmus+ horizontal priorities relevant to current challenges and needs? – Public consultation – Overall responses (n=1,231)



[423] See Annex I - Technical Annex, Table 39.

[424] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI,SK and TR.

[425] AT, BE, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, LU, NL, SE.

[426] https://data.europa.eu/en/news-events/news/what-are-key-challenges-our-times-according-eu-citizens-find-out-latest

[427] Public consultation report – Annex II. Question "In your view, to what extent are the Erasmus+ horizontal priorities relevant to current challenges and needs?"

The case studies provide further examples of how the horizontal priorities helped to better integrate these aspects into the strategies and everyday work of the organisations supported by the programme. This included, for instance, moving meetings online (green transition) and identifying and reaching out to more hard-to-reach segments of the target groups (inclusion).

The Key Informant Interviews provide evidence on the generally good alignment between Erasmus+ priorities and the priorities of the countries represented by the EU Delegations to countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. In Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Kenya, South Africa and Tanzania alignment is reported in relation to the Global Gateway strategy, particularly regarding support for digitalisation and the green transition. Enhancing connectivity, digitalisation, and innovation are key areas of alignment with Erasmus+, also reflecting broader trends in global education and development.

When considering the major challenges which emerged during the current programming period, the response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic was already well reflected in the new priorities and actions of the programme[428]. This includes the strong reinforcement of the inclusion aspect of the programme, offering a relevant response to the educational and social disparities that were further deepened by the pandemic. In addition, strengthening the programme's contribution to digital education was also a relevant response to the need for digital skills and increased digitalisation in the education system that was made particularly evident during the pandemic.

Relevance of actions and projects

The evidence collected overall suggests a good alignment between actions and projects and wider EU priorities. Respondents to the NA/EACEA survey perceived strong alignment between individual actions and projects funded by the programme and specific EU priorities such as, "increasing the number of learners and staff who spend some time abroad" (80%) and, "improving the quality of education and training"; "promoting equity, social cohesion, and active citizenship"; and "improving green and digital skills" (69% each)[429]. Survey respondents working in the youth sector (n=29) further agreed that projects and actions are well aligned with, "supporting volunteering and youth organisations to provide opportunities for participation" (83%), and "strengthening recognition of youth work" (72%). In the sport sector (n=19), 94% perceived good alignment regarding, "promotion of participation in sport…", but much less (between 26 and 42%) with regard to "capacity building…", "integrity of sport…" and "socio-economic and environmental dimension…".

When asked about the balance between national and EU priorities, 52% of the respondents to this survey acknowledged the programme's alignment with EU priorities, while 46% asserted that it aligns equally with national and EU priorities[430]. Comparing the share of projects that address European and national policy priorities under the current and the previous Erasmus+ programme, respondents to the expert assessors survey[431] also perceived a greater increase in the share of projects that are relevant to a European priority than in the share of those reflecting national priorities.

[428] https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2021-09/2021-erasmusplus-programme-guide_v2_en.pdf

[429] Annex III - NA/EACEA survey: "To what extent are the individual actions and projects funded under Erasmus + aligned with key EU policy priorities?"

[430] Annex III - NA/EACEA survey: "How do you judge the evolution of policy alignment of Erasmus+ over the two programming periods? The current generation of the Erasmus+ supports actions that are more aligned with EU priorities / national priorities than the previous programming period."

[431] Annex IV - Expert Assessors survey: "When comparing the two generations of Erasmus+, under the current Erasmus+ programme… …The share of projects addressing topics that are high on the European policy agenda is… / The share of projects addressing topics that are high on the policy agenda of my country is… "very high", "high", "average", "low", "very low".

The Russian invasion of Ukraine also created major challenges to Europe, to which the Erasmus+ programme responded by promoting educational activities and facilitating the integration of people fleeing the war, while also supporting organisations, learners, and staff in Ukraine[432]. While there is no direct information available on how stakeholders perceived the relevance of these support projects and activities, these were well aligned with public opinion, setting "providing humanitarian aid to other countries" (15%) as a key challenge Europe is facing today in the Eurobarometer survey of April and May 2022[433].

3.3.2 EQ 14 Relevance to green transition and digital transformation

EQ 14.1: To what extent are the needs and challenges linked to Europe's green transition and digital transformation reflected in the actions/activities of Erasmus+ 2021-2027?

The 2021-27 Erasmus+ programme objectives place a strong emphasis on supporting the green transition and digital transformation, enhancing green and digital skills, and having a systemic impact on the digitalisation and greening of education ecosystems.

The stakeholder consultations conducted for this evaluation suggest that the programme is more relevant to current and emerging needs and challenges linked to Europe's green transition and digital transformation than in the previous period[434]. 68% of respondents to the NA/EACEA survey reported, "improving digital and green skills" as the second most relevant action of the programme (69% strong alignment and 23% medium alignment), right after, "increasing the share of students and staff who spend time abroad". The programme's focus on digital transformation and environmental sustainability is widely recognised as an improvement in the 2021-2027 period in national reports, with 18 explicitly mentioning this[435], although 9 countries[436] noted that these priorities are not yet fully integrated into participant experiences or project implementations. The survey of assessors shows that 38% consider that Erasmus+ priorities have become clearer and suggests that the alignment of project results and priorities has also improved. The Public Consultation (PC) results indicate that most respondents consider, "the environment and the fight against climate change" (69%) and "digital transformation" (60%) as "extremely relevant" (and 94% in both cases as extremely relevant or relevant) horizontal priorities, while only 5% consider each of these not relevant.

Skills development for the digital transformation

Erasmus+ aims to improve digital skills through learning mobility in KA1[437] and funds a number of other actions and activities that support digital skills development[438]. These include, for example, KA2 and KA3 projects, the Digital Education Hub, the Centres of Vocational Excellence, and the European Universities initiative.

[432] https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2023-11/2024-Erasmus%2BProgramme-Guide_EN.pdf

[433] https://data.europa.eu/en/news-events/news/what-are-key-challenges-our-times-according-eu-citizens-find-out-latest

[434] The survey of expert assessors, moreover, suggests that the alignment of project results and priorities has also improved.

[435] AT, BE, CY, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, IT, LT, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO.

[436] AT, BE, CY, DE, DK, IE, NL, NO, PT.

[437] Annex 1, point 1.1 of the 2021-2027 Erasmus+ Regulation refers to "learning mobility: short-term, long-term, group or individual mobility on diverse thematic areas and study subjects, including forward-looking fields such as the digital field, climate change, clean energy and artificial intelligence".

[438] Erasmus+ funds a number of actions under priority 2 of the Digital Education Action Plan: (7) Common guidelines for teachers and educators to foster digital literacy and tackle disinformation through education and training; (8) Updating the European Digital Competence Framework to include AI and data-related skills; (9) European Digital Skills Certificate (EDSC); (10) Council recommendation on improving the provision of digital skills in education and training; (11) Cross-national collection of data and an EU-level target on student digital skills; (12) Digital Opportunity Traineeships; (13) Women's participation in STEM.

In terms of design, the highest share of the 2021-2027 Erasmus+ budget[439] is allocated to the higher education field, followed by vocational education and training (VET), school education and youth. Younger and more educated people have more frequently already acquired basic digital skills[440]. This shows a greater need for basic digital skills development among the adult population. Other EU funding instruments, such as the ESF+, also target the adult population, but tend to have a clear focus on employment, while Erasmus+ pays greater attention to the role of the digital transformation and digital skills in learning, social and civic participation, which are also areas of significant importance. There is scope to step up actions in these areas for the adult population - see also the next section on the development of green skills.

The structure of Erasmus+ does not envisage an action specifically targeting ICT specialists, although related subjects are eligible for KA1 mobility, as for other subjects. The programme also funds initiatives that aim specifically to support digital skills development. The Digital Opportunity Traineeships (DOT), initially directed to the provision of opportunities to gain hands-on professional experience in digital fields which are in demand on the labour market – including at advanced levels – to higher education students and recent graduates, was extended over 2021 and 2022 to higher education staff, VET learners and recent graduates, as well as VET, school and adult education staff[441].

However, activities for the development of digital skills under KA1 remain largely focussed on specific programme elements[442], such as DOTs, rather than being an overarching feature. This is confirmed by the beneficiary learners survey, which found some evidence of the impact of Erasmus+ on the level of digital competence for VET learners and (in certain cases) youth, but not for other groups such as school pupils or higher education students[443].

Thus, Erasmus+ could better articulate the ways in which KA1 mobility is a suitable tool to address digital skills development at basic to specialist level, providing a more nuanced presentation of the ways in which it can help to develop such skills – e.g. which activities within KA1, and which sectors of education.

In addition, the programme could focus more on concerns regarding the negative effects of excessive screen time[444], in particular amongst young people, and on fostering the development of relevant self-regulation skills[445].

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[439] See Article 17 of the 2021-2027 Erasmus+ Regulation.

[440] See Digital Economy and Society Index 2023, DESI 2022 Thematic chapters p.22. Figures are for 2021. See also case-study 9 (Społeczny Instytut Ekologiczny) for a similar argument.

[441] DOTs for educational staff of all fields addresses basic/pedagogical or advance digital skills depending on their needs and profile.

[442] For information on the size of DOT see Annex I Technical Annex - Programme Data, Table 41.

[443] As indicated in the methodology section, some degree of caution should be exercised when interpreting the impact estimates calculated on the basis of the beneficiary survey data, which should be considered as only indicative of the real impact exerted by Erasmus+ on the outcomes explored.

[444] A search for “screen time” in the Erasmus+ project platform conducted in May 17 2024 resulted in 62 projects out of 179,000 contained in the database (0.03%), of which 17 (out of 58,900) were ongoing (0.03%). Moreover, this included several projects that do not have a clear focus on the negative effects of screen time and their prevention -for example projects that had no strong link to this topic and did not include it in their objectives, that mentioned their desire not to aggravate the problem (for example, citing a desire not to not increase screen time during their activities as a justification not to undertake virtual mobility activities), or that presented their activities as alternatives to screen time, for example through sports. Following this later argument, many more projects would contribute to fighting against excessive screen time even if they do not mention this in their descriptions, as they are related to outdoors education or sports -over 1,100 projects refer to outdoor education in their description and 8,500 mention sport. However, research shows varied results on the association between sports practice and reduction of screen time to healthy levels - See for example Dahlgren, A., Sjöblom, L., Eke, H., Bonn, S.E. and Trolle Lagerros, Y., 2021. Screen time and physical activity in children and adolescents aged 10–15 years. *PloS one*, *16*(7), p.e0254255.

[445] See for example Neophytou, E., Manwell, L.A. and Eikelboom, R., 2021. Effects of excessive screen time on neurodevelopment, learning, memory, mental health, and neurodegeneration: A scoping review. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, *19*, pp.724-744.

Skills development for the green transition

The Erasmus+ programme helps the green transition by increasing the supply of green skills[446]. The employment boost resulting from the green transition will take place, according to Eurofound[447], mainly in occupations that do not require tertiary qualifications. This makes initiatives such as the Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) highly relevant. But above all, the green transition is expected to lead to the transformation of job tasks[448] for those who are already in the labour force. Adult workers and jobseekers are not as represented in Erasmus+ as other groups, as most adults are not enrolled in education or training programmes, nor working for education and training providers or youth organisations, which would make them eligible for participation, but are catered for by other EU programmes. This limits the programme's potential in terms of contributing to green skills development among the general EU population. It has, however, a greater degree of influence over key areas for the green transition, such as consumption patterns and production processes. This observation is derived from direct analysis of the programme design and existing needs by the evaluators. Various national reports also recommended modifying the programme design to better cater for the needs of adult learners (EE) or placing greater emphasis and investment on the adult education sector to reach this critical target group (HU, IE, LT, PT). BE, CY, DE, ES, FI, MT, NL and SI also suggested more targeted funding and support for the youth and adult education sectors -to rebalance the focus compared to higher education. Part of this investment could be directed to support actions related to the green transition, as well as the digital transformation. In other countries, where there have been difficulties in fully utilising existing funds for adult learners (FR), efforts to ensure the attractiveness of activities around the green transition – and the digital transformation – should be stepped up.

There are also concerns regarding the environmental impact of transnational and international mobility, a central part of the programme[449]. The DiscoverEU action offers participants a travel pass and travel opportunities predominantly by train. Erasmus+ has taken several positive steps in the current programming period to stimulate the use of low emission means of transport in other actions too. These include changes in funding rules to incentivise 'green travel'[450]. Green travel support also increased in the 2024 call, and the budget category 'travel support' now specifies that for any travel below 500km participants will, as a general rule, travel by low emission means of transport. Changes in the denomination of different forms of transport also signal that green transport should be the norm[451].

Digital transformation of education ecosystems

Erasmus+ actions help to support the development of digital education ecosystems in several ways, and the programme includes a strong set of relevant actions, activities and tools to do so. COVID-19 increased awareness of the need to have resilient education

[446] The Erasmus+ Regulation notes the role of Erasmus+ in helping develop skills in STEAM subjects, climate change, environmental protection, sustainable development, clean energy, amongst others.

[447] Eurofound (2023) Fit for 55 climate package: Impact on EU employment by 2030. Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union.

[448] Eurofound (2023) Fit for 55 climate package: Impact on EU employment by 2030. Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union. Vandeplas, A., Vanyolos, I., Vigani, M. and Vogel, L., (2022) *The Possible Implications of the Green Transition for the EU Labour Market* (No. 176). Directorate General Economic and Financial Affairs (DG ECFIN), European Commission.

[449] Shields, R (2019) 'The sustainability of international higher education: Student mobility and global climate change', *Journal of Cleaner Production*, vol. 217, pp. 594-602.

[450] Case-study TU Berlin - ENHANCE Alliance (HED, DE), however, shows how programme participants are not always fully clear on the meaning of green travel.

[451] Green/ low emission travel is now considered the norm and non-green travel the exception, whereas in the previous top up system low emission travel was the exception. Case-study Pädagogische Hochschule Freiburg (SCH, DE) noted how learners have preferred in some cases to take the train (up to 3 days) to avoid the environmental impact of flying.

ecosystems, and the key role that digitalisation plays in this, as noted in 22 national reports[452]. KA2 cooperation projects such as CoVEs contribute to the development of skills for the digital transition by promoting the creation of ecosystems for sustainable collaboration between education and training providers and other stakeholders, including companies in this area; Erasmus+ Teacher Academies aim to support the creation and application of digital pedagogies and teachers' digital expertise. Online self-reflection tools SELFIE and SELFIE for Teachers[453] support schools and teachers assessing their skill gaps and planning for further training. Erasmus+ also funds activities related to the priorities of the Digital Education Action Plan[454], which is the basis for outlining the digital horizontal priority in the programme. Policy experimentation calls and Alliances for Innovation have given attention to digitalisation in education[455]. European Universities alliances' long-term joint strategies include the development of shared governance structures and pooling of resources, including in data services[456]. The Digital SALTO Resource Centre provides access to online tools and databases, across all the programme's horizontal priorities, and produces resources and materials to help applicants to integrate the digital transformation priority in their projects.

The Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE) and other Erasmus+ quality standards also require institutions to digitalise as a pre-requisite for participation in KA1[457]. Applications' contribution to digital and green priorities is considered in award criteria. From an implementation point of view, the ECHE requires higher education institutions to implement digital mobility management. The European Student Card Initiative and Erasmus Without Paper (EWP) employ digital solutions to manage the exchange of student data in a more secure and efficient way. This is relevant to the facilitation of the digital transformation priority of the programme, and also to the programme's green transition aims.

Case studies revealed various ways in which the programme is supporting the digital transformation in education, leading to the adoption of digital tools, applications and innovative methodologies enabled by digital technology, often following examples discovered during international mobility activities. In certain cases, the programme has contributed to organisations adopting digital transformation as an objective[458].

16 national reports nevertheless noted the need to further develop Erasmus+ activities in relation to the digital transformation[459] – although the majority referred to the development of digital skills specifically. The NA/EACEA survey also highlighted a need to enhance the programme digital actions, in particular with regard to the school education field. The need for more dedicated calls in collaboration with the European Education Hub and Digital

[452] AT, BEde, BEnl, BG, CZ, CY, DE, EL, ES, FI, IE, IT, LV, LU, HU, PL, PT, RO, SE, SK, NO, TR.

[453] This is based on the European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators.

[454] Priority 1, actions: (1) structured dialogue with Member States on digital education and skills; (5) digital transformation plans for education and training institutions (through KA2); (6) ethical guidelines on the use of AI and data in teaching and learning for educators.

[455] See, for example, the 2022 Call for proposals and related guidance from the Commission.

[456] Alliances can, for example, pool resources to create new digital resources and virtual campuses, or further develop their blended learning provision to increase collaboration between institutions across borders. Some Alliances have a particular focus on technology, including digital innovations, while others have placed a focus on the environment, to develop skills but also to transform higher education itself. Examples of these include Unite!, EU GREEN and UNI Green. Uni Green Alliance provides an overview of actions to reduce carbon balance in their activities.

[457] Erasmus accreditation for education and training organisations in adult education, vocational education and training, school education and youth organisations, which gives simplified access to KA1 funding, confirms that these organisations have set up an Erasmus plan to implement high quality mobility activities. When applying for Erasmus accreditation organisations agree to follow a set of Erasmus quality standards that include digital education. For KA1 applicants should either explicitly subscribe to the Erasmus Quality Standards (KA122), or explicitly mention how they will contribute to each of the EQS (KA120).

[458] Case studies Asociația Sprijin+ (ADU, RO), CHARM-EU, University of Barcelona (ES).

[459] BEnl, CY, DE, DK, ES, IE, IT, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, SE, SI, SK, TR

Europe Programme, to support HEIs efforts on digitalisation (e.g. interoperability of HEIs systems within EUI alliances) was also noted.

Green transition of education ecosystems

The Erasmus+ programme design appropriately supports the greening of education ecosystems through its quality standards, and the accreditations that institutions need to meet to participate in/ achieve simplified access to the programme in some sectors – see also previous section. For example, in relation to higher education, the programme requires HEIs to adopt environmentally-friendly practices, support sustainable means of travel and reduce the negative impact of mobility on the environment. HEIs are encouraged to develop their own sustainability strategies and connect these with mobility and internationalisation. Alliances for Innovation, European Universities alliances and CoVEs, among other parts of the programme, also aim to support the green transition.

Another relevant element of the programme design is the exchange of good practices through KA2 cooperation projects. Platforms such as the European School Education Platform (ESEP) and the Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe (EPALE) allow for the exchange of effective educational policies and practice for sustainability[460]. Moreover, the expectations and incentives set out regarding the use of green travel can have a positive 'educational' effect on individual institutions and public authorities. In the national reports all Member States and third countries associated to the programme[461] assessed the evolution of the programme between the 2014-2020 and the current programming period positively in terms of relevance. Nevertheless, and in spite of the progress made, innovative approaches adopted and greater awareness of the importance of the green transition, the large majority of national reports (30) noted the need to further enhance activities related to the green transition in Erasmus+[462], and 8 expressed a need to increase green travel subsidies, which they deemed insufficient[463].

Relationship between digital transformation and green transition

While these two horizontal priorities are distinct, they are often seen as closely related. The 2024 Programme Guide (p. 302) refers to them as 'twin transitions', and around two-thirds of Europeans think that digital technologies are important to combat climate change[464]. There is, however, a need to better assess the environmental impact of digital technologies[465]. There is also a need to ensure that the relationship between these two priorities and other horizontal priorities is balanced, for example by considering how inclusion may be affected by longer journey durations – e.g. in cases when longer journeys could negatively impact the participation of educational institutions with fewer resources to cover staff absences, and for individuals with caring responsibilities or those living in countries with fewer options to use low-emission means of transport, such as those in insular or outermost regions.

[460] For example, save resources and energy use / waste/ carbon footprint reduction, curriculum development or changing values and preferences.

[461] Except MK which didn't submit the national report for the assessment as part of this study.

[462] AT, BEfr, CY, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, EL, HR, HU, IE, IS, IT, LI, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, RS, SE, SI, SK, TR.

[463] AT, BEde, CY, DE, FI, IS, NO, PT.

[464] See Special Eurobarometer 2959 and case-study Oktatasi es Szakerto Bt. (ADU, HU).

[465] See COM (2023)570. Some Erasmus+ projects are also examining the relationship between digital technologies and the environment. See for example, the Green-Co KA2 project. The JRC has also explored clashes between the two transitions in a range of other fields outside of education -see Muench, S., Stoermer, E., Jensen, K., Asikainen, T., Salvi, M. and Scapolo, F., (2022) Towards a green and digital future, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, JRC129319.

3.3.3 EQ 15 Relevance to stakeholder needs

EQ 15.1: To what extent are needs of different stakeholders and sectors addressed by Erasmus+ 2021-2027 objectives?

Individual-level needs

The needs of individuals participating in the programme are generally well addressed according to the various stakeholder groups, including the representatives of the National Agencies, the key informants as well as respondents to the PC. Concerns were however raised about the extent to which the programme can meet the needs of those with fewer opportunities.

Regarding the needs of practitioners, representatives of National Agencies and the EACEA rate Erasmus+ learning mobility actions (KA1) as highly relevant for the majority of the practitioner groups[466]. Compared to the other groups, only a medium level of relevance was however associated with several groups with fewer opportunities, as well as with other non-teaching staff in certain types of institutions. In addition, moderate or no relevance was reported regarding the current and emerging needs of other non-teaching staff in schools and VET as well as employers/staff in companies. At the same time, KA2 is perceived as having high relevance to almost all of its practitioner target groups' current and emerging needs[467].

For learners, evidence from the NA/EACEA survey also suggests that the needs and challenges faced by learners with fewer opportunities require further attention[468]. KA1 is perceived by representatives of the National Agencies and the EACEA to have only medium relevance to various target groups with fewer opportunities across the different sectors. It is also described as being of moderate or no relevance to the needs of recent graduates. The activities under KA2 are generally seen as highly relevant to 17 out of the 24 target groups considered in the survey[469]. However, only a medium level of relevance is perceived for young people in general, as well as for young people with fewer opportunities. The concerns regarding the programme's relevance to learners and young people with fewer opportunities were also echoed by key informants from 19 different countries and across all the sectors. In addition, two EU Delegations to Sub-Saharan African countries also explicitly recognised that Erasmus+ addresses the knowledge needs of practitioners.

[466] Annex III - NA/EACEA survey: To what extent are Erasmus+ mobility actions (KA1) relevant to the current and emerging needs of the different target groups concerned? Do they address key issues/needs the target groups are facing? In the National Agencies' survey, respondents were requested to evaluate the relevance of KA1 and KA2 to the needs of specific target groups. Depending on their involvement with the various sectors, different groups of respondents received different questions to make sure they only evaluate the actions' relevance for target groups in their sectors of activity.

[467] Annex III - NA/EACEA survey: To what extent are activities under KA2 relevant to the current and emerging needs of the target groups concerned? Do they address key issues the target group is facing?

[468] Annex III - NA/EACEA survey: To what extent are Erasmus+ mobility actions (KA1) relevant to the current and emerging needs of the different target groups concerned? Do they address key issues/needs the target groups are facing?

[469] Annex III - NA/EACEA survey: To what extent are activities under KA2 relevant to the current and emerging needs of the target groups concerned? Do they address key issues the target group is facing?

Table 23: Individual target groups whose needs are only met to a "medium", "moderate" or lower extent according to the NA/EACEA survey participants Please note that all other groups were mentioned under "high relevance"

Medium Relevance	Moderate or no relevance
Practitioners, KA1 School teachers with fewer opportunities (n=32) Leadership in VET institutions (n=27) VET teachers and practitioners with fewer opportunities (n=27) Other non-teaching staff in higher education institutions (n=28) Youth workers and staff with fewer opportunities (n=29) Other non-teaching staff in adult learning organisations (n=26)	Practitioners, KA1 Other non-teaching staff in schools (n=32) Other non-teaching staff in VET institutions (n=27) Higher education staff from third countries not associated to the programme (n=28) Employers/ staff in companies (n=27)
Practitioners, KA2 Other non-teaching staff in higher education institutions (n=28) Higher education staff from third countries not associated to the programme (n=28)	Practitioners, KA2 -
Learners, KA1 Pupils with fewer opportunities (n=32) Higher education students with fewer opportunities (n=28) Adult learners (n=26) Adult learners with fewer opportunities (n=26) Erasmus Mundus participants (n=28) Young people with fewer opportunities (n=29)	Learners, KA1 Higher education students from third countries not associated to the programme (n=28) Recent graduates (n=55)
Learners KA2 Young people in general (n=29) Young people with fewer opportunities (n=29)	Learners KA2 Higher education students from third countries associated to the programme (n=28)

Source: NA/EACEA survey
NB: All other groups were mentioned under 'high relevance'

A similarly positive generic picture emerges from the PC, with the respondents from the relevant fields finding the individual-level specific objectives of the programme – i.e. learning mobilities in the various sectors for learners, young people and sports staff – 'extremely relevant' in the vast majority of cases[470]. Considering the views only of those involved in the specific sectors, the lowest level of perceived relevance of the individual level specific objective is found in the youth sector (61% calling it extremely relevant), while the level of perceived relevance exceeds 80% in all the other sectors and fields

According to the respondents of the NA/EACEA survey, beneficiaries in the third countries (associated or not associated to the programme) are generally considered among those whose needs are not as well met by the programme – this is however a rather partial view given by European actors that consider the position of third countries relative to the target groups within the Member States. In this regard, international-level key informants (representatives of international organisations, EU Delegations, National Erasmus+ Offices (NEOs) and regional SALTO Resource Centres) are better placed to report on the programme's relevance for learners and practitioners in these countries.

[470] See Annex II PC Report.

Key informants from Brazil, Vietnam, as well as the interviewed NEOs and the SALTO South-East Europe recognise that Erasmus+ contributes to the employability of young people and graduates as mobility allows them to gain international experience, develop new skills, and broaden their horizons. Interviewed representatives from EU Delegations to Brazil, Bangladesh and Pakistan highlight that Erasmus+ offers significant opportunities for vulnerable groups, particularly through the Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters (EMJM) scholarships. There is also consensus among the interviewed NEOs (Kosovo, Bosnia, Ukraine) and EU Delegations to Asian and African countries that Erasmus+ projects bring different perspectives to teaching and learning. They report that in higher education, professors can gain access to resources and exchange with professors working in their fields of knowledge abroad, which directly influences the quality of teaching.

Organisation-level needs

The responses to the NA/EACEA survey[471] further suggest that the programme's activities under KA2 and KA3 are the most relevant for the organisations that are the main target groups of Erasmus+, i.e. organisations providing training and education, youth and sport organisations. At the same time, the actions are considered to address the needs of a long list of organisation types (including also social partners and civil society organisations), only to a more moderate extent. Further, even lower levels of relevance were reported in the context of policy-making bodies at various levels, as well as companies which train higher education students. It is noted that the responses only reflect the views from the National Agencies managing the programme in the relevant sectors.

PC respondents involved in the relevant sectors generally expressed positive views about the relevance of the organisational-level specific objectives of the programme – although not as positive as the views regarding individual-level objectives discussed in the previous sub-section. The difference between the perceived relevance of the individual- and the organisational-level specific objective as reported by the respondents involved in the sector is most marked in the education and training sector. 71% to 80% of respondents across the various education and training fields considered these objectives 'extremely relevant'[472] .

Reflecting on the organisation-level needs and challenges, several key informants expressed positive views about the Erasmus+ 2021-2027 programme's relevance. In particular, the organisations' needs to expand their professional networks and to build cooperation both within and across sectors was often mentioned as being well-served by the programme. The importance of promoting cooperation was further underlined by the socio-economic actors' survey[473]. Across the different organisation types inquired for this survey – civil society and youth organisations; public authorities; companies; organisations in the education and training sector and sport (as well as in the remaining 'other' group) – the primary motivations for participating in the programme included providing new opportunities for learners (80%), an interest in cooperation with other European and third countries (78%), and a desire to establish partnerships with organisations from other countries (75%). Conversely, a relatively smaller share of the organisations participated in the Erasmus+ programme to address skill gaps in the organisation. At the same time, key informants from eight organisations perceived the programme as being better oriented towards larger, better-resourced organisations as opposed to smaller ones that would need more support. While also mentioned in other sectors, this shortcoming of the programme

[471] NA/EACEA survey: To what extent are activities under KA2 and KA3 relevant to the current and emerging needs of the following organisations? Do they address the key issues these organisations are facing?

[472] Specifically: 71% of the respondents involved in higher education, 74% of those involved in adult education, 78% of those in VET and 80% of those involved in school education consider "promoting cooperation, quality, inclusion and equity, excellence, creativity and innovation at the level of organisations and policies" as extremely relevant. See Annex II PC Report and also EQ13.

[473] Socio-economic actors survey: What was the main motivation for your organisation to participate in the programme?

remains especially problematic in the youth sector, where key informant interviews show that it is important that a broader range of organisations can receive support and develop their activities. Limited engagement of smaller organisations, particularly in KA2 projects, was also mentioned in the national reports from 15 countries[474]. This is often due to lack of administrative capacity[475] and limited resources to manage complex project requirements[476].

Regarding the international dimension of the programme, the views of key informants from NEOs, SALTOs, and EU Delegations are of particular importance. The organisations interviewed in third countries not associated to the Erasmus+ programme confirmed that learner and institutional needs are addressed via Erasmus+, especially regarding internationalisation, which remains a priority for many universities. For instance, in Colombia, Erasmus+ addresses student needs and supports university priorities, although achieving a broader organisational impact remains a challenge. In addition, international interviewees repeatedly recognised Erasmus+ for its role in supporting institutional capacity-building across various fields. This was particularly noted in regions such as Georgia, Africa, and Uzbekistan, where the programme has significantly contributed to upgrading and modernising teaching curricula. Policy stakeholders in these regions often use Erasmus+ to enhance their training structures, pedagogical programmes, and mobility schemes.

EQ 15.2: How successful is the programme in attracting and reaching target audiences and groups within different fields of the programme's scope?

Individual level

Programme data (supported by results from the beneficiary survey) show that Erasmus+ is attracting learners and staff with reasonably diverse profiles across the different fields of the programme's scope[477]. The programme data offer information on participants' diversity in terms of age and gender, while from the beneficiary survey we have further details on place of residence and parental education of the programme participants. Regarding gender, data consistently suggest an over-representation of females among the programme participants. Also, data presented in the 2022 Erasmus+ annual report show that 60% of the mobility opportunities were taken up by women in that year[478]. For some target groups, such as higher education students and teachers, this tendency is likely to reflect both the dominance of females in the population itself and girls' generally higher interest in participating in mobility programmes. In other cases – as for school pupils and youth – the higher representation of women (girls) than men (boys) is more due to the second factor. This shows that the programme remains more successful in attracting girls and women than boys and men.

Programme data show that the programme is more successful in attracting more senior (40+) staff members across the different sectors (apart from the youth sector). Women are also in a majority among practitioners – except for sport, where they are a minority, most likely reflecting the imbalances in the respective target groups. While key informants are

[474] BE, CY, DE, ES, HR, IE, IT, LT, LV, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, SK.

[475] BE, CY, DE, IE, MT, NL, NO.

[476] BE, HR, IE, LT, MT, NO, PL.

[477] The beneficiary surveys were based on samples not designed to be fully representative of all the programme participants. Programme data on the other hand provides a broad coverage (although with a reasonable number of invalid / missing data) and offers a more accurate representation of the underlying populations. Survey data is only used to describe characteristics where Programme data is not available.

[478] Erasmus+ annual report 2022 - Publications Office of the EU (europa.eu) https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/9020d5f5-8f3a-11ee-8aa6-01aa75ed71a1/language-en

generally satisfied with the outreach of the programme and the diversity of its participants, some consider that even more could be achieved, especially to attract more people with fewer opportunities (see also EQ16) – who are typically also hard-to-reach. Physical barriers, especially to reaching young people in remote and rural areas, appear to be a particular challenge and require even more targeted outreach actions. Similarly, the national reports repeatedly call for more effective communications strategies (explicitly mentioned in 11 countries). Austria, for instance, emphasises the need for targeted communication strategies to raise awareness and promote inclusivity among specific target groups. Similarly, Estonia highlights the importance of disseminating comprehensive information on the programme to current and potential beneficiaries to address knowledge gaps.

Organisation level

According to Erasmus+ Programme data, the combined share of distinct newcomer organisations between 2021 and 2023 under KA1 and KA2 was on average 13% out of the total distinct participating organisations. Altogether 25,820 newcomer organisations participated in these actions in the first three years of the ongoing programming period. At the same time, the share of less experienced organisations reached an average of 23%. Across the 2021 to 2023 period, most newcomers were attracted to the school education field (18%), followed by adult education (16%), while there were more less experienced organisations in adult education (28%) and somewhat less school education (22%). The share of less experienced organisations (26%) was similar in the youth sector, too[479]. The socio-economic actors' survey shows that as many as 20% of the respondent organisations had been involved in at least 10 projects across the various programme generations[480].

Programme data further suggest a decreasing level of competition under KA2 indirect management from the previous to the ongoing programme period. The success rate (i.e. the ratio of submitted and contracted projects) started out just below 20% at the start of the 2014-2020 period, but increased to more than 30% in later years, reaching an average of 28% for the entire programme. It increased to an average of 38% for the first three years of the 2021-2027 programme. Under direct management activities, the competition remained somewhat stronger, with a success rate of just 25%[481].

This does not mean, however, that the competition has decreased across the entire programme: in fact, 62% of the expert assessors participating in the survey[482] considered the competition for grants either as 'high' or 'very high' when compared to the previous period within their sectors of expertise. Still, this increase in the intensity of the competition was not accompanied by a clear increase in the quality of proposals[483]. Around half of the expert assessors who replied and were in a position to compare between the two generations perceived an improvement, while the remainder either did not perceive any change or even noted a decline in the quality of the proposals.

Regarding the types of organisations that might not be reached in the current situation of intense competition for Erasmus+ funding, key informants repeatedly mentioned that the programme does not sufficiently reach small organisations across the sectors and countries. Stakeholders highlighted the difficulties smaller-sized organisations face in

[479] Annex I - Technical Annex, Table 25.

[480] Socio-economic actors survey: In how many project(s) has your organisation participated either as a partner or coordinators since 2014?

[481] Annex I - Technical Annex, tables 80 to 82.

[482] Annex IV - Expert Assessors' survey: Please share your view on the following statements about the quality of project applications when comparing the two generations of Erasmus+. Under the current Erasmus+ Programme… the competition for grants in my sector of expertise is … very high / high / average / low / very low.

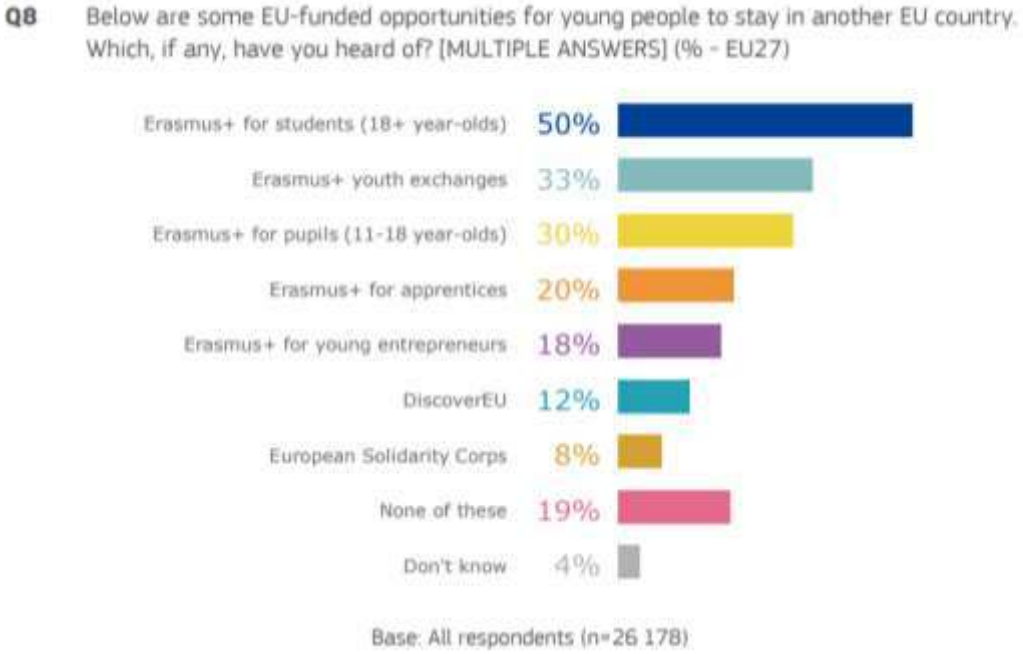
[483] Annex IV - Expert Assessors' survey: Please share your view on the following statements about the quality of project applications when comparing the two generations of Erasmus+. Under the current Erasmus+ Programme… the share of applications that are of good quality is … very high / high / average / low / very low.

mobilising themselves to apply for funding and implement projects, as they have fewer resources and are less equipped.

EQ 15.3: How well is the Erasmus+ programme known to the education and training, youth and sport communities?

The Erasmus+ programme, and especially its activities supporting mobility for higher education students, remains the single most well-known EU-funded programme among young people in Europe. The 2022 Flash Eurobarometer survey "Youth and Democracy in the European Year of Youth"[484] found that from a list of EU-funded opportunities for young people, half of the respondents identified "Erasmus+ for students (18+)" as familiar to them, and a similar ratio was found in the behavioural experiment survey carried out for this evaluation among young people who have not participated in the programme[485].

Figure 21: Young people's awareness of EU-funded opportunities. Eurobarometer survey 2022[486]



Source: Youth and Democracy in the European Year of Youth - May 2022 - Eurobarometer survey (europa.eu), https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2282

According to both this Eurobarometer survey and the behavioural experiment, the other actions are much less widely known. Awareness of the Erasmus+ youth exchanges reaches around 30% and of Erasmus+ for pupils from 25% (behavioural experiment survey) to 30% (Eurobarometer). Not surprisingly, young people are less aware of opportunities for staff members than for learners, as shown by the behavioural experiment survey. The Eurobarometer survey also found significant cross-country differences in young people's awareness of the various programme elements. For example, the percentage of young people who are aware of youth exchanges ranges from below 20% in Denmark, Sweden,

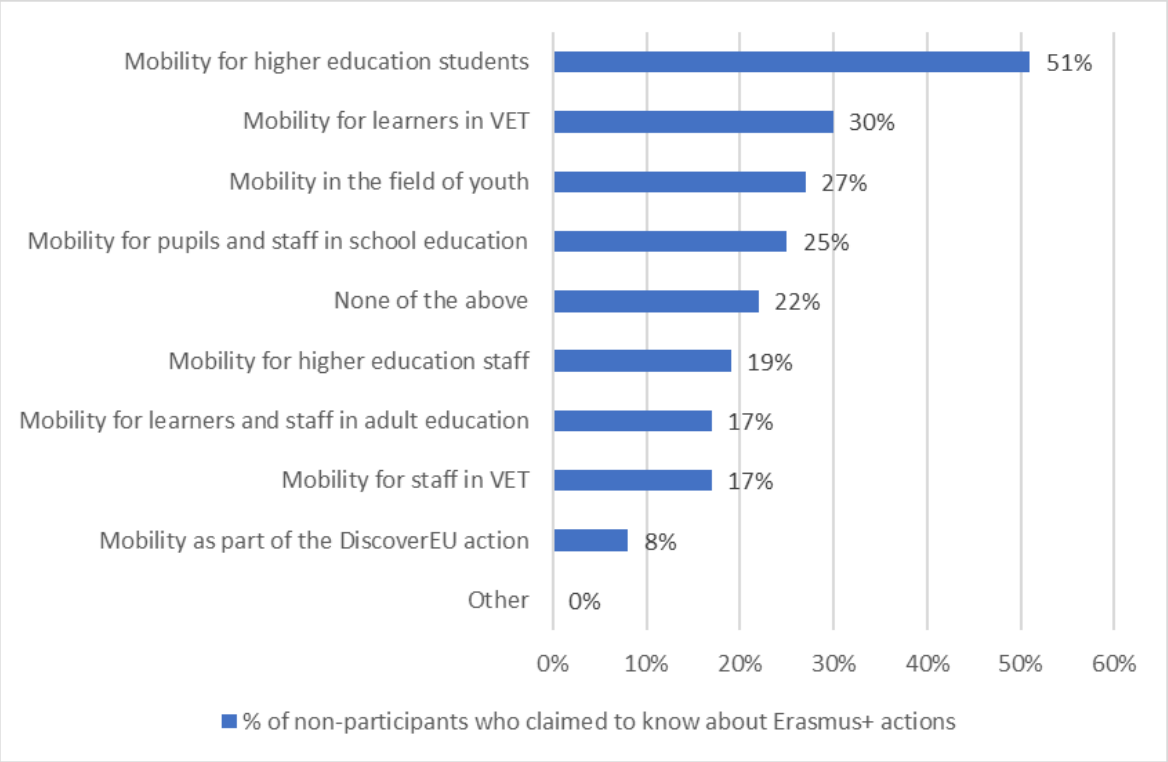
[484] Youth and Democracy in the European Year of Youth - May 2022 Eurobarometer survey *https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2282*

[485] As the sample used for the Behavioural Experiment does not include young people that have participated in the programme, it can be expected that it finds somewhat lower awareness as compared to the Eurobarometer.

[486] "Erasmus for young entrepreneurs" is not part of the Erasmus+ programme.

the Netherlands and Germany, to over 50% in Cyprus, Greece and Latvia. The proportion of young people who know about Erasmus+ for pupils is less than 15% in Sweden, the Netherlands and Denmark, while it is around 50% in Latvia, Slovenia, Cyprus and Greece.

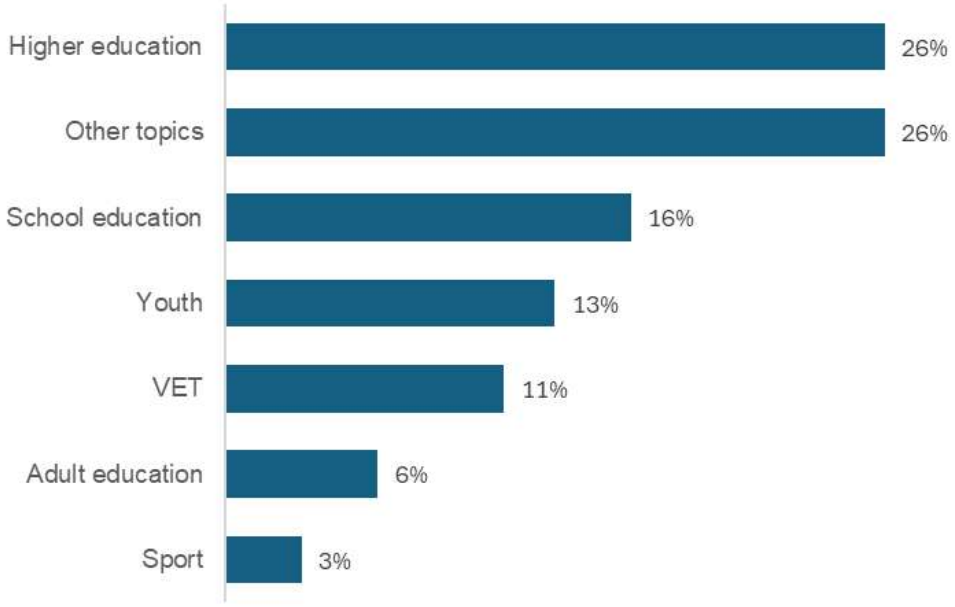
Figure 22: Which Erasmus+ actions do you have knowledge about? Familiarity with the various Erasmus+ actions (source: Behavioural experiment. N=10,985)



The social media analysis shows a high volume of discussions on Erasmus+ overall. To understand the prevalence of the different Erasmus+ sectors in social media discussions, over 124,000 posts, mainly from X/Twitter[487], were tagged by sector, based on the topic discussed. From this, 92,948 posts included at least one of the programme-level keywords and offer the possibility to compare the incidence of posts mentioning specific sectors. In these, all the programme sectors were extensively mentioned in the posts, suggesting that the Erasmus+ programme is quite widely known and is a popular topic discussed online amongst its various target audiences. Considering only those posts that specifically refer to Erasmus+, the highest share (26%) was related to higher education, confirming that this remains the sector most widely associated with the programme. However, when other, more sector-specific keywords – eTwinning, EPALE, DiscoverEU, European Week of Sport, #BeActive – are considered, then the related sectors move higher up the list.

[487] The social media analysis was carried out on the basis of analysing content about the Erasmus+ programme posted by users on various social media platforms: X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok. This analysis was performed using a social media listening tool, which does not provide equal data access to all social media platforms due to the different data privacy restrictions implemented by each of them. As a result, the vast majority of the posts collected come from X/Twitter, which apply the least restrictions to data collection, and hence the collected data cannot be considered representative of the overall social media activity that has taken place around the Erasmus+ programme during the period considered.

Figure 23: Social media posts classified by field (posts that mentioned the Erasmus+ programme, N=92,948)



Source: Social Media analysis. "Other topics" includes posts on Jean Monnet actions as well as other cross-sectoral or cross-cutting activities/topics (e.g. posts on Erasmus+ 35th anniversary, Brexit impact). The sum of percentages equals to 101 rather than 100 due to rounding.

The Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) largely confirm the high levels of awareness of the programme, with some interviewees also noting an improvement with respect to the previous programming period. The widespread awareness of the programme is again most evident in the higher education field where, *"everyone knows someone who has taken advantage of it"* (key informant, Austria). Still, improvements in the level of awareness were also reported in the youth sector (e.g. in Germany and Belgium) as well as in sport (e.g. in Romania). However, stakeholders also pointed to sectors and target groups where awareness was lacking, and to actions and activities which were less visible. While acknowledging some improvements as well as the efforts made by the National Agencies, difficulties in increasing awareness were reported for example in the sport sector in Czechia and Finland, in the adult education field in France and the youth sector in Spain. The key informants repeatedly called for (even) more targeted communications to reach new participants in these sectors. This view also appeared strongly in the national reports, 11 of which mentioned targeted communication strategies as an essential means to increase awareness and further promote inclusion[488]. Estonia for example highlights the importance of disseminating comprehensive information on the programme to current and potential beneficiaries to address knowledge gaps.

Among the different programme activities, opportunities for cooperation (KA2 and KA3) were highlighted by key informants as not being as well-known in Czechia, Denmark as well as in North Macedonia. In Czechia, limited awareness of opportunities to fund cooperation was mentioned in particular in the school sector, while in Denmark it was more of a concern in other sectors such as adult education, youth and sport. The perceived lack of awareness of opportunities for cooperation under KA2 and KA3 is likely to be related to the novelty of some activities in certain fields, especially in school education.

[488] AT, BEde, BG, CY, DE, EE, ES, FI, HR, IE, PL.

Companies were particularly likely to mention 'lack of awareness' as a potential barrier to participation for other organisations similar to theirs (43%, n=63), while the average across all respondents the socioeconomic actors' survey was 35% (n=1,138)[489].

EQ 15.4: In case some target groups are not sufficiently reached, what factors are limiting their access and what actions could be taken to remedy this? What are the reasons of non-participation of certain target groups, are there groups who chose not to participate or are there always external factors preventing them?

Individual level

Most of the reasons for non-participation identified for learners are related to individuals with fewer opportunities, which are discussed under EQ16. Additional barriers mentioned by stakeholders and reported also in some National Agencies' yearly reports (e.g. Romania,) concerned difficulties with admission procedures and requirements related to travel to and from countries outside the EU. These included practical difficulties to apply for and obtain a visa, as well as the high costs involved, issues which are also highlighted in the national report by Türkiye. A key informant in Bulgaria[490] reported that visa requirements are hindering potential international cooperation, for example, between Bulgaria and Sub-Saharan Africa. As the Bulgarian informant explained, there are just a few Bulgarian embassies across these countries and interested students would need to fly considerable distances to apply for a visa.

Regarding non-participant learners, the behavioural experiment carried out as part of this evaluation further shows that not being well-informed about the potential benefits of the programme also limits willingness to participate, both among higher education students and young people. This is particularly the case among males and those who have no pre-existing knowledge about Erasmus+. In addition, the experiment shows that providing details about how to find more information on Erasmus+ mobility actions has a significant positive effect on willingness to participate in the programme – suggesting that not knowing how to obtain details about participation also serves as an additional barrier for some.

The beneficiary staff survey asked respondents about obstacles based on the extent to which they can prevent them (or their colleagues) from taking part in international cooperation[491]. From the list of possible barriers, time constraints, financial and administrative difficulties as well as language barriers featured among the highest-ranking ones – each mentioned by over half of the respondents:

- workload and schedules, rendering it difficult to find time for travel and stays abroad (60% strongly agree or rather agree);
- administrative barriers during the application process (58%);
- administrative requirements for project management and reporting during the mobility activity (57%);
- requirements for co-funding from national or school budget are too high (56%);
- size of grants is too low to cover all expenses (54%);
- lack of necessary language skills (53%).

[489] Socio-economic actors survey: In your view, what are the main barriers for other organisations like yours to participate in Erasmus+ projects?

[490] Key Informant Interviews (national level).

[491] Beneficiary staff survey. Question to Programme participants: Do you think the following present a barrier for your peers/ colleagues to take part in international cooperation? Question to non-participants: To what extent does the following prevent you from taking part in international cooperation?

National reports from 22 countries also identify administrative burden as a significant barrier to participation in Erasmus+[492]. Based on the results of the beneficiary staff survey, some barriers are more pertinent in specific fields than in others. For example, staff in sport frequently noted insufficient funding opportunities as an important obstacle and finance-related constraints were also very frequently mentioned in the Youth field. Respondents in Schools, VET as well as in adult education stressed, on the other hand, that their workload and schedules make it impossible to find time for this type of work. In the education and training sector, only in higher education the administrative burden was perceived more serious when compared to time constraints. While some of these barriers are – at least in principle – possible to tackle as part of the programme design, this is not the case with the most frequently mentioned one, which is time and capacity constraints. In fact, practitioners who face challenges in leaving their regular roles, for example in primary schools, were mentioned as groups that are not only hard-to-reach but also unwilling to participate in the programme and are therefore particularly difficult to attract to Erasmus+, according to some key informants.

Organisation level

For organisations, the main barriers hindering participation in the Erasmus+ programme according to the socio-economic actors' survey[493] are the following:

- lack of available staff to get involved in such activities (49%),
- application procedures (40%),
- time constraints (36%),
- lack of knowledge about Erasmus+ (35%),
- finding the right partners (32%).

Lack of staff was the most frequently cited barrier across all types of organisations, including education and training organisations as well as the youth sector, public authorities, and companies. Application procedures continue to be perceived as an issue, despite the attempts made to ease the process at least in some action lines, particularly for civil society, youth organisations and public authorities. Among companies, lack of knowledge about the programme was cited rather frequently – by 43%, indicating the need for increased awareness about the programme among company representatives.

This list of main barriers, identified by respondents to the socio-economic actors' survey, reflects the observation from the KIIs (and discussed also under EQ15.2) that smaller organisations with limited resources might require more support to participate in the programme. In fact, some key barriers, such as lack of staff available to get involved in such activities as well as time constraints, are the barriers repeatedly mentioned by key informants in the context of small organisations. Similarly, the complexity of application procedures was also often raised as a particular difficulty for small(er) organisations. As a solution, a Belgian key informant even suggested that the package provided to higher education institutions to cover the costs linked to the management of each student going on a mobility experience should be inversely proportional to the size of the institution. The particular challenges faced by smaller organisations were also repeatedly raised in the national reports – particularly with a reference to KA2 projects (15 countries).

Lack of language skills did not feature at the top of the list above. However, it was mentioned by 23% of the socio-economic actors taking part in the survey and was also discussed by some key informants as a factor hindering organisations' participation. The issue was raised in Sweden, Finland, and Romania, and specifically regarding the sport sector. In Sweden, for example, it was suggested that sport clubs should be enabled to apply for funding at

[492] AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, IE, IT, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, RO, SE.

[493] Annex V - Socio-economic actors' survey: Question: 'In your view, what are the main barriers for other organisations like yours to participate in Erasmus+ projects?'.

national level rather than via procedures at EU level, to overcome language barriers. Contradicting views were expressed in France, where the sport sector was mentioned as one where language poses fewer barriers to participation compared to other sectors.

3.3.4 EQ 16 Relevance to hard-to-reach groups

EQ 16.1: To what extent is the design of Erasmus+ 2021-2027 oriented and adapted towards hard-to-reach groups, people with fewer opportunities (including inter alia people living in remote regions such as the EU outermost regions and overseas countries or territories) or specific disadvantaged groups of the population who traditionally do not engage in transnational or international activities as compared to other groups that benefit from the programme?

Main barriers to participation

The literature and document review provides good justification for the approach taken in the Erasmus+ programme[494] in defining people with fewer opportunities. First, surveys among potential participants in the mobility programmes – the Eurostudent[495], the SIEM[496] and the Eurodesk surveys[497] – consistently confirm the importance of the barriers as defined in the programme, especially the relevance of the economic and social barriers. Second, they also indicate a high level of accumulation of different barriers.

As discussed extensively in the literature[498], financial obstacles represent a key barrier to participation in mobility programmes. According to the surveys discussed here, direct economic barriers related to the financial costs of participating in the programme are often combined with other types of difficulties, including indirect financial costs, psychological costs and lack of language skills. Cultural and linguistic barriers were also highlighted as significant obstacles in the national reports in 12 countries[499], particularly for participants from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Indirect costs, such as losing a paid job while being away, is a great concern for many – but especially for young people from socially disadvantaged groups. Psychological costs, such as separation from family and other contacts, appeared as the second most important obstacle in the Eurostudent survey and, again, students from low-education backgrounds were particularly likely to refer to familial responsibilities. Lack of language skills, or the perception of having insufficient language skills, can also stop young people from participating in mobility programmes. Language barriers also appear to be an issue more for the socially disadvantaged than for others according to the three surveys listed above.

An additional barrier to participation which is not discussed to a great extent elsewhere but is repeatedly mentioned in the national reports, is related to mental health. Mental health

[494] Commission Implementing Decision - framework of inclusion measures of Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps 2021-27 | Erasmus+ and: Implementation guidelines - Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Inclusion and Diversity Strategy | Erasmus+

[495] Eurostudent survey (Hauschildt, K., Gwosć, K., Schirmer, H., Wartenbergh-Cras, F. (2021), *Social and Economic Conditions of Student Life in Europe*, EUROSTUDENT VII Synopsis of Indicators 2018–2021).

[496] Social Inclusion and Engagement in Mobility (SIEM) project survey (SIEM-survey-report_2022_10.pdf (siem-project.eu))

[497] The discussion is based on the results of a Eurodesk 2022 survey ED_survey_22_WEB_Final.pdf (eurodesk.eu)

[498] See the studies listed above as well as: European Commission 2023: Supporting Learning Mobility: Progress, obstacles and way forward Study on learning mobility - Publications Office of the EU (europa.eu); European Commission, Meng, C., Wessling, K., Mühleck, K.et al. (2020) *Eurograduate pilot survey – Design and implementation of a pilot European graduate survey.* Publications Office. https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/629271 ; Rahul Choudaha. (2017). *Three waves of international student mobility (1999–2020)*, Studies in Higher Education, Vol. 42, No. 5, pp. 825-832. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2017.1293872; Souto-Otero, M., Huisman, J., Beerkens, M., de Wit, H., & VujiĆ, S. (2013). Barriers to International Student Mobility: Evidence From the Erasmus Programme. Educational Researcher, 42(2), 70-77. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X12466696

[499] AT, BE, CY, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, IT, LV, NO, PL.

concerns and the need for additional support in this area were discussed in six national reports.

Despite the challenges these barriers represent to participation, it is evident that there are many programme participants with fewer opportunities. This can be seen from the beneficiaries' profiles both in the programme data and in the beneficiary survey. This suggests a certain level of success in inclusion efforts. Data further confirm that economic obstacles remain the most frequent barrier among programme participants. Other obstacles are mentioned far less frequently, but still by a significant share of the various programme participant groups.

Compared to beneficiaries in other sectors, higher education students participating in the programme are relatively less likely to face barriers, which may be related to the already privileged situation of this target group compared to others[500]. In the beneficiary learner survey higher education students are the least likely to mention any barrier but, even then half of them mention at least one. VET and adult learners in the programme face more obstacles, with 6 out of 10 mentioning at least one, while the share is even higher among the beneficiaries of youth actions[501]. As seen in the survey data, obstacles are often cumulative, as acknowledged in the programme's inclusion and diversity strategy[502], with participants often facing more than one barrier at the same time. Among survey participants in the youth sector, 49% face more than one barrier and 30% face more than two. Many learners who mentioned one of the non-financial barriers often also struggle with economic difficulties. These findings confirm the observations of many stakeholders and key informants that financial barriers to participation are particularly frequent in specific hard-to-reach groups, such as young people with disabilities, those living in rural areas, etc.

The Network analysis carried out as part of this evaluation provides further insights into the involvement in mobilities of people with fewer opportunities from the different countries. Between 2021 and 2023 there were 1.6 million mobilities, comprised of learners and staff, of which 134,228 (12%) were identified as having fewer opportunities. The best-connected Member States in terms of either sending or receiving of learners and staff with fewer opportunities were Belgium, Germany, and France. It is however important to note that both the programme and the survey data cover programme participants, which thus does not reflect the real magnitude of the problem among non-participants.

According to the social media analysis carried out as part of this evaluation, the majority of the Erasmus+-related posts on social media (74%) were sent from urban locations, while 22% were sent from intermediate locations, and only 4% from rural locations – a reflection of the more limited access of the rural population to the programme[503]. Besides living in a rural area, living in an outermost region is also considered to be an obstacle to participating in Erasmus+. Programme data provide information on the number of participants from such regions by call year, field and sending country[504]. The data show the highest activity from these regions in the higher education field, followed by school education and VET. The data

[500] Higher education students represent a socially selected population as shown e.g. by the latest EUROSTUDENT survey, (EUROSTUDENT_8_Synopsis_of_Indicators.pdf) with regards to parents' education level. Challenges to social inclusion among higher education students related to ethnicity, immigrant background, disability…. are also discussed in Crosier and Haj (2020): Evolving Social Dimension of the European Higher Education Area. In: Curaj et.al (ed): European Higher Education Area. Spinger Evolving Social Dimension of the European Higher Education Area | SpringerLink

[501] School pupils are not considered in this comparison, as the reliability of their reports e.g. on their families' economic situation is likely to be limited.

[502] Implementation guidelines - Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Inclusion and Diversity Strategy

[503] According to Eurostat (Eurostat, 2021 data. File:Distribution of area according to various typologies, 2021 (% share of total area) URE2023.png - Statistics Explained (europa.eu)) 44.7% of the European population lives in rural areas. Note that the main target groups of the Erasmus+ programme belong to younger age groups, who are more concentrated in urban locations. Also social media posts recorded in the analysis include those generated from business accounts, which are most likely based in urban or intermediate regions.

[504] Annex I - Technical Annex, Tables 83 and 84.

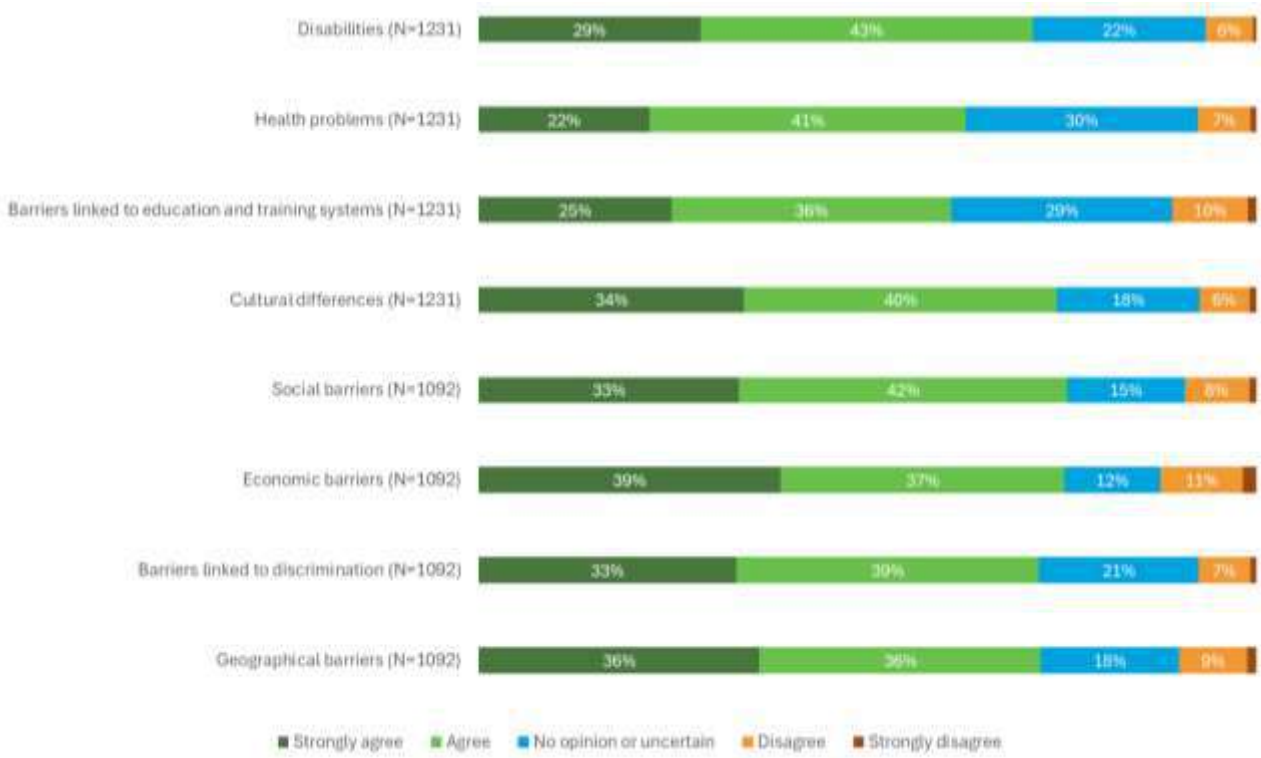
for sport are obviously the lowest as the action only started in 2023, for which data were incomplete at the time of the analysis. The Canary Islands are by far the outermost region most actively involved in the programme, followed by Açores and Martinique.

Based on the behavioural experiment, effective ways of improving the willingness to participate in the programme among young people aged 18 to 30 with fewer opportunities, in any relevant sector of the programme, include providing more information about the potential benefits of the programme and about effective ways of finding information about it. The effectiveness of such interventions, however, might vary across groups facing different kinds of barriers. Giving information about the benefits of the programme increases willingness to participate less for people who have disabilities, health problems or face cultural differences, than for people who are affected by barriers linked to education and training systems, economic barriers and geographical barriers. In addition, people who face several barriers are also likely to be more impacted by receiving more information about the potential benefits of the programme than those with one barrier only. Regarding the other type of intervention, which is explaining where information is available, the experiment shows that this method is more effective in increasing willingness to participate for those who are affected by fewer opportunities in general, and especially those who face multiple barriers.

Stakeholders' views on barriers and on the programme's efforts to mitigate them

In the PC, the majority of respondents agreed that Erasmus+ is successfully facilitating the participation of people with fewer opportunities facing various barriers, although the respondents were more likely to 'agree' than to 'fully agree'. The highest level of agreement concerns the success in facilitating the participation of people who face cultural differences (40% 'agree' and 34% 'strongly agree'); social barriers (42% 'agree' and 33% 'strongly agree'); and economic barriers (37% 'agree' and 39% 'strongly agree'). Health problems and barriers linked to the education and training system were considered to be the least positively handled, but still with an overall level of agreement of around 60%. Overall, the views can be considered as highly positive but still pointing to room for further strengthening of the inclusivity of the programme.

Figure 24: Public Consultation - To what extent do you agree with the following statements: Erasmus+ is an inclusive programme as it facilitates participation of people with fewer opportunities facing the following barrier(s) –Summary of overall results



European, international, and national key informants interviewed broadly acknowledged the enhanced focus and efforts of the programme to reach people with fewer opportunities, as did those consulted as part of the case studies. The programme's focus on social inclusion and tackling inequalities is considered to be adequate by the EU Delegations, National Erasmus+ offices (NEOs), and the international organisations, as well as by SALTO Resource Centres. The use of blended learning and digital tools is seen as a positive step to reach a broader socio-economic range, as well as the expansion into vocational education and teacher participation. At the national level, stakeholders from several countries noted that the 2021-2027 programme made significant efforts to encourage participation among people with fewer opportunities and that the current programme responded better to the needs of groups with fewer opportunities, compared to the previous period. A key informant from Denmark praised the increased flexibility of Erasmus+ in this respect, "*This programme does real inclusion, beneficiaries are able to apply for extra funding if needed - if a particular learner has an additional need costing 1,000 extra euros, that can be done. This is a great development, because in the previous programme, if a learner had additional requirements there was no flexibility in the budget to allow this and the learner would not have been able to go*."

Alongside the high appreciation for the increased inclusiveness measures, some (over 25) key informants noted how – despite the efforts taken – the various barriers continued to reduce access to the programme. Concerns regarding the effectiveness of current measures were raised, particularly in achieving tangible results for marginalised groups such as young people in rural areas, learners with disabilities, etc.

Financial barriers emerge as a key concern from the various stakeholder consultations as well. A few stakeholders (five at the European level, plus two at the national level) considered that the current grant amounts were insufficient to ensure equal access to

mobility programmes among participants. As a respondent to the PC phrased it: *"It is important to enhance more inclusion on mobility. The grants should be enough to cover the living and learning cost of the mobile learners, including adults."* National-level key informants from six countries emphasised the additional financial difficulties caused by the recent high inflation rates across Europe. These observations are also underpinned by the national reports, with insufficient and sometimes ineffective support for inclusion being discussed in 17 reports[505]. This includes concerns about inadequate levels of top-up funding for participants with fewer opportunities not reflecting the complex needs of support these people face[506], lack of targeted support for specific groups such as people with disabilities[507], and insufficient resources for comprehensive inclusion strategies[508].

In the various consultations, financial barriers are often mentioned in relation to other barriers, reinforcing the programme's emphasis on the correlations between the various difficulties. In addition, out of the 269 PC respondents that disagreed with a series of statements regarding the performance of Erasmus+[509], 21% (57) mentioned that travel costs are not realistically calculated, especially for people living in rural areas, with the green travel grant not being sufficient to cover the difference in cost between air travel and more sustainable forms of transport being a particular theme. Also, 4% of these respondents (n=12) said that people with fewer opportunities are not given enough funding – suggesting a possible lack of full understanding of the grant possibilities that would in fact allow participants to apply for exceptional costs in such cases.

While overall the definition of people with fewer opportunities as provided in the inclusion and diversity strategy is considered to be adequate, two SALTO representatives and one European Commission-based informant asked for a further refinement of the definition for more operational purposes. Two key informants from EC services, for example, noted challenges in aligning the criteria for fewer opportunities across diverse contexts, adding that the categories of people with fewer opportunities remained very broadly defined. They considered that additional guidance on the implementation and utilisation of the indicators would be helpful, a need that was also mentioned by some national-level interviewees and in case studies (please see also EQ 12.2 for a similar argument).

Further, two EU-level informants also expressed a need for detailed data disaggregation (specifically covering gender, persons with disabilities, ethnic and minority groups, and socio-economic status) to have a better understanding of the Erasmus+ programme's outreach. The difficulties arising from applying the same definitions across various contexts was also flagged by international key informants, noting that the term social inclusion may be understood differently in third countries participating in the programme. They further noted that not all elements or dimensions of the concept may align with national priorities. Importantly, the issue of alignment between the national context and priorities was also highlighted in EU Member States, specifically in Austria and Estonia.

The national reports give further evidence on the remaining challenges to inclusivity. Difficulty in reaching people with fewer opportunities and disadvantaged groups was

[505] AT, BEfr, CY, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, IE, IT, LT, LU, MT, NL, NO, PL, SE.

[506] DE, FR, NO.

[507] AT, BEfr, CY, IE, IT, MT, NO.

[508] BE, ES, FI, LT, LU, NL, PL, SE.

[509] Annex II - PC report. Question: 'Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements: Erasmus+ is performing well in…'.

reported in 23 countries[510] with a reference to lack of awareness [511], complex application procedures[512] and – most often – financial barriers[513].

3.3.5 EQ 17 Evolution of relevance between the two periods

EQ 17.1: What is the relevance of Erasmus+ 2021-2027 compared to the relevance of Erasmus+ 2014-2020? Has it been improved in the new programme generation?

The interim evaluation of the Erasmus+ 2014-2020 programming period reported a high level of alignment between the objectives of the programme and EU-level policy priorities at the time. Evidence collected for this evaluation similarly suggests a high level of alignment and even some improvements, linked by many stakeholders to the clear and explicit horizontal priorities set for the present programming period. As discussed under EQ13, the four priorities are generally considered to be well aligned with the EU policy priorities and to address the main socio-economic challenges Europe is facing today. Stakeholders across the various consultation activities welcomed the introduction of these horizontal priorities in the programme. Moreover, in the National reports, the evolution of the programme between the 2014-2020 and the 2021-2027 programming period was consistently more positively perceived in terms of relevance by participating countries.

Notable improvements in the level of relevance of the programme are also shown by some direct comparisons between the current and previous programming periods made by various stakeholder groups. Two-thirds of the respondents to the NA/EACEA survey confirmed that the current programme is more relevant to the current and emerging needs in the main target groups than the 2014-2020 Erasmus+ generation, compared to less than 1% perceiving a decline. Regarding the alignment of the current generation of the Erasmus+ actions with the EU priorities, 90% of respondents to the NA/EACEA survey reported an improvement, while 62% agreed that the current programme supports actions that are more aligned with national priorities than the previous one.

At the level of projects funded, a slightly less pronounced, but still positive trend is emerging. In the expert assessors' survey, 34% reported an improvement in the alignment with policy priorities at the national/EU level, while a similar share reported no change and only 2% perceived a decline[514]. 51% indicated that the share of projects addressing topics high on the European policy agenda is greater than in the previous period, while 38% reported that the share of projects addressing topics that are high on the national policy agenda increased since the previous period, compared to 11% perceiving a decline[515].

While it is not possible to compare the share of distinct less-experienced organisations across the two programming periods due to a lack of available data[516], the sharp increase in the number of such organisations from 2021 to 2022 suggests a positive trend altogether. At the same time, the comparison of success rates under KA2 indirect management shows an increase between the two periods – from an average of 28% in the 2014-2020 period to

[510] AT, BE, BG, CY, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, HR, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, SE, SK.

[511] ES, BG, CY, IE, LT, LV, MT, NL.

[512] BE, CY, DE, IE, MT, NL, NO, PL.

[513] AT, BE, CY, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, IE, IT, LU, MT, NO, PL, PT.

[514] Annex IV - Expert Assessor survey: Q34 When comparing the current Erasmus+ programme generation to the previous one, in your view, the alignment of projects and their results with the policy priorities at the national / EU level has: improved / remained the same / worsened?

[515] Annex IV - Expert Assessor Survey, Q21 Please share your view on the following statements about the quality of project applications when comparing the two generations of Erasmus+. Under the current Erasmus+ programme… ... the share of projects addressing topics that are high on the policy agenda of my country / on the European policy agenda: very high / high/ average / low / very low.

[516] Data on less experienced organisations was not collected under the previous programming period.

38% between 2021 and 2023[517]. This is linked to the exceptionally higher budget allocated (and transferred) to KA2 in the first two years of the 2021-2027 programme due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and may suggest that moving towards offering smaller budgets but to a larger number of organisations under KA2 increased the probability of success.

Moving to the relevance of the programme-funded projects and actions to a series of more specific EU policy priorities, a somewhat less clear, but overall positive picture emerges. The NA/EACEA survey shows that the relevance of the programme across the various fields is considered to have either improved or remained unchanged since the previous period[518]. With regard to the various EU policy priorities in the field of education and training, an improvement was perceived by at least 19% of respondents concerning some policy priorities (reducing early school leaving, increasing higher education attainment) and for others by up to 73% (promoting equality, social cohesion and citizenship) and even 84% (improving digital and green skills) (n=113). Over half of the respondents from the youth sector (n=29) perceived an improvement with regard to supporting volunteering and youth organisations to provide opportunities for participation. Finally, in the sport sector, an increase of relevance was observed by 63% with respect to promotion of participation in sport and health-enhancing activity.

At the same time, the data does not allow for a clear assessment of some more critical points emerging from this evaluation. In particular, it is not possible to directly compare the involvement of members of the hard-to-reach groups (i.e. young people experiencing economic, social, health-related or other barriers) in the programme across the two programming periods. Their access to the programme has been a concern for a long time, as already emphasised in the interim evaluation of the 2014-2020 programme. Key informants in the present evaluation agreed that some progress has been made since then, the extent of which can unfortunately not be assessed. The programme data only allows a direct comparison between the number of participants from outermost regions, and this number already reached a relatively high level in 2020, to which it returned in 2022 after a short decline.

3.4 Coherence

3.4.1 EQ 18 Internal coherence

EQ 18.1: To what extent are the objectives of different programme fields within Erasmus+ 2021-2027 consistent and mutually supportive? What evidence exists of synergies between the different programme fields and actions? How well do different actions work together? To what extent are there duplications, overlaps, or other clashes between the programme fields and how are they dealt with?

The overall structure of the Erasmus+ 2021-2027 programme is generally viewed as being internally coherent. The early years of the 2014-2020 programming period were challenging in terms of coherence, as several predecessor programmes were integrated into a single structure, which demanded significant adjustments and learning from all programme stakeholders. The current structure is now seen as consistent and logically connected with programme objectives, as per the evidence summarised below.

[517] Annex I - Technical Annex, Tables 80 to 82.

[518] Annex III - NA/EACEA Survey: To what extent are the individual actions and projects funded under Erasmus+ aligned with key EU policy priorities?

Most (27) of the national reports consider that the objectives of different programme fields are consistent and mutually supportive[519]. The different programme actions work well together with no overlaps or inconsistencies identified between the different actions or fields. The national reports also identify evidence of collaboration between the different programme fields and actions. Similarly, a vast majority of respondents to the NA/EACEA survey[520] (87%) agreed that the programme has good internal coherence. A large majority (74%) also considered that the programme architecture is coherent, whilst another 73% found that the actions supported by Erasmus+ do not overlap with each other. The objectives and intended effects of all actions are well thought through, each contributing to achieving objectives set out in the programme's intervention logic.

The programme is efficiently anchored into EU policy priorities as well as relevant policy area goals and strategies (e.g. European Education Area, EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027, EU Work Plan for Sport), creating a logical link between these and the Erasmus+ priorities and objectives.

The programme architecture comprising of three Key Actions, separating opportunities for individuals, organisations and policy development and cooperation respectively, is deemed sufficiently clear and consistent. The overall value of JMA is clearly recognised; however, the current separation of JMA from the KAs is found confusing and impractical. It was suggested by some to integrate JMA into the structure of KAs[521].

The current Erasmus+ offer is considered comprehensive and complementary. Consulted stakeholders (including National Agencies workshop, NA/EACEA survey, and EU-level key informant interviews), agreed that there are no patently missing actions. However, the wide scope and – to some extent inevitable – complexity of the programme can make it difficult for newcomers and less experienced organisations to grasp the full range of opportunities available.

The increased focus on cross-sectoral collaboration under the current Erasmus+ programme is a welcome and positive step, much in line with the programme's core objectives and strengthening its internal coherence. Evidence for this has been found through KIIs, case studies, NA/EACEA survey and the PC. Cross-sectoral cooperation occurs most frequently between the youth and sport sectors, considering target audiences often show similarities. Further, national key informant interviews suggest that a good cross-sectoral collaboration exists between VET and higher education in actions such as the Alliances for Innovation[522], whereas partnerships between universities, schools and VET institutions are encouraged via the CoVEs[523] and European University initiatives[524]. Similarly, illustrative examples have been found through the case studies undertaken as part of this evaluation on: (i) how Erasmus+ fosters cooperation with the labour market (e.g. with businesses) and policymakers, and (ii) how such collaborations provide the programmes' overall ability to steer cross-sectoral cooperation, further demonstrating the efficiency and complementarity of its structure to ensure synergies across fields.

[519] AT, BEnl, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, IS, IT, LI, LV, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, RS, SK, SI, TR.

[520] For further details, refer to the Annex III - NA/EACEA survey Q10: - To what extent do you agree with the following statements: The programme has a good internal coherence, The programme architecture comprising of three Key Actions and the Jean Monnet actions is coherent. The actions supported by Erasmus+ do not overlap with each other.

[521] Consulted as part of scoping interviews, workshop with National Agencies of June 2023, workshop on draft final report of July 2024.

[522] https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-b/key-action-2/alliances-innovation#:~:text=Alliances%20for%20Innovation%20aim%20to%20strengthen

[523] https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-b/key-action-2/centres-vocational-excellence

[524] https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/european-universities-initiative

Box 12: Case study example demonstrating the programme's capacity to foster cross-sectoral collaboration

CS Pilot PoVE Water, CIV Water (NL): *The PoVE project focused mainly on the skills development of VET students and support to structural international collaboration between various organisations in education, research and professional practice. Before the PoVE, interviewees indicate that there was no international student mobility and that international cooperation was ad hoc. After the pilot, the project impact analysis (a baseline measurement and evaluation questionnaire) and interviews revealed that a positive impact was achieved among all stakeholder groups (VET/HEI students, teachers and management of VET/HEI and water boards and water industry professionals), in all involved regions and for nearly all observed criteria*[525]*.*

EQ 18.2: To what extent are the actions implemented under direct and indirect management coherent? How do they interact/complement each other?

As indicated above, the Erasmus+ programme demonstrates a good degree of internal coherence. A key strength is that it pursues its objectives through a combination of actions under direct and indirect management. Whilst this management model is generally viewed positively, several stakeholders noted that it was making it challenging for non-specialised audiences to understand the implementation modality of specific actions. National Agency representatives often expressed concerns regarding the interaction and flow of information between implementing bodies of directly and indirectly managed actions, which may negatively impact coherence.

The two issues, which are connected, both point towards insufficient communication and lack of transparency, rather than suggesting incoherence or overlaps between actions under direct and indirect management. Indeed, respondents to the NA/EACEA survey called for strengthened coordination and communication, particularly between the EACEA and National Agencies to ensure greater alignment in the overall implementation of the programme. In their view, actions under direct and indirect management sometimes seem to belong to different programmes, with no clear links between them. They called specifically for closer collaboration and better communication with the EACEA (see also EQ 11.2 and 11.3 for further details). For example, National Agencies consider it important that information about projects awarded grants under direct management as well as rejected project proposals is shared with them.

Several National Agencies also advocated for reducing the overall number of actions under direct management along with the budget available. Concrete examples of actions that could be moved to decentralised management, however, were not provided. Further, as discussed in EQ11.1.1 and EQ11.1.2, reducing the share of budget available for actions under direct management could negatively impact the programme's ability to pursue pan-European objectives and challenges through large-scale projects.

Another suggestion made to improve the coherence of actions under direct and indirect management is the systematic harmonisation of calls and application processes, so as to foster a 'one Erasmus+' perception among (potential) applicants and beneficiaries.

[525] Pilot Platform of Vocational Excellence Water (Pilot PoVE Water), https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/612632-EPP-1-2019-1-NL-EPPKA2-SSA-P ; PoVE Water Scale up - Platform of Vocational Excellence Water Scale-up, https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/101055851

EQ 18.3: Key Action 2: How appropriate is the structure of KA2? How complementary are the Actions and what contributions do these make in reaching the Erasmus+ objectives?

Results of the NA/EACEA survey and KIIs suggest a good level of coherence between KA2 and the rest of the programme. Whilst it is appreciated that KA2 provides distinct types of funding opportunities at both direct and indirect management levels, its structure is seen as somewhat confusing by stakeholders. Related to this, a handful of participants in the workshop with National Agencies (June 2023) and the one on the draft final report (July 2024) argued that KA2 had become overly broad, resulting in a loss of its prior focus on driving innovation. A common criticism of KA2 among some of the consulted National Agency representatives relates to its overly prominent focus on the development of tangible outputs (i.e. apps, websites, manuals, learning material), which, based on collected views, often appear to be of insufficient quality and exploited to a limited extent only (see EQ2.2 regarding dissemination and exploitation of results). Against this, the Programme Guide requires that results of Cooperation Partnerships "*should be re-usable, transferable, up-scalable"*[526]*.* Further, it was argued during the workshop with NAs of June 2023 that cooperation among participating organisations and institutions often tends to end immediately upon project completion, which questions KA2's capacity to deliver longer-term results and systemic change. Case studies[527] revealed good examples, such as strengthened capacity (i.e. organisation and project management, teaching and learning methods) or tangible benefits (i.e. IT infrastructure development) which provide sustainable results[528].

Overview of Key Action 2

KA2 supports cooperation among organisations and institutions. Projects are expected to result in the development, transfer and implementation of innovative practices at organisational, local, regional, national or European levels. To this end, this Key Action supports:

- Partnerships for Cooperation, including Cooperation Partnerships and Small-scale Partnerships;
- Partnerships for Excellence, including Centres for Vocational Excellence, European University alliances, Erasmus+ Teacher Academies and Erasmus Mundus;
- Partnerships for Innovation, including Alliances and Forward-looking projects;
- Capacity Building projects in the fields of higher education, vocational education and training, youth and sport;
- Not-for-profit European sport events.

The importance of KA2 within the programme is well demonstrated both by the share of contracted grants (42% in 2021, 36% in 2022, 33% in 2023)[529] and by the number of projects funded[530]. These figures also suggest, however, that after a budget shift to KA2 during the COVID-19 pandemic (i.e. due to travel restrictions, mobility projects were put on hold/ postponed/ recalibrated), an increasing focus has been placed again on KA1. Whilst this means that the budget share of KA2 within the overall programme shows a stagnation

[526] For further details, see Erasmus+ Programme Guide. https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-b/key-action-2/cooperation-partnerships 4

[527] For instance, Case studies E29 (formerly, Ifjúsági Nomád Klub) (YOU, HU); TU Berlin - ENHANCE Alliance (HED, DE); Univerza v Mariboru (HED, SI); Thomas More – Sportleg partnership (SPO, BE); Chambre de Métiers et de l'Artisanat Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes (VET, FR); Kauno technologijų mokymo centras (VET, LT)

[528] Further, illustrative examples of sustainable results beyond the project duration in terms of tangible outputs, outcomes and impacts are included under EQ25.2

[529] Erasmus+ 'Programme Results Dashboard, extracted by ICF on the 5th January 2024. Data for 2023 is provisional and should be treated cautiously.

[530] Number of contracted projects: 2021: 4,799, 2022: 4,073, 2023: 2,778.

or a decrease in the last couple of years, the budget for contracted grants has been growing in absolute terms[531]. The number of funded projects has, however, declined, somewhat limiting the programme's capacity to steer and deliver cooperation among organisations and hampering KA2's overall coherence with its objectives.

Analysis of contracted grants and project numbers indicate that projects are rather evenly distributed across education and training and youth. Only the sport field has a significantly lower number of contracted projects and grants due to the overall lower budget allocated to the Sport sector (see table 85 of annex I). For education and training and youth fields, this shows a move away from the trend of the 2014-2020 programme, where KA2 project numbers under school education were disproportionately higher than in other fields and sectors – as during the 2014-2020 period, pupil mobility was part of KA2 (KA229 School Exchange Partnerships projects), whilst in the 2021-2027 programme it has moved to KA1. This is an important change, which results in a more coherent and aligned funding landscape across fields and sectors. However, a substantial difference exists in the average value of grants in each field (highest in higher education – EUR 1,013,245 and lowest in youth – EUR 135,879). Whilst this is partially explained by the differing funding need and capacity across the various programme fields, it might be worth reviewing whether such a gap is justified or may need to be somewhat reduced in the future.

KA2's coherence with the overall programme and its contribution to programme objectives

In accordance with the programme's intervention logic[532], KA2 is key to deliver change at institutional and organisational level. This means that, overall, both the place and role of KA2 within the overall Erasmus+ programme are fully justified and coherent. Questions arise, however, in regard to its strong emphasis on producing tangible outputs (i.e. apps, websites, manuals, learning material), and the perceived low quality of the outputs produced in many cases – a view that featured strongly during the workshop with National Agency representatives of June 2023[533]. Further, a good share of the projects and products do not survive after Erasmus+ funding ends and beyond mandatory sustainability measures[534] (see also EQ2.2 on this point). This has also been confirmed through the project sample review undertaken as part of this evaluation, which found that a good share of the project websites developed are no longer accessible. This suggests that the collaboration process may be more important than the concrete outputs in many instances. This, in turn, can lead to the establishment of an extended community of practitioners. This 'collateral benefit' is crucial to build strong networks that can contribute to the development and implementation of policies in the fields covered by the programme. In that spirit, funding online portals (European School Education Platform, Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe, European Youth Portal) under KA2 is logical and coherent.

Recommendations to ensure greater coherence of KA2 and its contribution to programme objectives

Whilst the logic of KA2's contribution to the programme objectives is well-evidenced, a number of options to further improve its structure, clarity and contribution to the programme arise from the above analysis and stakeholder consultations (KIIs, NA/EACEA survey, case studies).

- **Strengthening inclusivity:** due to internal capacity and resources, larger organisations tend to apply more than smaller organisations, hampering

[531] KA2 Contracted grants 2021: EUR 987,380,375, 2022: EUR 1,207,289,550, 2023: 1,170,765,746.

[532] See the programme's intervention logic Annex I – Technical Annex.

[533] Workshop with NA representatives, organised in Brussels on 14 June 2023 to support the evaluation work.

[534] For instance, maintaining the project website for a defined period of time following the end of the funding period.

inclusiveness. Moreover, organisations applying for KA2 actions under direct management are often the same. It was suggested that a mechanism to ensure wider and more inclusive participation could be introduced (e.g. limit the number of projects an organisation can apply to – already in place for actions under indirect management, allocating a share of the budget specifically to new organisations).

- **Increasing the budget available for KA2:** As specified above, the share of KA2 within the overall Erasmus+ budget has been stagnating or even decreasing since the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. Several stakeholders call for increased KA2 budget, to strengthen coherence with and contribution to programme objectives.
- **Structuring KA2 opportunities along the various Erasmus+ fields**, as is the case for KA1. This would help (potential) applicants navigate through the programme and identify the most suitable funding option for their project ideas.
- **Introducing KA2 sport projects under indirect management:** to contribute to further professionalisation and ensure smaller sport organisations have the possibility and capacity to apply at national level.
- **Reconsidering the difference in size between KA220 and KA210:** A large KA220 project can receive up to a EUR 400,000 maximum grant, the equivalent of up to 13 smaller KA210 projects (EUR 30,000 minimum grant). Such a large discrepancy raises questions as to whether spending such a large budget for just one partnership, even with very good products, is justified when the same funding could support many smaller partnerships to learn, develop and contribute to Erasmus+ objectives and priorities.

Finally, as noted above, sustainability of KA2 cooperations and specific project results are limited. Hence, further targeted research might be needed on what support measures could be provided or how the funds could be used in alternative ways to ensure lasting collaborations and sustained exploitation of developed results.

3.4.2 EQ 19 External coherence – EU level

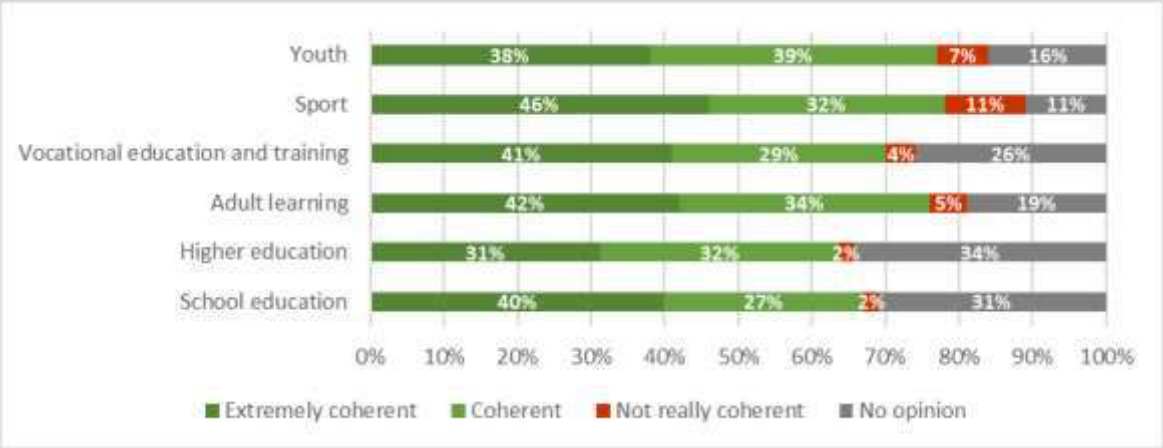
EQ 19.1: To what extent is Erasmus+ 2021-2027 coherent with relevant EU policies and programmes with similar objectives, such as Creative Europe, European Solidarity Corps, Horizon Europe (in particular EIT, MSCA and 'Widening participation and strengthening the ERA' parts), ALMA, 2021-2027 Cohesion Policy programmes funded under European Social Fund (ESF)+ and European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) (including mainstream and ETC programmes)

Article 32 of the 2021-2027 Erasmus+ Regulation states the importance of the programme's complementarity with other EU programmes, policies and funds: *"The Programme shall be implemented so as to ensure its overall consistency and complementarity with other relevant Union policies, programmes and funds, in particular those relating to education and training, culture and the media, youth and solidarity, employment and social inclusion, research and innovation, industry and enterprise, digital policy, agriculture and rural development, environment and climate, cohesion, regional policy, migration, security and international cooperation and development."*

The evidence collected in this evaluation points to a very high level of complementarity between Erasmus+ and other EU programmes with similar objectives. 66% of PC respondents indicated that Erasmus+ is fully or partially coherent with other EU funding

opportunities, while only 3% believe it is not[535]. A further split into sectors, as illustrated in the figure below, shows that coherence is perceived as highest in the sport sector, with 46% considering it extremely coherent, while sectors like youth and vocational education and training also show high levels of perceived coherence, with lower coherence levels observed in higher education and a notable share of respondents having no opinion in several sectors, especially in higher education (34%) and school education (31%).

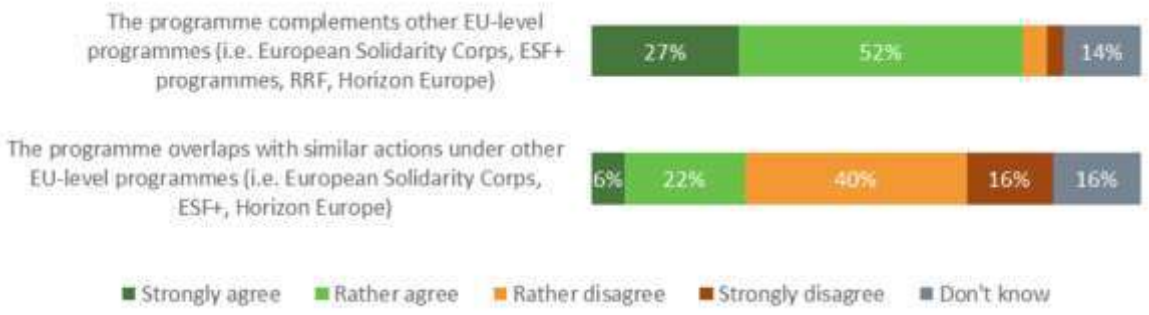
Figure 25: Coherence of Erasmus+ with other EU funding opportunities/instruments addressing the education, training, youth and sport sectors



Source: Public consultation, Question: "The Erasmus+ programme should be complementary to and provide synergies with other funding instruments available at national, EU or International level, working coherently with them, while avoiding overlaps. Please comment whether, and if so to which extent, the Erasmus+ programme is coherent with: Other EU funding opportunities/instruments addressing the education, training, youth and sport sectors (such as European Social Fund Plus, European Solidarity Corps, Interreg programmes, National Recovery and Resilience Facility, etc.)." N=1225

Similarly, almost 80% of respondents to the NA/EACEA survey stated that Erasmus+ complements other EU programme.

Figure 26: Complementarity of Erasmus+ and similar programmes at the EU level



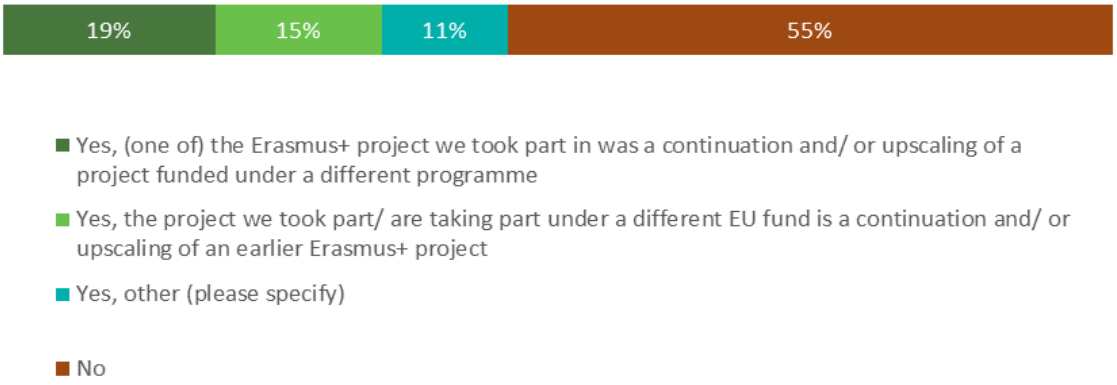
Source: NA/EACEA survey, N=164

[535] Annex II - PC report, Other EU funding opportunities/instruments addressing the education, training, youth and sport sectors (66% out of 1,225 respondents).

Similarly, coherence with other EU initiatives is pointed out as good in national reports from 14 countries[536].

Furthermore, the Survey of socio-economic actors shows that, among the respondents who either took part previously (35%) or are taking part currently (30%) in another EU-funded programme[537], 45% indicate that this project has a link with their Erasmus+ participation, showing a high level of complementarity between Erasmus+ and other programmes.

Figure 27: Links between projects under Erasmus+ and other programmes



Source: Survey of socio-economic actors (Q11: You said that your organisation has participated/ is participating in other EU-funded project(s). Does this have any link with your Erasmus+ participation? N=539

Among respondents who had participated in other EU-funded programmes, the most common were the European Social Fund (ESF) (31%), Interreg (21%), and Horizon 2020/Horizon Europe (13%). 63% mentioned participation in 'other programmes', mostly consisting of Comenius or Youth in Action, predecessors of Erasmus+. Similarly, socio-economic actors currently involved in other EU programmes demonstrated comparable patterns, with participation principally in ESF/ESF+ (34%), Horizon (17%) and Interreg (16%), which thus emerge as the EU funding instruments with the highest potential for synergies and complementarities with Erasmus+.

Overview of specific programmes/instruments

A number of sources, such as international and national level KIIs, case studies, and national reports, highlighted **Horizon Europe** as being highly coherent with Erasmus+. The study 'Innovative Europe', contributing to the interim evaluation of Horizon Europe, supports these findings. Its quantitative analysis, based on common beneficiaries encoded in the eGrants system, indicates Erasmus+ as one of the most complementary programmes with Horizon, with regard to the actions supporting innovation under Horizon Europe Pillar III 'Innovative Europe'[538]. However, it should be noted that the quantitative analysis conducted under this study is limited to programmes managed through the e-grants system. Therefore, for Erasmus+, it only took into account the actions under direct management, which correspond to approximately 20% of the Erasmus+ budget.

[536] AT, BE, CY, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, IT, LU, NL, PL, PT, RO

[537] Annex V - Survey of socio-economic actors Q9 (Before participating in Erasmus+ activities, have you been involved as a partner or coordinator in another EU-funded project?) and Q10 (Is your organisation currently involved as a partner or coordinator in another EU-funded project?)

[538] European Commission: Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, Naujokaitytė, R., Cakić, M., Didžiulytė, M., Zharkalliu-Roussou, K. et al., Evaluation study of the European framework programmes for research and innovation for an innovative Europe – Report phase 2 (support study for the interim evaluation of Horizon Europe), Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/499132, p. 88.

Furthermore, the legal bases of Horizon Europe[539] and Erasmus+ emphasise the importance of synergy between the two programmes in the higher education field. Erasmus+ focuses on enhancing the European education and training ecosystem, and Horizon Europe complements this for the research dimension. Data from different sources showed examples of successful synergies between Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe activities. As a key example, the European Excellence initiative under Horizon Europe provides complementary support for the development of the research dimension of the Erasmus+ European Universities alliances. The ability to combine core Erasmus+ funding with complementary support from Horizon Europe is seen as a significant advantage, as highlighted by a national-level interviewee from Austria. Specifically, the European Excellence Initiative[540] was highlighted as a key mechanism enabling universities to access additional funding for the development of their research and innovation capabilities. However, concerns have been raised on three fronts. First, the multiple applications and reporting processes for the alliances with incompatible timelines when applying to both the Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe funding streams, result in increased administrative burden for the alliances. Second, the European Excellence initiative currently funds a very limited number of alliances due to budgetary constraints. Third, there are concerns about the discontinuation of synergistic research funding for the R&I dimension of the European Universities under the European Excellence initiative under Horizon Europe and the future framework programme for research and innovation. A case study[541] involving three universities as part of a European Universities alliance further underscores these concerns. The universities argue against separating funding for education and research departments and advocate for bringing Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe funding closer together to fully realise the alliance's potential and developing integrated, long-term strategies across education, research, and innovation. While pure research activities should remain funded under Horizon Europe or national programmes, the alliance contends that there is a crucial need to fund institutionalised cooperation and an interdisciplinary approach in R&I, creating improved framework conditions for building excellence in R&I, so as to mainstream good ERA policies and practices at institutional level and breaking down silos with education.

Box 13: Examples of Synergies between Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe

*The **University of Sevilla** (Spain) has secured numerous EU grants under both Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe, driving advancements in agriculture, green transition, and sustainable development. Synergies between the Horizon Europe research initiatives and the Erasmus+ programme have been particularly impactful. Through Erasmus+ Key Action 2 (Cooperation Partnerships) and the European Universities Initiative, the university has established strong transnational alliances. These collaborations have facilitated the exchange of knowledge, resources, and best practices among universities across Europe, directly enhancing the quality and scope of research projects funded by Horizon Europe.*

*The **Unite! European University**[542], funded under Erasmus+, also secured funding for the development of the R&I dimension under the European Excellence initiative with "Unite.Widening"[543]. They have also set up an MSCA Doctoral Network 'Energy Storage Network', and under Digital Europe, several of the Unite! universities have set up "GreenChips-EDU[544]",*

[539] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021R0695

[540] https://rea.ec.europa.eu/funding-and-grants/horizon-europe-widening-participation-and-spreading-excellence/european-excellence-initiative_en

[541] Case study CHARM-EU, University of Barcelona (ES)

[542] https://www.unite-university.eu/

[543] https://unite-widening.eu/

[544] https://www.unite-university.eu/unitenews/novel-education-programmes-for-sustainable-microchips-made-in-europe

which allows for the set-up of joint programmes to train the urgently needed specialists for the semiconductor industry.

The evaluation study 'Excellence science' addressing Pillar I of Horizon Europe under the interim evaluation of Horizon Europe highlights that the collaborative networks established under Erasmus+ often serve as platforms for collaborations under Horizon Europe[545]. Further synergies between Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe were also identified, for example under Pillar II (Global Challenges & European Industrial Competitiveness) in relation to addressing inequalities in green and digital transitions, EU skills, and labour shortages. Synergies and complementarities between Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe were also mentioned by key informants interviewed for this evaluation, including three EU Delegations and one NEO, especially regarding capacity-building for research excellence and learning mobility between universities located within and outside of Europe.

Erasmus+ has strong synergies with **Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA)** (Horizon Europe, Pillar I) in terms of the possibilities for Erasmus+ participants to take part in MSCA research teams and for MSCA researchers to participate in Erasmus+ activities. The same is true for staff exchanges or establishing consortia at institutional level[546]. MSCA were also mentioned by three EU Delegations in the KIIs, who indicated that Erasmus+ facilitates mobility for PhD students previously on the Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters (EMJM) and contributes to academic excellence via the European Universities initiative.

Synergies also exist between Erasmus+ and the **European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT)** (Horizon Europe, Pillar III). For instance, as reported in the study 'Innovative Europe', the 'EIT Food'[547] has partnered with other organisations in its network to submit bids for Erasmus+ funding, leading to successful Erasmus+ projects such as I-RESTART[548] and GEEK4Food[549].

Even if synergies already exist between Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe, further improvement could enhance the coherence between the two programmes. Findings from the public consultation conducted during the interim evaluation of Horizon Europe indicated that 38% of respondents believe that synergies between the two programmes could be further strengthened[550].

Several key areas for improvement emerge, with a recurring theme being the need to strengthen alignment between the two programmes. This was emphasised through key informant interviews (KIIs) at both the EU and national levels, as well as in a position paper submitted during the public consultation (PC) and feedback received during the workshop on the draft final report of this evaluation study. Specifically, there is support for harmonising management, financial rules, application processes, call criteria as well as to improve coherence regarding doctoral mobility to enhance both visibility and synergies between the programmes. A publication on MSCA and Erasmus+ synergies[551] noted that university staff

[545] Draft evaluation study of the European Framework Programmes for Research and Innovation for Excellence Science, not finalised yet.

[546] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Synergies between the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions and Erasmus+ in the area of higher education, Publications Office of the European Union, 2022, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/84992

[547] https://www.eitfood.eu/

[548] https://www.erasmus-i-restart.eu/

[549] https://geek4food.com/

[550] European Commission: Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, Synopsis report – Looking into the R&I future priorities 2025-2027, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/93927, p.32-33.

[551] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Synergies between the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions and Erasmus+ in the area of higher education, Publications Office of the European Union, 2022, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/84992

and faculties often work in isolation, leading to a lack of awareness about each programme's opportunities.

Only limited specific synergies between Erasmus+ and **Creative Europe** 2021-2027could be identified in practice, except for the fact that some National Agencies promote synergies between Erasmus+ and Creative Europe, alongside other programmes. However, it is worth noting that in response to the COVID-19 pandemic a specific selection round was held under the 2020 Call of the Erasmus+ Strategic partnership, called 'Partnerships for creativity'[552], with the allocation of an indicative EUR 100 million budget to address the priority "Skills development and inclusion through creativity and the arts". Partnerships for creativity aimed to support projects in the youth sector, school, and adult education fields to foster the cooperation of educational institutions and youth organisations with the cultural and creative sectors to boost creativity, support skills development and enhance social inclusion through the arts. Other areas of synergies with Creative Europe are found in the Erasmus+ projects supporting skills for the arts and cultural sectors, for architecture and design and the fashion sector. For example, more than 70 Erasmus+ projects support skills for sustainable fashion, around 150 concern the textile industry and more than 3,700 relate to 'arts and culture'[553].

The **European Solidarity Corps** is a relatively new programme, established in 2018. The programme incorporated the European Voluntary Service (EVS), which until 2018 was part of Erasmus+. The objectives and beneficiaries of Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps are related, and coherence between the two programmes is important. Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps[554] implement a common inclusion and diversity strategy[555] to facilitate access to both programmes for people with fewer opportunities. Moreover, the programmes are managed under a single National Agency in the countries participating in both programmes[556] and share the same IT landscape for the management of indirectly managed actions. 60% of National Agencies dealing with the youth sector reported taking specific actions to ensure synergies between these two programmes, such as joint events, trainings, information sessions or similar types of activities.

Whilst the approach overall shows substantial effort to ensure coherence and avoid overlaps, evidence suggests that there is still a margin for improvement, as synergies mostly concern administrative efforts rather than programme activities. The evidence collected from KIIs at national and international level, the PC, and the NA/EACEA survey show that the differences between these two programmes are not always clear to all stakeholders and that some concerns exist about their coherence.

Specifically, 46% of National Agencies in the youth sector reported that the coherence of Erasmus+ was affected by taking out EVS from the programme to form the European Solidarity Corps[557], against 37% who considered that it was not (17% did not know). Some interviewed key informants from NGOs and SALTOs) indicated that separating the two programmes had led to confusion among beneficiaries, and one NGO noted lower awareness of the European Solidarity Corps among young people. Furthermore, a national-level interviewee viewed the division of Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps as a missed opportunity for achieving greater synergy. However, several participants in the draft

[552] Second corrigendum to the Erasmus+ Programme Guide. 2020. https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2021-09/2nd-corrigendum-2020-pg-extract-covid_en.pdf

[553] Source: Erasmus+ project result platform. Search made using keywords 'arts and culture', 'sustainable fashion' and 'textile industry'.

[554] https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2021-10/comm-2021-7493_en.pdf

[555] https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2021-09/implementation-inclusion-diversity_apr21_en.pdf

[556] Except for Serbia and Norway, which do not participate in the European Solidarity Corps.

[557] Annex III - NA/EACEA survey: Taking the EVS out of Erasmus+ did not affect the programme coherence. N=29.

final report workshop pointed out that the two programmes had clearly established scopes and focus and that their separation was justified.

Overall, the outcomes of this evaluation suggest that ways to achieve greater synergies and reduce risks of overlap between Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps should be investigated, as called for int the December 2023 European Parliament report on the implementation of Erasmus+ 2021-2027[558].

Programmes funded under the European Social Fund (ESF)+ and European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) are generally viewed as very coherent with Erasmus+, supported also by a number of synergy examples. The ESF+ Regulation[559] explicitly emphasises collaborative efforts with Erasmus+ in supporting various initiatives, particularly in facilitating the participation of disadvantaged learners in learning mobility. These potential synergies were also highlighted in the key informant interviews by three representatives from Commission services, who pointed to the possibility for Erasmus+ to fund policy innovation projects, which could be then expanded and funded under ESF+. This alignment extends to the ESF+ focus on human resource development, which encompasses upskilling and reskilling, including digital skills and green initiatives, echoing the objectives of Erasmus+. Regarding ERDF, a novelty in the 2021-2027 programming period is that it can also directly fund skills development opportunities in the framework of smart specialisation strategies.

A novelty to foster synergies with Cohesion policy funds is the possibility to transfer funds from ESF+/ERDF to Erasmus+ in accordance with the legal bases of these instruments, specifically Article 26 of the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR)[560] and Article 17(8) of the Erasmus+ Regulation. This mechanism allows the transferred resources to be managed under a single budget on the basis of the rules of the receiving programme (i.e. Erasmus+), thus providing a high degree of simplification both for the National Agency and the beneficiary organisations. In line with these provisions, Germany decided to transfer EUR 57 million for the period 2022-2027 (EUR 10 million in 2024) to higher education student mobility to support students with fewer opportunities[561]. However, despite its potential, this possibility of budget transfers has only been used by Germany to date.

Other mechanisms for the injection of ESF/ESF+ funds into Erasmus+ have however been used in other countries, for instance in Lithuania, Poland, and Italy, as illustrated in the box below.

Box 14: Examples of synergies between Erasmus+ and ESF+

***Lithuania**: The European Social Fund Agency of Lithuania and the Erasmus+ National Agency of Lithuania signed an agreement for the implementation of the 2014-2020 ESF+ project "Development of the Internationality of Higher Education" in December 2016. The project enabled the Lithuanian HEIs which had signed an Erasmus+ Grant Agreement in the Higher Education field to receive ESF funding. This helped with outgoing mobilities and international traineeships in Lithuanian schools and communities abroad. The total amount allocated for outgoing student mobilities was EUR 9,498,000, while the budget allocated to international traineeships in*

[558] https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2023-0413_EN.html

[559] Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1296/2013, OJ L 231 of 30.6.2021, p. 21 (https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021R1057)

[560] Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and financial rules for those and for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy, OJ L 231 of 30.6.2021, p. 159

[561] COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING DECISION of 18.9.2023 on the financing of Erasmus+: the Union Programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport and the adoption of the work programme for 2024. https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2023-09/eplus-awp-20240-C-2023-6157_en.pdf

Lithuanian schools and communities abroad was EUR 2,131,000. The project successfully increased mobility opportunities and promoted Lithuanian institutions abroad, despite challenges due to differing rules and administrative burdens, which led some HEIs to opt out from using the ESF funding.

***Poland**: The Foundation for the Development of the Education System (FRSE) is the Erasmus+ Polish National Agency and an Intermediary Body (IB) for the ESF Managing Authority (FDES). The National Agency managed ESF resources under the National Programme "Knowledge Education Development 2014-2020" to finance Erasmus+ projects that would have not been financed otherwise, for a total amount of EUR 18 million for the 2020-2021 period. As of May 2023, the Polish National Agency is implementing ESF+ funds for the 2021-2027 programming period under the VET mobility for learners and staff.*

***Italy**: The Italian National Agency for HE, SE and AE (INDIRE) was appointed as the intermediary body of the 2014-2020 ESF regional programme of Sicily. The objective was to enhance Erasmus+ through the management by INDIRE of EUR 6 million (ESF resources) to be invested in the period 2019-2020 in Universities, Arts and Music Education, and professional schools, through projects selected under Erasmus+. This initiative aimed to boost student and staff mobility, particularly for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, to increase the participation of Sicilians in schools in eTwinning projects, and to develop cooperation with Mediterranean countries (Tunisia, Jordan, Morocco, Egypt, Algeria). Key activities included providing additional funding for learning mobility towards EU and non-EU countries, especially eTwinning projects, and supporting international cooperation through Erasmus+. Despite the challenges of managing dual funding sources, with different funding and reporting rules, the synergy initiative boosted mobility opportunities and addressed specific regional needs, promoting cooperation in the targeted countries. This cooperation continues in the 2021-2027 period with a more extensive scope and budget.*

Another example of synergy between Erasmus+ and ESF/ESF+ can be found in the Asturias region of Spain, where the city of Gijón established a local Youth Employment and Activation Agency in 2014 to tackle high rates of youth unemployment and NEET ('not in education, employment or training'). The Agency, initially funded by the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) and now sustained by municipal and ESF/YEI funds. collaborates with local stakeholders to provide tailored guidance and job opportunities, using Erasmus+ for mobility projects to enhance participants' skills and employability. This initiative exemplifies effective coordination of multiple funding sources to support youth employment.

Italian key informants stressed the importance of the synergy between ESF+ and Erasmus+ funding to ensure coherence in supporting disadvantaged groups and youth mobility, preventing double funding, and enhancing collaboration among educational institutions.

Satisfaction with synergies between Erasmus+ and ESIF funds was also voiced by national stakeholders from Czechia, where these funds are used as a top-up for supporting higher education students through their mobility as well as in school education (OP VVV and OP JAK[562]).

The **ALMA** (Aim, Learn, Master, Achieve) initiative, supported under ESF+, shows a high degree of complementarity with Erasmus+. This initiative aims to support the social empowerment of disadvantaged youth, helping them to find employment and integrate into society by combining education, vocational training, or employment support in their home country with work-related learning experiences in other EU Member States. Originally piloted in Germany, ALMA is, in the current programming period, implemented under shared management through national and regional ESF+ programmes, as well as under indirect management through a one-off call launched at the end of 2022 to help Member States integrate ALMA into their ESF+ programmes. One position paper submitted in response to

[562] https://opvvv.msmt.cz/

the PC argued for more synergies between ALMA and Erasmus+. Specifically, this position paper stated that the synergies between the Juventus programme, implementing the ALMA initiative in Germany, and Erasmus+, are not well understood by national stakeholders, and that more information is needed to strengthen the coherence between these two programmes.

The **Interreg programmes** addressing the **European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) objective under ERDF** aim to foster cooperation and cohesion across border regions. They promote economic, social, and territorial integration by supporting cross-border, transnational, interregional and outermost regions' cooperation projects. Human capital support (such as skills development and language trainings, joint education and training schemes and cross-border school exchanges), infrastructure and equipment support and measures to reduce legal and administrative obstacles (such as joint recognition of qualifications and joint delivery of services) are eligible under Interreg. Seven respondents to the public consultation mentioned the Interreg programmes, out of whom four were happy with the coherence between Erasmus+ and Interreg, while three pointed to possibilities for further improving synergies. Suggestions included increasing clarity of the possible synergies, focusing on local and regional authorities in the case of Erasmus+, and enhancing knowledge about the Interreg programmes.

While synergies between the two programmes may exist, Interreg remains more territorially focused, whereas Erasmus+ fosters a stronger internationalisation element[563].

Box 15: Example of synergies between Erasmus+ and Interreg

*The project **"BBVET – Boosting Business Integration through joint VET Education"** was funded by the 2014-2020 Interreg South Baltic programme, addressing an area of intervention complementary to Erasmus+, i.e. improving the labour market relevance of education and training systems.*

The project aimed to develop international cross-border VET (Vocational Education and Training) education in the green and blue sectors in the South Baltic cross-border area, which involved Denmark, Germany, Lithuania, Poland, and Sweden. Through the promotion of internationalisation of VET schools and regional companies, the project aimed to enhance the capacity of VET schools, thereby facilitating practical experience in Erasmus+ mobility and contributing to Erasmus+ objectives.

EQ 19.2: To what extent is Erasmus+ coherent with other EU funding programmes, such as InvestEU, Recovery and Resilience Facility, Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV), EU4Health, Digital Europe, Life

Overall, the evaluation obtained relatively limited evidence related to the synergies of Erasmus+ with other EU funding programmes such as InvestEU, Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV), EU4Health, Digital Europe, or Life. Very few stakeholders consulted mentioned these programmes, though a few highlighted the potential benefits of increased synergies with Erasmus+. However, some actual examples of existing synergies could be identified.

The Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) aims to support Member States in addressing the economic and social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. A key objective of the RRF is the development of skills to support green and digital transitions and resilience. This aligns with Erasmus+ objectives, particularly in fostering digital skills and supporting the green transition through educational initiatives. A PC respondent highlighted that RRF funds could enhance Erasmus+ efforts in these areas, suggesting a potential for synergy in

[563] As pointed out, for instance, in Case study Chambre de Métiers et de l'Artisanat Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes (VET, FR).

supporting skills development for the green and digital economy. An example of complementarity is illustrated by the collaboration between the Italian National Agency INDIRE and the Ministry of Education in Italy, who developed an Operational Plan to use RRF funds to increase the number of beneficiaries of Erasmus+ mobility projects in the school sector. This plan aims to address the unmet demand for such opportunities, which has been a significant issue due to the high popularity of the Erasmus+ programme. The additional RRF funds will cover the shortfall in Erasmus+ funding, ensuring that more projects, especially those that had passed the qualitative assessment but lacked funding, can be supported.

In the case of the **EU4Health** programme, the recent European Parliament Report on the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027[564] states that synergies with EU4Health need to be further developed. The same opinion was voiced also by one NGO that took part in the PC. However, no further evidence was found.

The **Digital Europe** programme shows a link to Erasmus+ regarding its alignment at the policy level. Annex III (point 5) of Regulation (EU) 2021/694 establishing the Digital Europe programme[565] states that synergies with Erasmus+ shall ensure that: (a) the programme supports the development and acquisition of the advanced digital skills needed for the deployment of cutting-edge technologies such as artificial intelligence or high-performance computing, in cooperation with relevant industries; (b) the advanced skills part of Erasmus+ complements the interventions of the programme, addressing the acquisition of skills in all domains and at all levels through mobility experiences. Only one EU-level key informant mentioned the existence of complementarities and more rarely, overlaps between Erasmus+ and the Digital Europe programme, specifically in advanced digital skills and competences (Specific objective 4 of the Digital Europe programme).

Six respondents to the PC drew attention to some missed opportunities and potential areas of overlap between Erasmus+ and the **Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV)**. A respondent observed that CERV, once more aligned with Erasmus+, now focuses more on justice than citizenship. They also noted a potential overlap between Erasmus+ priorities on democratic participation and civic engagement and similar strands in CERV. Moreover, one EU-level key informant mentioned that exploiting potential synergies between CERV and Erasmus+ requires closer cooperation with National Agencies.

EQ 19.3: To what extent is Erasmus+ coherent with external financing instruments, such as the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI)-Global Europe, Instrument for PreAccession (IPA III)?

NDICI-Global Europe and IPA III are financing instruments that fund EU external action projects and activities under various EU programmes, including Erasmus+. They are thus instrumental to supporting the international dimension of Erasmus+, providing the necessary funding to enhance its global reach and impact.

Erasmus+ demonstrates coherence with NDICI-Global Europe and IPA III on actions aimed at enhancing educational and training opportunities, fostering youth engagement, and promoting international cooperation. Both NDICI-Global Europe and IPA III fund initiatives that facilitate mobility, capacity-building, and institutional partnerships in regions outside the EU, which aligns with the Erasmus+ goals of internationalisation and transnational collaboration.

[564] https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2023-0413_EN.html

[565] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021R0694

NDICI-Global Europe and IPA III each focus on supporting specific countries and regions in their development. While IPA III covers seven Western Balkan countries[566], NDICI-Global Europe covers EU cooperation with other third countries. Both instruments highlight the importance of strengthening Erasmus+ external dimension in their legal frameworks. For instance, Recital 33 of the NDICI-Global Europe Regulation states[567] that an indicative amount of EUR 1.8 billion from its geographic programmes should be allocated to actions under the international dimension of Erasmus+. Similarly, Recital 38 of the IPA III Regulation explicitly refers to funding Erasmus+ activities under its international dimension[568]. Both IPA III and NDICI-Global Europe regulations indicate that this earmarked budget has to be implemented in accordance with the Erasmus+ Regulation.

Only a limited number of stakeholders mentioned these instruments as part of the consultations (five respondents to the public consultation and three KIIs), which seems normal since beneficiaries are typically more familiar with programmes than with their funding sources. Those who did mention NDICI-Global Europe and IPA III praised their importance and acknowledged their potential to foster educational cooperation with strategic partners beyond Europe. However, they also highlighted the need for increased funding to ensure greater synergies with Erasmus+ and avoid missed opportunities. According to one respondent, there is a need for a clear vision regarding Erasmus+ and its role in the EU's public diplomacy and pursuit of strategic autonomy.

EQ 19.4: To what extent has Erasmus+ 2021-2027 proved complementary to other EU interventions/initiatives in the fields of education and training, youth and sport? To what extent is it building effective synergies or interactions with other EU funding programmes or financing instruments?

Drawing upon the evidence collected for this evaluation and previously illustrated under the evaluation questions above it appears that Erasmus+ successfully complements other EU programmes. In the current programming period, additional efforts to foster synergies and complementarities between Erasmus+ and other EU interventions/initiatives have been put in place. National Agencies are tasked to implement a set of activities for building effective synergies and develop long-lasting cooperation with the implementing bodies of other funding instruments. To this aim, as from 2023, the increase of the EU contribution to management fees for National Agencies includes a special allocation to foster synergies with other funding instruments, as specified in 2023 Guide for National Agencies.

The commitment to build synergies is confirmed in the NA/EACEA survey, where a substantial share (77% of respondents) affirmed that their agencies implement targeted measures to facilitate coordination between Erasmus+ and other programmes at the EU, national and international level[569]. Among National Agencies overseeing multiple programmes alongside Erasmus+, 69% indicated that this approach notably enhanced synergies across diverse initiatives. A closer look at specific synergies reported by the National Agencies reveals that most synergies are in terms of joint promotion of the programmes to increase awareness and help beneficiaries select the best programme for their goals.

The results of the public consultation support the findings that Erasmus+ is generally perceived as coherent with other EU initiatives. A significant majority of respondents (66%)

[566] Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Türkiye.

[567] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/947/oj

[568] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021R1529&from=EN

[569] NA/EACEA survey: Agreement with the query whether Agencies implement targeted measures to facilitate coordination between Erasmus+ and other programmes.

found it to be either 'extremely coherent' or 'coherent' with other EU funding opportunities/instruments.

Commission-led measures for boosting synergies

The Commission has foreseen a number of measures to enhance synergies across EU programmes, particularly between Erasmus+ and other initiatives in education and training, youth, and sport, including reinforced provisions and new tools to facilitate the cooperation among instruments and build more effective synergies. Among these is the **Seal of Excellence**, thanks to mirroring provisions in the Common Provisions Regulation (Article 73(4)) and in the Erasmus+ Regulation (Article 32), this mechanism aims to ensure that high-quality proposals awarded with a Seal of Excellence under Erasmus+ may receive alternative funding from ESF+/ERDF in case of insufficient funding under a given Erasmus+ Call for proposals. The implementation of the tool was piloted from the 2023 Call through Erasmus+ flagship actions, such as the European Universities alliances and the Centres of Vocational Excellence. Despite the potential for this mechanism, no specific synergies connected to the Seal of Excellence were mentioned by the stakeholders consulted for this evaluation, showing low awareness of this mechanism.

Additionally, a new mechanism was introduced in the 2021-2027 period allowing for the transfer of funds between ESF+/ERDF and Erasmus+, as described above. A notable example of this is in Germany, where EUR 57 million has been transferred from the Partnership Agreement of Germany to support Erasmus+ mobility projects, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. However, this option has not yet been used outside of Germany, even though other countries are also using the ESF+/ERDF funds in synergy with Erasmus+. Differently from the budget transfer model applied by Germany, the synergy practices used by other countries (such as Poland and Italy) imply budget separation, with the consequent application of ESF/ESF+ funding and reporting rules, which are different from those used under Erasmus+. This requires more burdensome implementation both for the National Agency and the beneficiary organisations. Following the German example might thus help reinforcing synergies between these Erasmus+ and Cohesion policy funds, while reducing burden on implementing bodies and beneficiaries.

Synergies with Horizon Europe

Despite the established synergies between Erasmus+ and **Horizon Europe**, further improvement could be beneficial to both programmes. The public consultation conducted for the interim evaluation of Horizon Europe indicated that 38% of respondents believe that synergies between Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe could be further strengthened[570].

The need to strengthen alignment between Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe was emphasised by EU-level and national-level key informants interviewed for this evaluation, as well as in a position paper submitted in response to the PC and in the discussions with stakeholders attending the workshop on findings from the draft final report. The views expressed point to the need to expand complementary funding opportunities beyond alliances to include all higher education institutions, as well as better alignment of doctoral mobility. Additionally, support was voiced for harmonising management, financial rules, application processes and call criteria to enhance both visibility and synergies between the programmes.

Synergies with the European Solidarity Corps

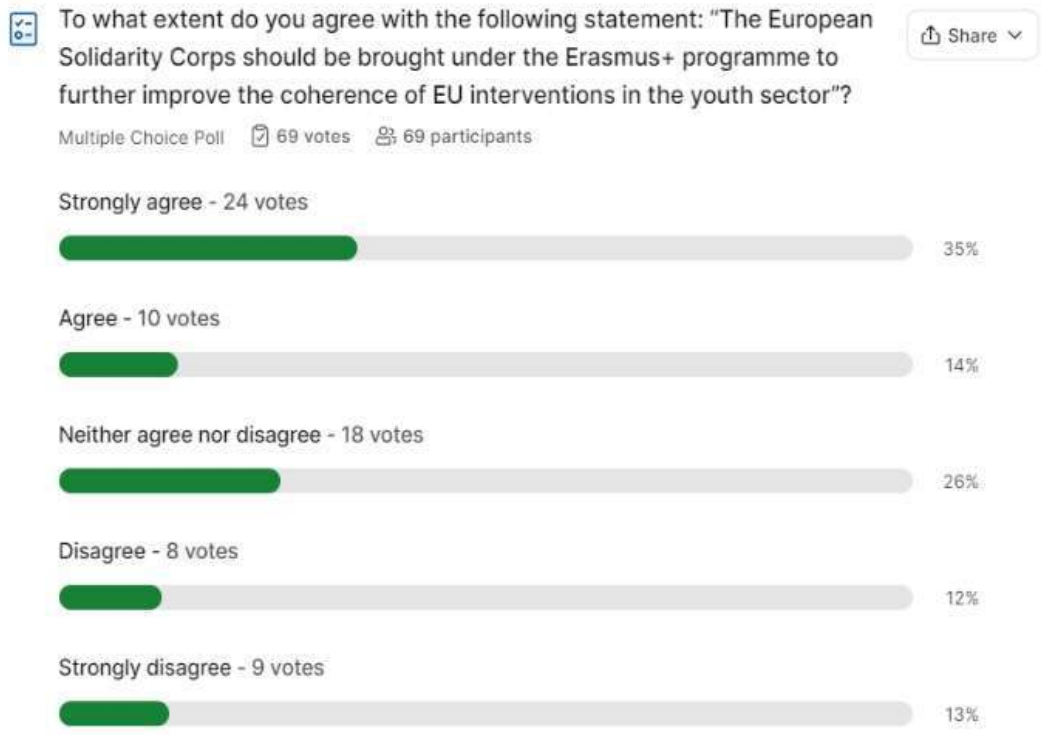
The **European Solidarity Corps** is one of the key programmes where synergies with Erasmus+ exist and are essential. Both programmes share common objectives related to youth engagement and social inclusion. The **inclusion and diversity strategy** shared by

[570] European Commission: Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, Synopsis report – Looking into the R&I future priorities 2025-2027, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/93927, p.32-33

both programmes has facilitated access for participants with fewer opportunities, while joint management by National Agencies has simplified administrative processes. National Agencies managing both programmes have reported actions to foster synergies, such as joint events, trainings, and information sessions. However, despite these efforts, some challenges exist. For instance, 46% of National Agencies in the youth sector responding to the NA/EACEA survey expressed concerns about the coherence of the programmes. Some stakeholders believe that the separation between the two has resulted in confusion among beneficiaries and diminished awareness of the European Solidarity Corps.

Suggestions to improve coherence included reintegrating the European Solidarity Corps into Erasmus+ or establishing a clearer distinction between the two programmes in terms of scope and focus to avoid overlapping topics and beneficiaries, reduce bureaucratic burdens and increase the efficiency and effectiveness of funding[571]. These recommendations were voiced by 40% of respondents from the youth sector in the NA/EACEA survey, by national and international level key informants, and by some respondents to the PC. Calls for bringing Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps together were also voiced in three national reports (CZ, DK, IS). Specifically, the Czech national report indicated that merging the programmes together would contribute to making their activities clearer for applicants and to a more efficient administration by the National Agencies. Similar opinions were voiced by the participants in the workshop on the draft final report of this evaluation study[572], where in response to a live poll 49% agreed or strongly agreed that European Solidarity Corps and Erasmus+ should be brought together to improve coherence in the youth sector, vs. 25% who disagreed or strongly disagreed and 26% who did not know.

Figure 28: Answers to poll conducted during the workshop on the draft final report (N=69)



[571] Annex III - NA/EACEA survey. Question: Would you have any ideas on how to improve the coherence of the Erasmus+ Programme?

[572] The workshop was held on 9 July 2024 in a hybrid format, with 159 participants, including representatives of National Agencies, National Authorities, representatives of stakeholder organisations active at European level in the various programming fields.

EQ 19.5: To what extent does the design of Erasmus+ 2021-2027 (including needs, objectives, activities, outputs and effects) provide appropriate links and support to the EU policy agendas, both internal and external?

The design of Erasmus+ 2021-2027 demonstrates a high degree of alignment with relevant EU policy agendas, both internally and externally. The programme is closely tied to key EU policy objectives such as those included in the European Education Area, the Digital Education Action Plan, the European Skills Agenda, the Green Deal, the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027, the EU Work Plan for Sport, and the European Research Area. The programme's emphasis on mobility, cooperation, and capacity-building reflects the EU's commitment to creating a more competitive, cohesive, and inclusive Europe.

Erasmus+ also plays a crucial role in advancing the EU's international cooperation and development agendas. Through partnerships with non-EU countries and organisations, the programme promotes mutual understanding, cultural exchange, and cooperation in education, training, and youth activities. By supporting capacity-building projects, policy dialogue, and mobility opportunities with third countries not associated to the programme, Erasmus+ contributes to the EU's efforts to promote stability, prosperity, and sustainable development globally.

Overall, according to numerous sources, Erasmus+ is well-embedded in EU policy agendas and thus provides strong support for their implementation. For example, 77% of PC respondents either 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' that Erasmus+ is supporting EU policies and priorities. Similar findings emerged from the NA/EACEA survey, where Erasmus+ was given the highest score compared to other programmes for its alignment with EU policy priorities[573]. Furthermore, international-level KIIs also pointed to a high degree of coherence, especially with regard to horizontal priorities, specifically the green and digital transitions, and inclusion and diversity (particularly gender equality).

Box 16: Youth Wiki case study

CS Youth Wiki (MT, FR, CY): *The Youth Wiki is a prime example of initiative that fosters synergies within the EU's youth policy agenda, enhancing coherence between national and European-level policies. By facilitating the exchange of information and innovative practices, the platform strengthens alignment and cooperation among Member States in the youth sector. The Youth Wiki is an online platform that provides comprehensive information on youth policies across European countries. Its primary goal is to facilitate evidence-based cooperation in the field of youth by offering accessible, up-to-date data on national policies that support young people. By doing so, the platform aims to assist the European Commission and Member States in making informed decisions, offering insights into reforms and initiatives. Additionally, the Youth Wiki fosters the exchange of information and innovative practices, supporting peer learning activities. Currently, 33 countries participate in the Youth Wiki.*

Erasmus+ flagships actions, such as the European Universities, the Centres of vocational Excellence and the Erasmus+ Teacher Academies are key to achieve the European Education Area and contribute to the European Skills Agenda. Commission's communication on a European strategy for universities[574] called to have at least 60 alliances gathering 500 universities by mid-2024; this goal has been reached and even exceeded; by

[573] Annex III - NA/EACEA survey. Question: To what extent do you agree with these statements about the comparison between Erasmus+ and other comparable initiatives?

[574] COM(2022) 16 final (Commission Communication on a European strategy for universities - European Education Area (europa.eu))

mid-2024, 64 European Universities alliances were operational and supported under Erasmus+, encompassing more than 560 higher education institutions from 35 countries, taking transnational cooperation to a different level and forging a novel understanding of the way higher education institutions (HEIs) can work together across border, with all across Europe. long-term vision going beyond regular cooperation settings. In school education, close to 30 Erasmus+ Teacher Academies are already funded under Erasmus+, (the initial objective set up in policy documents was to support 25 academies by 2025[575]) and contribute to tackling some of the most relevant issues in the teacher community. In the VET field, the Centres of Vocational Excellence are pillars of excellent vocational education in Europe, showing added value with a growing number of projects and networks created. The recent Commission's communication on Labour and skills shortages[576] updated the objectives of 50 Centres of Vocational Excellence to be funded by Erasmus+, set in the European Skills Agenda[577], calling to co-finance more Centres of Vocational Excellence with a target of at least 100 projects by 2027, to support European and regional development, innovation and smart specialisation strategies. 41 CoVEs have already been funded by end 2023. While at this stage a full assessment of the contribution of these actions to these key policy initiatives is not possible, the collected evidence shows that interesting signs of spill-over effects producing changes at systemic level.

The integration of the European Green Deal into the Erasmus+ programme design is consistently reinforced, with alignment expanding in each Annual Work Programme (AWP). While the Erasmus+ Regulation does not refer to European Green Deal policies like the Biodiversity Strategy and the New European Bauhaus (because these initiatives were launched after the adoption of the Regulation), the programme's contribution to these initiatives is mentioned in its AWPs. The 2021 AWP highlights themes such as organic agriculture, while the 2022 AWP underscores the importance of integrating climate and biodiversity priorities into cooperation activities and promoting green practices within projects. Furthermore, the AWP for 2023 incorporates the Council Recommendation on learning for the green transition and sustainable development, as well as the New European Competence Framework. This ongoing integration demonstrates a commitment to aligning Erasmus+ activities with the objectives of the European Green Deal over time[578]. Several initiatives have been implemented in recent years to promote environmentally sustainable practices within Erasmus+, evolving to meet students' needs. The 2021-2027 programme introduced a green top-up, while since 2024 sustainable travel is prioritised within the programme, with stronger incentives for participants who opt for green travel. Participants are encouraged to choose environmentally-friendly options as their first choice. However, increased support is also provided for non-green travel to ensure that individuals in remote areas or those with limited rail networks are not excluded.

Concerning the digital transformation, the Erasmus+ Regulation specifies that the programme should actively contribute to the Digital Education Action Plan (DEAP) 2021-2027 by involving learners, educators, youth workers, young people, and organisations in the journey towards digital transformation. Erasmus+ plays a crucial role in implementing the DEAP by supporting initiatives that foster digital transformation in education. This includes projects and mobility opportunities that develop digital competences among learners and educators, such as the Digital Opportunity Traineeships, promote the use of digital tools, and create digital content. Additionally, the programme encourages the

[575] Commission's Communication on achieving the European Education Area by 2025, COM(2020)625 final (EUR-Lex - 52020DC0625 - EN - EUR-Lex (europa.eu)

[576] COM(2024) 131 of 20 March 2024.

[577] Commission's Communication on European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience, COM(2020)274 final, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0274

[578] https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_STU(2023)747442

combination of physical mobility with virtual learning and cooperation, which aligns with the DEAP's emphasis on flexible and accessible education models[579].

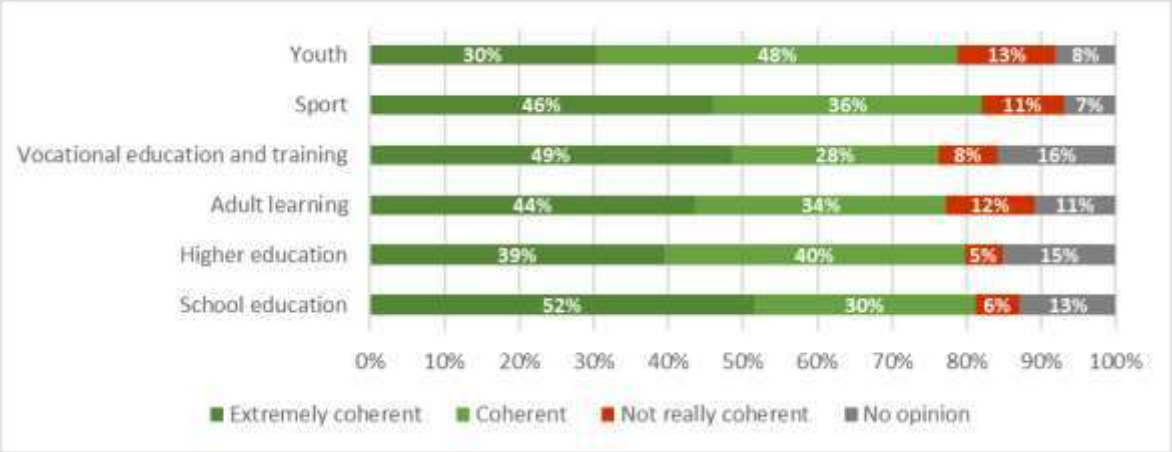
The EU Work Plan for Sport 2024-2027[580] sets the basis for policy cooperation in three priority areas: the integrity and values in sport, the socio-economic and sustainable dimensions of sport, and the participation in sport and health-enhancing physical activity. These priorities and the main instruments of the work plan are supported by Erasmus+.

3.4.3 EQ 20 External coherence – national level

EQ 20.1: To what extent is Erasmus+ 2021-2027 coherent with various interventions pursued at national level which have similar objectives? To what extent has it proved complementary to countries' interventions/initiatives in the fields of education and training, youth and sport?

Overall, the evidence collected for this evaluation study suggests that Erasmus+ is generally coherent with and complementary to national interventions that have similar objectives[581]. A vast majority (88%) of PC respondents consider that Erasmus+ and national programmes are fully or partially coherent[582]. A further split into sectors show that the highest perceived coherence is from respondents active in the school education sector, with 52% of respondents rating it as extremely coherent, while respondents from sectors such as vocational education and training and sport also highlight strong coherence. In contrast, a lower share of respondents finding it "extremely coherent" is observed in youth and higher education. A small proportion of respondents finding Erasmus+ "not really coherent" is noted across all sectors, and a moderate number of respondents has no opinion, with the highest share in vocational education and training (16%).

Figure 29: Complementarity of Erasmus+ with national level programmes - Public consultation



Source: Public consultation, N=1,227

Additionally, the analysis of national reports shows that the programme aligns well with national education and youth policies and programmes (as highlighted in reports from 13

[579] https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2023-0413_EN.html

[580] https://sport.ec.europa.eu/news/adoption-of-new-eu-work-plan-for-sport-2024-2027

[581] A list of comparator programmes is provided in Annex I - Technical Annex, Table 93.

[582] Public consultation: Please comment whether, and if so to which extent, the Erasmus+ programme is coherent with: National funding opportunities/instruments addressing the education, training, youth and sport sectors.

countries[583]). Specific examples include Austria, where Erasmus+ complements national university mobility programmes. Similarly, Finland reports strong alignment between Erasmus+ and national priorities, supporting curriculum implementation across multiple educational sectors. A key informant from Greece as well as the Greek national report also praised the impact of Erasmus+ on the national VET policy, which resulted in high coherence between national policies and Erasmus+ in the VET field.

The number of national programmes with similar objectives varies across countries, with some having no comparable programmes while in others multiple similar programmes exist. The varying number of national programmes with similar objectives indicates differing levels of coherence between Erasmus+ and national interventions across Europe. In countries with a lower number of national programmes, Erasmus+ plays a more critical and possibly unique role in addressing its objectives. This was specifically mentioned by stakeholders from North Macedonia or Romania. In contrast, the presence of a higher number of similar national programmes in other countries suggests a greater potential for synergies and complementarity, which could enhance the overall impact of these interventions. However, there is also a higher risk of overlaps, if sufficient coordination and cooperation is not established.

In some cases, national programmes are specifically designed to complement Erasmus+ by providing additional funding to supplement Erasmus+ grants or by focusing on bilateral mobility with countries not covered by the programme. This complementary approach enhances the overall effectiveness of mobility and educational opportunities.

Specific examples of national programmes with synergies with Erasmus+ were identified in several countries including Belgium, Bulgaria, Austria, Czechia, Denmark, the Netherlands, Italy, Poland, Serbia, Türkiye, or Germany. In Bulgaria, stakeholders mentioned that the Erasmus+ mobility concept has been incorporated into a national programme focusing on innovation in schools, funded by the state budget. The 'Innovative Schools' programme promotes in-country mobility of students and teachers between participating schools, fostering mutual learning. Additionally, the Ausbildung Weltweit (worldwide training) scheme, funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) since 2017, complements Erasmus+ by financing activities with countries not covered by the programme. Training companies, chambers of commerce and other vocational training institutions (such as inter-company training centres) can apply for subsidies for their trainees and for their training staff. Since 2020, vocational schools have also been able to submit funding applications and subsidise stays for people undergoing school-based vocational training. These programmes only target countries that are not covered by Erasmus+, thus strengthening complementarity and avoiding overlaps.

In Italy, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the Erasmus+ Italian National Agency responsible for VET (INAPP) collaborated to enhance VET mobility projects by transferring in 2019 national resources equal to EUR 1,928,419 from the National Social Fund for Employment and Training to fund additional KA102 projects. This synergy successfully supported four projects from the reserve list and enabled 401 more VET mobilities, applying Erasmus+ rules to ensure consistent management and equal treatment of all applicants.

In Belgium, the BelJ initiative[584] is a sort of mini-Erasmus in the youth sector between the three language communities for young people. This programme is viewed as a stepping stone for Erasmus+ and serves as a complement to Erasmus+ by filling gaps.

There are also several complementarities in higher education. In Denmark, participants in Erasmus+ individual mobility can receive additional funding as a top-up to the Erasmus+

[583] AT, BE, CY, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, LU, NL, PL, PT, TR.

[584] https://dynamointernational.org/en/service-mobilite/partir/belj-2/

grant from a national-level programme [585] . There is a similar programme in Serbia, that funds master and PhD students studying abroad[586]. This programme operates independently from Erasmus+, however, recipients may, in some cases, use the programme as a top-up for Erasmus+. In Poland, a programme called NAWA which supports mobility for scientists in higher education complements Erasmus+[587]. Moreover, the 'Kingdom Exchange Grant' (Koninkrijksbeurs[588]), introduced in the Netherlands in 2024, enables 120 students from the Netherlands to participate in national mobility exchanges in HE and VET sectors. This grant complements the Erasmus+ programme, as it supports short-term student mobility that Erasmus+ does not cover. In Czechia, a bilateral programme with Austria called 'Aktion' focuses on doctoral candidates and postdocs and addresses needs not covered in Erasmus+. In Germany, synergies between Erasmus+ and national programmes are clear in higher education and youth inclusion. German universities can leverage both EU and national funding mechanisms to enhance their international collaboration activities.

Box 17: NAWA programme in Poland (from PL national report)

> *"In the area of higher education, the Erasmus+ programme is consistent with the programme of the national institution NAWA. Both programmes are aimed at the same recipient, but they pursue different goals. The national programme focuses on the scientific mission of the university (scientific mobility), while Erasmus+ supports the learning mobility and teaching mission of the university. In this case, the effect of synergy is to modernise the functioning of the university and better adapt the teaching process to the scientific goal. An increase in this synergy can be noted from 2021."*

A small percentage of key informants interviewed (about 5-10%) noted a need to increase synergies between Erasmus+ and national programmes, considering that these were insufficiently explored. For example, some identified missed opportunities regarding third country mobility. While third country mobility is possible through several national programmes, national and EU funding could be better aligned to support individuals in accessing these opportunities. Key informants in Czechia and Belgium highlighted efforts to integrate national programmes with Erasmus+, but also the challenges resulting from a lack of thematic and national priority alignment. Stakeholders interviewed for the case study on the project Regional Capacity for Adult Education and Learning led by EAEA (Belgium) indicated that it was important to ensure that an increase in funding under Erasmus+ would not lead to reductions in national and regional funding programmes[589]. Conversely, the Serbian national report recommends higher synergies and information sharing between national programmes and Erasmus+ to avoid the risk of double financing.

[585] SU - The Danish students' Grants and Loans Scheme, more information available at https://www.su.dk/

[586] https://fondzamladetalente.gov.rs/cyr/%d0%bf%d1%80%d0%be%d0%b3%d1%80%d0%b0%d0%bc%d0%b8/#dositejacir

[587] https://nawa.gov.pl/en/nawa-programmes

[588] The new Kingdom Exchange enables student mobility at VET and HE for students from Aruba, Curaçao, Netherlands, Sint Maarten and the islands Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba which are special municipalities within the Dutch Kingdom. the grant amount is comparable to the Erasmus+, also considering inclusion groups. https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/actueel/nieuws/2023/01/17/landen-koninkrijk-zetten-stappen-voor-vergrotenstudiesucces-caribische-studenten

[589] Case study Regional Capacity for Adult Education and Learning, EAEA (BE).

Additionally, some KIIs[590] and case studies[591], as well as a recent report focusing on the funding of the European Universities initiative (EUI)[592], highlighted the differences in national and Erasmus+ funding for the EUI. National support from Member States for their higher education institutions part of alliance complements the European funding, building on the unprecedented support received so far at regional and national level across almost all Member States, on top of the regular higher education funding. As differences in the size and form of such national funding occur, the higher education institutions involved in the alliances would benefit from a more level playing field in this regard. Furthermore, to sustain the initiative's central role in improving the attractiveness and competitiveness of European higher education, the alliances and the higher education stakeholders call for funding needs to match and support the alliances' capacity to pool resources and strengths, to remove silos between university missions, and to attract and retain global talent, with benefits for the entire higher education sector.

3.4.4 EQ 21 External coherence – international level

EQ 21.1: **To what extent is Erasmus+ 2021-2027 coherent with various international-level interventions with similar objectives?**

This section examines the coherence of Erasmus+ 2021-2027 with various international-level interventions that share similar objectives. There are numerous multilateral schemes, the key features of which are presented in the Technical Annex[593]. The analysis focuses in particular on the programme's alignment with the CEEPUS (Central European Exchange Program for University Studies), Nordplus, EEA and Norway Grants, and International Visegrad Fund, as these were highlighted by different stakeholders during the data collection activities and also through the literature and document review.

Overall, respondents to the PC considered that Erasmus+ was coherent with other international interventions (although a high share had no opinion[594], perhaps due to their lack of awareness of relevant schemes and opportunities). While a high share of respondents active in the sport sector considered the programme extremely coherent or coherent with international opportunities (72%), coherence was rated the lowest by respondents active in the youth sector (51% considered Erasmus+ to be extremely coherent or coherent with international schemes and opportunities[595]).

[590] KIIs at the national level from Estonia, Germany, and Norway

[591] Case studies TU Berlin - ENHANCE Alliance (HED, DE), Universidad de Sevilla (HED, ES), European Institute of Public Administration (JMA, NL), and CHARM-EU, University of Barcelona (HED, ES).

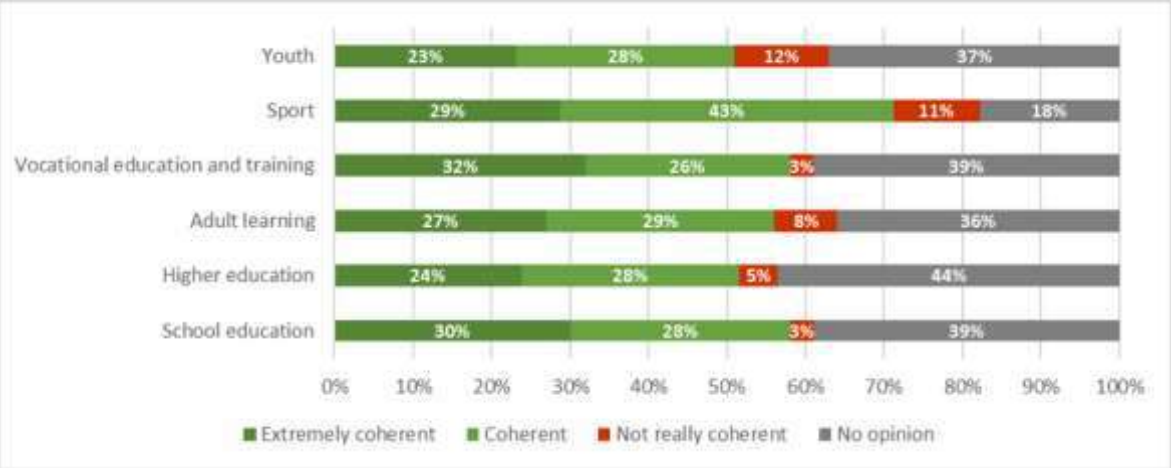
[592] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Jongbloed, B., McGrath, C., Boer, H. et al., *Final report of the study on the state and effectiveness of national funding systems of higher education to support the European universities initiative Volume I*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/885757

[593] Annex I - Technical Annex I, table 93

[594] Overall, 'no opinion' represented 42% of responses across all sectors, higher than for EU level and national level instruments. Specifically, 37% of respondents had no opinion in the youth sector, 18% in the sport sector, 39% in the VET field, 36% in the adult education field, 44% in the higher education field, and 39% in the school education field.

[595] Public consultation: Please comment whether, and if so to which extent, the Erasmus+ programme is coherent with Other international funding opportunities/instruments for the education, training, youth and sport sectors (such as from the World Bank, Unesco, EEA and Norway Grants, Nordplus etc.).

Figure 30: Coherence of Erasmus+ with other international funding opportunities/instruments for the education, training, youth and sport sectors (such as from the World Bank, Unesco, EEA and Norway Grants, Nordplus etc.)



Source: Public consultation, N=1,226

When examining the selected international-level interventions, stakeholders highlighted synergies between Erasmus+ and programmes such as Nordplus and the EEA and Norway Grants.

The EEA and Norway Grants represent the contribution of Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway to reducing economic and social disparities and strengthening bilateral relations with 15 EU countries, primarily in Eastern and Central Europe. Each beneficiary country agrees on a set of programmes with the donor countries, based on national needs and priorities and the scope for cooperation with the donor countries. Stakeholders' opinions gathered from the KIIs indicate various elements of synergy between the EEA and Norway Grants and Erasmus+. For example, the project, "Supporting threatened plurality: Languages and Medieval Literatures"[596] in Czechia, funded under the EEA and Norway Grants, was designed to prepare a Master's degree programme that aimed for future funding under the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's degree. This exemplifies the sequential funding approach, where initial projects funded by EEA and Norway Grants pave the way for further development under Erasmus+. Similarly, the project "Use of modern technologies in vocational education"[597], also in Czechia, highlights successful long-term partnerships initiated under EEA and Norway Grants having in mind future developments under Erasmus+. On the other hand, the EEA and Norway grants project, "Digitalisation of the water sector and water education (DIGIWATRO[598]) in Romania, successfully built on the Erasmus+ Knowledge Alliances project "Digitalisation of water industry by innovative graduate water education"[599] to address more specific national challenges, demonstrating the potential for complementary, rather than overlapping funding.

[596] Supporting threatened plurality: Languages and Medieval Literatures | EEA Grants, https://eeagrants.org/archive/2014-2021/projects/CZ-EDUCATION-0099

[597] Use of modern technologies in vocational education | EEA Grants, https://eeagrants.org/archive/2014-2021/projects/CZ-EDUCATION-0085

[598] The project was funded under the 'Education, Scholarships, Apprenticeships and Youth Entrepreneurship' programme of Romania (programming period: 2014-2021). See: 20-COP-0050 - Digitalisation of the water sector and water education | EEA Grants, https://eeagrants.org/archive/2014-2021/projects/RO-EDUCATION-0130

[599] The project was funded under Erasmus+ 2020 Call. It included 13 partners from 6 countries with an EU grant of EUR 999 990. See: https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/621764-EPP-1-2020-1-NO-EPPKA2-KA.

However, the Norwegian national report indicates that synergies between Erasmus+ and EEA and Norway Grants are insufficiently exploited due to poor coordination, conflicting goals, and differing evaluation processes, which hinder stronger collaboration. Moreover, the Slovakian national report identified that insufficient personnel capacity in schools may reduce their willingness to participate in the Erasmus+, especially when schools are engaged in projects under other schemes such as those improving infrastructure, like those promoted by EEA and Norway Grants. These initiatives provide attractive financial investment, leading schools to prioritise administrative management of such projects over Erasmus+, and potentially compromising the quality of work on Erasmus+ projects. This issue is expected to grow between 2023 and 2030, with the implementation of Slovakia's Recovery and Resilience Plan, and improved coordination between Erasmus+ and other support schemes is necessary to address it[600].

Nordplus promotes Nordic and Baltic cooperation in education, offering funding to projects that enhance collaboration between educational institutions in the Nordic and Baltic countries. Stakeholders' feedback highlights several synergies between Nordplus and Erasmus+. Many initiatives first funded by Erasmus+ are often continued through Nordic cooperation projects, ensuring their sustainability. According to stakeholders from Norway and Estonia, however, Nordplus is seen as easier to start with, in terms of application writing and management, and Erasmus+ funding can thus be applied for to support mobility once a Nordplus programme is in place, leveraging both in cooperation. Moreover, key informants noted that Nordplus can fund shorter mobilities compared to Erasmus+, thereby complementing the programme. This was particularly emphasised by stakeholders from Denmark and Estonia, who underscored the benefits of Nordplus in enhancing regional cooperation and mobility.

A noteworthy example of synergy developed with Nordplus is the Erasmus+ project "STEM skills and competences for the new generation of Nordic engineers", funded in 2018 under KA2[601]. This project, led by a consortium of five technical universities from Nordic countries, aimed to establish a 'Nordic Engineering Hub'[602]. The initial phase was funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers, enabling the consortium to develop an Erasmus+ application. Once approved, Nordplus provided additional funds to ensure full participation of all partners, including those not initially part of the Erasmus+ application. This project exemplifies how pooling resources from EU and non-EU funding instruments can enhance cooperation and project outcomes, fostering a significant impact on STEM education in the region.

Limited funding and geographical focus, however, restrict the scope of Nordplus, as indicated in the Estonian national report, Consequently, no significant evidence of overlaps between Nordplus and Erasmus+ was identified.

Established in 2000 by the governments of the Visegrad Group countries (Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia), the **International Visegrad Fund (IVF)** serves as an international donor organisation aimed at enhancing regional cooperation within the Visegrad region (V4) and fostering collaboration with other countries, particularly in the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership regions. With an annual allocation of EUR 8 million, distributed through grants, scholarships, and artist residencies, the Fund operates on equal contributions from all V4 countries. The IVF supports capacity-building, cooperation, and mobility initiatives. Notably, its focus on countries with limited access to Erasmus+ funding, such as those in the Eastern Partnership region, underscores complementarity with the programme.

[600] SK national report, p. 39..

[601] See https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2018-1-SE01-KA203-039142

[602] Nordic Engineering Hub (NordEnHub), https://www.nordenhub.org/

Similarly, the Central European Exchange Program for University Studies (**CEEPUS**) is a multilateral exchange programme designed to promote regional academic mobility in Central and Eastern Europe. The programme covers Albania, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Hungary, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Limited evidence of complementarities was found, even if for example the Serbian national report praises Erasmus+ alignment with the objectives of the CEEPUS programme, which has similar goals but employs a more flexible implementation model compared to Erasmus+.

3.4.5 EQ 22 Evolution of coherence (internal and external)

EQ 22.1: What is the coherence of Erasmus+ 2021-2027 compared to the coherence of Erasmus+ 2014-2020? Has it improved in the new programme generation?

The **internal coherence** of Erasmus+ 2021-2027 has improved compared to the 2014-2020 programme. In the early years of Erasmus+ 2014-2020, several predecessor programmes were consolidated into a single comprehensive structure. This merger required substantial adjustments and learning, resulting in initial challenges related to programme coherence. In contrast, Erasmus+ 2021-2027 presents a more streamlined and integrated structure with a higher degree of consistency and logical alignment with its objectives, facilitating smoother implementation and better stakeholder navigation *('evolution rather than revolution')*. Examples of small refinements made to the programme include for instance the introduction of KA1 mobility action in the fields of school education, adult education and sport to provide mobility opportunities across all fields and sectors under the same key action, moving the Youth dialogue from KA3 to KA1 (renamed as Youth participation activities), the re-design of Strategic Partnerships into partnerships for cooperation with the same type of actions across all programme fields, and the discontinuation of European Voluntary Service (EVS) due to the launch of the European Solidarity Corps, all contributing to a more logical and streamlined structure.

The overall structure of the Erasmus+ 2021-2027 programme remains largely unchanged from its predecessor, with most actions being continued, simplified, or only slightly refined. Only a limited number of actions were discontinued or newly added, thus maintaining a stable and familiar framework for participants. This continuity has contributed to the internal coherence of the programme, allowing for smoother transitions and sustained focus on key objectives.

With regard to **external coherence**, the mid-term evaluation of the previous programming period (2014-2020) confirmed strong alignment between Erasmus+ and various EU, international, and national interventions. It emphasised complementarities with EU level programmes, while also recommending improved communication between EU departments to fully leverage potential synergies. Notably, no significant examples of duplication or incoherence were identified.

For the 2021-2027 period, Erasmus+ has successfully built on this strong foundation of external coherence. With minimal changes from the 2014-2020 period, the programme has continued to build on the established framework, maintaining its consistency and alignment with existing EU policies and strategies. This continuity has helped to sustain a coherent approach across different programming periods, ensuring stability and predictability for stakeholders and participants.

One notable improvement in coherence for the 2021-2027 period is the more explicit definition of synergies with **Horizon Europe**. The new programme generation has successfully built on the previous framework by clearly outlining collaborative areas, such as research and innovation, capacity-building, and higher education.

The programme's coherence with **ESF+** and the **ERDF** has also improved, thanks to the introduction of mirroring legal provisions in the CPR and the Erasmus+ Regulation in the current programming period. As mentioned previously, the option to transfer ESF+/ERDF funds to Erasmus+ has been utilised, specifically by Germany, to support disadvantaged students and enhance mobility opportunities. This option also offers a higher degree of simplification, allowing the use of a single set of funding rules (i.e. those of the receiving country). However, the application of this mechanism has been limited and could benefit from broader implementation to maximise the potential of these synergies. The Seal of Excellence, which enhances cooperation between Erasmus+ and ESF+/ERDF by providing alternative funding to high-quality project proposals that did not receive Erasmus+ funding because of insufficient budget, is also not widely discussed among stakeholders, suggesting limited current uptake and awareness.

Finally, the ongoing cooperation between ESF+ programmes in Poland and Italy and the Erasmus+ National Agencies in these countries shows continuity between both programme generations in terms of coherence between these instruments.

Despite these advancements, there are notable challenges in terms of coherence between Erasmus+ and the **European Solidarity Corps**. The launch of that programme in 2018, with the consequent removal of EVS from the Erasmus+ framework, while intended to enhance focus on volunteering and solidarity, has led to some confusion and perceived overlaps. Stakeholders consulted for this evaluation have highlighted a lack of clarity in the relationship between the two programmes, which could result in duplication and confusion among beneficiaries. Suggestions have included integrating European Solidarity Corps into Erasmus+ or more clearly delineating the scope and objectives of each programme to improve coherence.

At the national level, Erasmus+ 2021-2027 has largely maintained its coherence with various **national education, training, youth, and sport initiatives**, reflecting continuity from Erasmus+ 2014-2020. To improve coherence further, a comprehensive strategy for a systematic exchange of best practices and information among Member States could address existing gaps, enhance the combined effectiveness of the programmes and reduce the risks of overlaps.

Internationally, Erasmus+ 2021-2027 is coherent with various multilateral education and mobility initiatives. The programme's alignment with multilateral schemes such as CEEPUS, Nordplus, EEA and Norway Grants, and the Visegrad Fund has been generally positive, with notable synergies and complementarities identified. For instance, projects initially funded by the EEA and Norway Grants have successfully transitioned to Erasmus+ for further development or vice versa, while Nordplus often complements Erasmus+ by funding regional mobility initiatives. However, there are calls from stakeholders for improved coherence and coordination, particularly to address potential overlaps and enhance resource efficiency. This includes better profiling of programme calls and exploring mechanisms like top-up options to maximise the impact of both Erasmus+ and other international funding sources.

The analysis of the national reports largely supports the findings described above. 23 reports mentioned increased complementarity with other support programmes[603] and 13 indicated increased alignment with national and European objectives[604].

[603] AT, BEde, BEfr, BEnl, CY, CZ, DE, EE, FI, FR, EL, IE, IT, LI, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, RS, SE, SI, TR.

[604] AT, CY, CZ, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, EL, LV, NO, PT, SK.

3.5 European added value

3.5.1 EQ 23 Overall European added value

EQ 23.1: What is the additional value and benefit from EU activities, compared to what could be achieved by Member States and other countries at regional and/or national and/or international level?

The evaluation shows that participation in Erasmus+ activities has added value and benefit for Member States and other participating countries compared to what could be achieved without Erasmus+. Evidence to answer this question comes from the PC, the case studies, KIIs and national reports on the implementation and impact of Erasmus+.

The Erasmus+ programme has delivered added value and benefit for Member States and third countries associated and not associated to the Erasmus+ programme in three main areas, according to the public consultation results as well as the Key Informant Interviews[605]:

1) Internationalisation of organisations, systems and policies

97% of PC respondents 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' that Erasmus+ contributed to the internationalisation of the participating organisations. Internationalisation takes the form of support to transnational mobility and partnerships that would not be achievable through national schemes alone, as reported in 24 national reports[606]. Member States and third countries associated and not associated to the programme can access funding to send staff and learners abroad, to set up partnerships and collaboration and to engage in dialogues, benefiting from mutual exchanges, which would not have been possible without Erasmus+. These mobility and partnership activities generate a structural benefit for the countries associated to the programme, which benefit from a labour force and pool of learners with enhanced capabilities, skills and competences and from stronger international connections as a result of mobility or participation in partnership activities (as further explored in EQ25.1). Erasmus+ also has an effect on the internationalisation policies and education systems in several countries, which would not have happened to the same extent or at all, without Erasmus+[607]. 86% of respondents to the public consultation were of the opinion that Erasmus+ contributed to improving the national, European and international support measures for the education, training, youth and sport sectors. Based on information collected through the KIIs as well as the national reports, examples of policy and system-wide changes include:

- The strengthening and increased awareness of the adult education field at national level, reported for instance in Austria and Malta.
- The integration of mobility targets in national VET strategies, reported for instance in Estonia. VET mobility targets, including with businesses, support the Estonian Education Strategy 2021-2035, and support the fact that more vocational education should take place with businesses as well[608].
- The development of national policies regarding mobility in upper secondary education (general and VET), reported for instance in France. In France, legislation supporting mobility in schools has had an immediate and quantifiable effect, with an

[605] Annex II - Public Consultation report.

[606] AT, BEde, BEfr, BEnl, BG, CZ, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, IT, LU, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, SE, SK, TR.

[607] Contributions to modernisation and internationalisation of education systems were noted in 29 national reports (AT, BEde, BEnl, BG, CZ, CY, DE, DK, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, IE, IT, LV, LT, MT, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, IS, NO, RS, TR; no direct assessment in the remaining 6 reports from BEfr, HR, LU, HU, NL, and LI).

[608] National Report of Estonia - Institute of Baltic Studies (2024). 'Erasmus+ programme final evaluation for 2014-2020 and interim evaluation 2021-2027', Tartu, p. 16.

increase in beneficiaries from schools of 120% between 2021 and 2023 (from 15 494 beneficiaries in 2021 to 35 226 beneficiaries in 2023)[609].

- The inclusion of Erasmus+ into national programmes and strategies on adult education, reported in Germany.
- Concrete policy changes in the youth field as the result of Erasmus+, particularly on European values and the quality of youth work and mobilities, reported in Latvia.
- The approval of legislation in Spain in 2023 that states that the educational system should have a mobility programme to study abroad, particularly in higher education, influenced by Erasmus+. In addition, regulatory provision was made to facilitate the implementation of joint undergraduate degrees as well as to ease the entry of international students and staff[610].

2) Funding activities that would not have been possible otherwise

Erasmus+ fills a gap in the demand for funding for certain activities across Member States and third countries associated and not associated to the programme. National public or private funding does not support the activities funded by Erasmus+ to the same extent. 84% of respondents to the public consultation agreed or strongly agreed that they would not have been able to fund the activities undertaken without Erasmus+. The representatives of beneficiary organisations interviewed for most case studies also indicated that they would not have been able to undertake similar activities, or the activities would have been on a much smaller scale, were it not for Erasmus+. For example, Erasmus+ operating grants enable Jean Monnet Designated Institutions (JMDIs) to focus teaching and research on EU issues that they would not have the resources to do through other public or private funding as this funding may focus on other priorities or provide lower grant amounts for EU research and teaching. JMDIs play a key role beyond filling-in a specialised offer on EU-related academic teaching and research: they also train future generations of leaders in policy-making with strong EU knowledge, and take part in shaping policy and structural national reforms. For example, the European Institute for Public Administration runs confidential one-to-one technical assistance sessions with Member State administrations on a policy issue of relevance to Member States, which would not have been possible without Erasmus+ funding [611]. And the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education is active in European Commission working groups and Technical Support Instruments projects.

3) Fostering 'Europeanness'

91% of PC respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the fact that Erasmus+ contributes to building a sense of European identity/sense of belonging and awareness of European values across participating countries. Building or maintaining European identities and European values provides key benefits for participating countries, in terms of supporting social cohesion, the preservation of democracy and the rule of law, but also for building relationships as well as supporting capacity building across the world and strengthening the geopolitical standing of the EU.

Erasmus+ has a range of other benefits, including supporting inclusion, diversity, fairness and equal opportunities (89% of respondents to the public consultation agreed or strongly agreed with this statement) and contributing to innovation (86% agreed or strongly agreed).

[609] National Report of France - General Inspection for education, sport and research, (*Inspection générale de l'éducation, du sport et de la recherche*), (2024). Interim evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme, ('*Evaluation à mi-parcours du programme Erasmus+*'), p. 13.

[610] Title VII Organic Law 2/2023 on the University system. Fidelis Auditores (2024).'Spain national report on the implementation and impact of Erasmus+': final evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme 2014-2020 and interim evaluation of the programme 2021-2027', p. 20.

[611] Title VII Organic Law 2/2023 on the University system.

These perceived benefits of Erasmus+ may be complementary to those generated by national policies supporting these topics.

This positive perception of the programme's added value may be attributed to the fact that Erasmus+ has the benefit of being a well-known funding programme for mobility and cooperation activities.

EQ 23.2: What does Erasmus+ 2021-2027 offer in addition to other education and training support schemes available at both national and international level?

Erasmus+ was assessed very positively by the stakeholders consulted against comparable initiatives for learning mobility purposes. Evidence to answer this question stems from the public consultation, the case studies, a comparison of data across Key Actions, and a comparison with relevant international support schemes.

Stakeholders consulted for the case studies were largely of the view that Erasmus+ was unrivalled in terms of scale, scope and potential to foster collaboration. For example, the Transnational Teaching Centre for STEM education ICSE from the Pädagogische Hochschule Freiburg, a university-based research centre in Germany, funded under Erasmus+ Teacher Academies (KA2), would not have access to funding to cover the type of activities financed by Erasmus+ at the same scale without the programme, even though it receives national public and corporate funding. The operating grant provided through Jean Monnet Actions is critical to allow the Natolin and Bruges campuses of the College of Europe to operate and implement their activities. Erasmus+ also fosters collaboration with project partners as a by-product of the project, for instance to share good practices[612].

According to NA/EACEA survey respondents[613], in comparison to other education and training schemes available at national and international level, Erasmus+ is seen as:

- Having more capacity to offer more funding and a broad coverage across countries as well as offering a wide variety of formats[614].
- Promoting synergies and complementarities. 77% of respondents to the survey of National Agency representatives confirmed that their agencies undertake specific actions to ensure coordination between Erasmus+ and other programmes. Additionally, among National Agency representatives hosting multiple programmes alongside Erasmus+, 69% indicated that this practice significantly contributes to synergies between various initiatives[615]. This underscores the importance of a coordinated approach and emphasises the interconnectedness of different EU programmes.
- Fostering alignment with EU policy priorities[616] (according to 65% of respondents), offering a broader country coverage (65%), providing more funding for comparable activities (70%), offering a broader variety of formats (64%), having a stronger focus on inclusion, green and digital transition (49%), and offering more opportunities for

[612] Case studies Pädagogische Hochschule Freiburg (SCH, DE), College of Europe (BE and PL).

[613] See Annex III NA-EACEA survey.

[614] Idem

[615] See Annex III - NAs-EACEA survey.

[616] See Annex III - NA/EACEA survey. A majority of respondents to the survey agreed that the Erasmus+ programme had a 'strong' to 'medium' alignment with the following EU priorities: "reducing early school leaving, increasing higher education attainment, increasing participation in lifelong learning, increasing learners and staff who spend some time abroad, increasing the quality of education and training, improving the efficiency of education and training, increasing the transparency of skills and qualifications, improving guidance and information, promoting equity, cohesion and active citizenship, enhancing creativity and innovation, facilitating access to education and training for all, opening up education and training to the wider world, improving basic skills, improving digital and green skills, capacity building in higher education, capacity building of VET, promoting validation and recognition".

people with fewer opportunities as well as a broader coverage for projects/activities (46%)[617].

In terms of scale, the table below compares Erasmus+ with a selection of 19 international progrmmes on the basis of the number of participants or projects and the total contracted grants or budgets[618] (these 19 comparator programmes are selected out of a total of 32 comparator programmes identified and further detailed in Table 93 of the Technical Annex).

Table 24: Comparison between international funding programmes and Erasmus+ - number of participants or projects and total grant or budget amounts, 2021-2023

Name	Lead organisation	Sector	Year	Number of participants or projects	Comparison with Erasmus+	Total grants or budget	Comparison with Erasmus+
1- African Research Universities Alliances	African research universities	HE	2021	704	<	€ 1,059,233	<
			2022	116	<	€ 586,033	<
			2023	no information		€ 18,193	<
			AVG	410	<	€ 420,413	<
2- Association of Commonwealth Universities grants	Association of Commonwealth Universities	HE	2021	no information		no information	
			2022	162	<	GBP 700,000 € 833,333	<
			2023	169	<	GBP 726,000 € 864,286	<
			AVG	166	<	€ 848,800	<
3- Association of Southeast Asian Nations	South-East Asian Governments	SCH HE VET YOU SPO	2021	more than 5,000 participants	<	more than $70 million (€64.81 million) each year	<
			2022		<		
			2023		<		
4- Ausbildung Weltweit	German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF)	VET	2021	224	<	No information	
			2022	508	<	No information	
			2023	No information		No information	
			AVG	385	<		
5- Baltic-American Freedom Foundation professional internship programme	Council on International Education Exchange (CIEE) – US Department of State	HE	2021	845	<	€16,738,183 $18,077,238	<
			2022	960	<	€17,917,919 $19,351,352	<
			2023	1,080	<	€19,438,610 $20,993,699	<
			AVG	962	<	€18,031,571 $19,474,000	<

[617] See Annex III - NA/EACEA survey.

[618] The information on comparator programmes has been built on the basis of publicly available data, which differed in many cases in terms of type of available information. Therefore, budgetary information takes into account either contracted grants or allocated budget based on the available information.

Name	Lead organisation	Sector	Year	Number of participants or projects	Comparison on with Erasmus+	Total grants or budget	Comparison with Erasmus+
6- Carnegie Foundation	Carnegie Foundation	SCH HE	2021	143 grantees	<	€1,314.9 million $1,420.1 million for 10 years ending in Sept. 2021	<
			2022	132 grantees	<		<
			2023	157 grantees	<		<
			AVG	144 grantees	<	€ 131,000,000	<
7- Central European Exchange Program for University Studies CEEPUS	CEEPUS Joint Committee of Ministers	HE	2021	1,851	<	no information	
			2022	4,326	<	no information	
			2023	5,056	<	no information	
			AVG	3,744	<		
8- EEA and Norway Grants	Governments of Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway (EEA grants). Government of Norway (Norway grants).	SCH HE VET YOU	2014-2021	3,445 HE [619]mobilities	<	€ 2,800,000,000	<
			2022	no information[620]			
			2023	no information			
			AVG	492 HE mobilities	<	€ 400,000	<
9- Franco-German Youth Office DFJW	Franco-German Youth Office (DFJW)	SCH SPO VET	2021	no information	<	no information	<
			2022	121,973	<	€ 26,779,200	<
			2023	no information		no information	
			AVG	121,973		€ 26,779,200	<
10-Fulbright	US Department of State	HE	2018	Foreign Grantees: 4,732	<	$445,089,280	<
				US citizens: 8,345		€ 412,463,423	
				Total: 13.077			
			2019	Foreign Grantees: 4,928	<	$445,546,420	<
				US citizens: 3,644		€ 412,887,054	
				Total: 8,572.			
			2020	Foreign Grantees: 4,083	<	$439,677,206	<
				US citizens: 2,515		€ 407,580,769	
				Total: 6,598			
			AVG	Average grantees: 9,415	<	$443.430.968	<
						€ 410,926,668	
		HE	2021	134,906	<	€ 634,680,000	<

[619] To ensure higher comparability, data take into account only higher education student and staff mobility (between donor and beneficiary states) under the programme area 'Innovation, Research, Education, and Competitiveness' specifically within 'Education, Scholarships, Apprenticeships, and Youth Entrepreneurship'.

[620] No post-2021 programme established yet.

Name	Lead organisation	Sector	Year	Number of participants or projects	Comparison on with Erasmus+	Total grants or budget	Comparison with Erasmus+
11- German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD scholarship programme)	German universities and HEIs		2022	140,873	<	€ 774,800,000	<
			2023	140,803	>	€ 839,800,800	<
			AVG	138,860	<	€ 699,440,000	<
12- German Polish Youth Office DPJW	German-Polish Youth Office (Deutsch-Polnisches Jugendwerk)	YOU other	2021	no information		no information	
			2022	39,923	<	€ 15,259,834	<
			2023	58,249	<	€ 14,000,057	<
			AVG	49,086	<	14,629,946	<
13- Mobility programme of the International Youth (*Bureau Programmes de mobilité du Bureau International Jeunesse*)	International Youth Bureau/Bureau International Jeunesse of Belgium	YOU other	2021	517[621]	<	no information retrieved	
			2022	1,122	<	no information retrieved	
			2023	1,698	<	€ 1,457,000	<
			AVG	1,112		€ 1,457,000	<
14- Nordplus	Nordic Council of Ministers	SCH HE AE	2021	395 mobilities	<	€ 651,395	<
			2022	297 mobilities	<	€ 482,115	<
			2023	385 mobilities	<	€ 583,445	<
			AVG	359 mobilities		€ 572,318	
15- NORPART - Norwegian Partnership Programme for Global Academic Cooperation	Directorate for Higher Education and Skills of Norway	HE	2016	72 projects	<	NOK 106,856,229 € 8,980,647	<
			2018	25 projects	<	no information retrieved	
			2021	28 projects	<	NOK 205,690,385 € 17,287,085	<
			AVG	41 projects			
16- OKM (Club support (OKM))	Pohjois-Karjalan Liikunta	SPO	2021	no information	<	no information	
			2022	no information	<		
			2023	130	<		
17- Turing Scheme	United Kingdom Government	SCH HE VET	2021	no information		n/a	
			2022	41,024 people	<	GBP 98,531,462 € 117,299,360	<
			2023	38,374 people	<	GBP 107,226,123 € 127,650,146	<
			AVG	389 projects, 40,191 people	<	€ 123,756,464	<
	Governments of the Visegrad	HE	2021	no information		€ 12,000,000	<
			2022	152	<	€ 1,232,000	<

[621] The figures are based on ICF estimations calculated by subtracting the number of young people supported through EU funded programmes (Erasmus+ and ESC) from the total number of youth mobility referred to in BIJ annual report.

Name	Lead organisation	Sector	Year	Number of participants or projects	Comparison with Erasmus+	Total grants or budget	Comparison with Erasmus+
18- Visegrad Scholarship Programme	Group countries through the International Visegrad Fund		2023	120	<	€ 999,000	<
19- Visegrad Grants and Visegrad+ Grants	Governments of the Visegrad Group countries through the International Visegrad Fund	SCH YOU VET	2021	no information		No information	
			2022	204 regular grant projects	<	€ 5,654,389	<
			2023	213 regular grant projects	<	€ 6,273,126	<

Source: ICF's own elaboration on the basis of the data publicly available (see also Table 93 of the Technical annex for a more complete overview of comparator programmes). Data on total budget and number of participants for Erasmus+ are based respectively on financial envelopes from the Erasmus+ Work Programmes, and KA1 completed mobilities, Erasmus+ 'MFF 2021-2027' Dashboard, extracted by ICF on 5th January 2024. Data corresponds to completed mobilities extracted by call year (see table 62 of the Technical Annex). 2023 data needs to be treated with caution as it is provisional and hence cannot be interpreted fully in the analysis. AVG represents the annual average for the years with data available..

The table above shows that Erasmus+ is one of the largest programmes of its kind. With an annual budget of EUR 4.4 billion in 2023, and EUR 26.2 billion for the period 2021-2027, Erasmus+ has, by far, the largest budget for mobility and cooperation/capacity building activities in the fields of education and training, youth and sport. Table 24 indicates a significant difference in volume between Erasmus+ and these other programmes. A similar comparison has been carried out between the number of participants in Erasmus+ and the 19 comparator programmes included in the sample. It is worth noting that a participant is defined in a general term in this analysis as an individual or organisational grant recipient. The number of Erasmus+ participants individual learners and staff under KA1 is higher than the number of participants for most of the international programmes considered in this analysis.

Scope effects

According to the Erasmus+ 2024 Annual Work Programme:

- EU Member states and third countries associated to the programme take part in 54 actions under KA1, KA2, KA3 and JMAs, although with some variations in the volume of projects because the overall allocated amounts and funding models used under Erasmus+ differ among Key Actions, with KA1 using a unit cost model and KA2 and KA3 a lump sum and because of the country allocations applied for actions under indirect management.
- Third countries not associated to the programme have different levels of cooperation because of differences in eligibility criteria depending on actions and relevant budget heading. Generally, third countries not associated to the programme are fully eligible when actions are funded under external policy funding instruments IPA III and NDICI-GE (Heading 6 of the EU budget). For example, third countries not associated to the programme are eligible for incoming and outgoing International mobility in the higher

education field (KA171[622]) for KA1, Erasmus Mundus scholarships under KA2[623], as well as virtual exchanges in HE and Youth[624] (KA1 under direct management). International outgoing mobility is also possible under other actions funded under internal policy funds (Heading 2 of the EU budget) in HE[625], VET[626] and Youth[627]. Under KA2, third countries not associated to the programme are eligible for capacity building actions in HE, VET, Youth[628] and Sport[629] (funded under H6 of the budget), as well as for Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters and Erasmus Mundus Design Measures (funded by both internal and external policy funds). In European Universities alliances, they can be full partners if coming from Western Balkans or otherwise associated partners if coming from the European Higher Education Area Bologna Process countries. They also qualify for support for the National Support Service for the Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe (EPALE). They are included in a limited number of KA3 actions, including support to Europass-EQF-Euroguidance (only Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia), support to the further implementation of graduate tracking (only EFTA) and policy experimentations (Western Balkans), for example support to the National Academic Recognition and Information Centres (NARIC). Third countries not associated to the programme also have access to Jean Monnet Chairs, modules, centres of excellence and policy debates on external EU policies.

- Under KA2 in particular, organisations from third countries associated and not associated to the programme have been awarded a total grant amount of 1,215,605,342 euros (for associated third countries) and 1,107,938,656 euros (for third countries not associated to the programme), over the period 2021-2023 according to data on directly managed projects[630].

Erasmus+ plays a critical role in providing opportunities across sectors. All the **target groups** covered by Erasmus+ are also covered by other programmes to a certain extent, as illustrated in table 93 in Annex I which explains the groups/sectors and fields covered by

[622] KA171 supports mobility to and from third countries not associated to the Programme (with the exception of regions 13 and 14) and is funded by EU external action instruments (the eligible countries are defined in the Erasmus+ Programme Guide).

[623] Heading 6 provides funding only for EMJM scholarships. The operating grants for the Master's degrees to run are funded under H2 of the budget.

[624] Open to Regions 1,2,3 and 9.

[625] KA131 supports staff and student mobility to all third countries not associated to the Programme (regions 1-14, based on the "Eligible countries" defined in the Erasmus+ Programme Guide) and is funded by EU internal policy funds.

[626] For VET mobility, organisations holding an Erasmus accreditation can send (i) participants (staff) on job shadowing and teaching or training assignments, and (ii) learners for short-term mobility, long-term mobility (ErasmusPro) and VET skills competitions in third countries not associated to the Programme (regions 1-14, based on the "Eligible countries" defined in the Erasmus+ Programme Guide).

[627] For youth mobility actions, up to 25% of the budget available can fund international mobility activities including organisations and participants from third countries not associated to the Programme neighbouring the EU (regions 1 to 4, based on the "Eligible countries" defined in the Erasmus+ Programme Guide).

[628] Applicants (coordinator and full partners) for youth Capacity building projects must be legal entities established in an EU Member State or third country associated to the Programme, or organisations in third countries not associated to the Programme from regions 1 and 3, as defined in the Programme Guide.

[629] The applicants (coordinators and full partners) for sport Capacity building projects must be legal entities (public or private bodies) active in the field of sport established in an EU Member State or third country associated to the Programme or in third country not associated to the Programme from Region 1, as defined in the Programme Guide.

[630] Based on the number of projects in which third countries associated and not associated to the programme were coordinators or participants for KA2 directly managed projects (2021-2023) according to the dataset of centralised projects 2021-2023 summarised in table 92 of the technical annex. Data comprises action types under KA2, namely: eTwinning national support organisations KA208, Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe - National Support Service KA209, small scale partnerships KA210, Capacity building in higher education KA211, cooperation partnerships KA220, Partnerships for excellence KA230, Erasmus Mundus Design measures KA231, Erasmus+ Partnerships Teacher Academies KA232, capacity building in vocational education and training KA233, partnerships for innovation KA234, partnerships for cooperation KA236, capacity building KA237, partnerships for excellence KA238, partnerships for innovation – forward looking projects KA239, capacity building programme sport CB-SPO1, large-scale not-for-profit European Sport events LS-SNCESE1, collaborative partnerships for sport SCP1, not-for-profit European sports events SNCESE1.

comparator programmes; but Erasmus+ plays a more crucial role for certain groups, such as adult learners, sport staff, or the youth sector, due to the fact that Erasmus+ has higher budget amounts than many other funding programmes (and because comparatively fewer funding programmes may be available in these sectors and fields than in others, including for example higher education). Erasmus+ funds sport staff mobility at grassroots level, unlike any other scheme identified. Among the comparator programmes selected for the analysis of this evaluation question and listed in Annex I, table 93:

- 18 are related to higher education,
- 7 cover the school sector,
- 10 cover vocational education and training or adult learning,
- 7 address youth,
- 2 programmes cover sport,

One includes all education levels and three other sectors (such as the arts and culture).[631]

Erasmus+ and other instruments such as EEA and Norway Grants or the Turing Scheme seem to have a comprehensive, mainstreamed approach to **inclusion and diversity**, with several specific measures implemented to support this priority. In Erasmus+ KA1 mobility activities, a significant proportion of participants (15% over the period 2021-2023) were people with fewer opportunities. The share of such participants was particularly high in the youth sector (28%) and adult education field (24%)[632]. Considering that these two sectors are among those that have access to fewer comparable programmes (four non-EU funding programmes covered youth and one adult education out of the selected sample of 19 comparable programmes), the role Erasmus+ plays in supporting individuals with fewer opportunities is clear. The responses to the NA/EACEA survey nevertheless suggest that programme inclusiveness could be further improved, a point that was also raised in some case studies[633].

13 comparator schemes identified fund both mobility and cooperation/capacity building actions, as Erasmus+ does, yet Erasmus+ is one of the few funding programmes covering such a wide breadth of fields across education and training, youth and sport. The perception of the breadth of the programme, however, varies. Most project beneficiaries interviewed for the case studies value the scope of Erasmus+[634]. However, according to respondents to the NAs/EACEA survey, Erasmus+ was perceived only slightly less positively than other programmes in terms of its capacity to offer a wide variety of formats (actions and sizes of projects). Half of the respondents to this survey saw it as slightly inferior in respect of its breadth of coverage of topics for projects or activities (n=87 out of 164)[635].

Role effects

The evidence collected suggests that Erasmus+ plays a positive role in these areas:

Internationalisation and capacity building.

The programme fosters international networks and knowledge exchange, as emphasised by various data sources, including 17 national reports[636].

[631] Multiple entries were possible.

[632] Annex I – Technical Annex, Table 31

[633] Annex III NA/EACEA survey section 3.3.5; see also Case study Pädagogische Hochschule Freiburg (SCH, DE).

[634] See for example Case study Agenzija Zghazagh (YOU, MT), European Hockey Federation (SPO, BE), College of Europe (BE and PL), European Institute of Public Administration (NL), Edlab, University of Grenada (ES)

[635] Annex III NA/EACEA survey. Q12 “To what extent do you agree with these statements about the comparison between Erasmus + and other comparable initiatives?”

[636] AT, BEde, BEnl, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, IE, IT, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, SE, TR

In addition, as mentioned in EQ23.1, among PC respondents that were familiar with Erasmus+, 97% 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' that the programme contributes to the internationalisation of the participating organisations and contributes to systemic policy changes[637].

Based on the findings of the beneficiary staff survey, staff members of organisations having taken part in Erasmus+ over the 2014-2020 programming period tend to have more continuous international professional exchanges (through social media, letters or exchanges of information and keeping up-to-date with professional developments), and are more likely to take part in international collaboration and networks as a result of participation in Erasmus+.

Erasmus+ was widely recognised by the majority of national-level key informants interviewed as a significant contributor to internationalisation within the education, training, youth, and sport sectors, through increased mobility opportunities, collaboration among institutions, and the development of shared values and understanding[638]. Interviewees from non-associated third countries highlighted the importance of capacity-building actions in the internationalisation and modernisation of higher education (see EQ26.2). An interviewee however regretted the restrictions to the participation of these countries in KA2 decentralised actions. To involve third countries not associated to the programme in Cooperation Partnerships, Centres of Vocational Excellence or Alliances for Innovation, applicants need to prove that their participation "brings an essential added value to the project" and the added value of partners from non-associated third countries is explicitly assessed by external assessors – when the additional value is not demonstrated, the project proposal is considered without the participation of this partner.[639] According to the same interviewee, it is complex to justify such an added value, and this discourages applicants from involving non-associated third countries (international level KIIs). Data on programme volumes also suggests that, in the absence of Erasmus+, international mobilities and international cooperation/capacity building actions in the fields of education and training, youth and sport would significantly fall in most participating countries.

Innovation. 86% of PC respondents 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' that Erasmus+ triggers innovation in the education and training, youth and sport sectors[640], an opinion also voiced in the KIIs. Innovations funded by the programme cover a wide spectrum. For example, out of 85 sampled projects falling under the specific action of Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices (indirectly managed KA2 projects under the previous programme), 63 had outcomes related to knowledge exchange and collaboration, 44 to skills development and recognition, 7 to institutional development and governance, and 6 to cultural and social interaction. On top of this, Erasmus+ has funded innovative projects, for example to provide AI training for school teachers[641].

[637] Annex II - PC report, section 3.5.1

[638] Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, Türkiye, Ukraine.

[639] Erasmus+ Programme Guide 2024: https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2023-11/2024-Erasmus%2BProgramme-Guide_EN.pdf

[640] See Annex II - PC report, section 3.5.1

[641] 836 Erasmus+ projects relate to Artificial intelligence. These include for example: 'I'm not a robot: working with artificial intelligence in early childhood education', Vrailexia: partnering outside the box: digital and artificial intelligence integrated tools to support higher education students with dyslexia https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2020-1-IT02-KA203-080006; Student academic performance: a machine learning approach for risk assessment and drop out prevention; https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2020-1-ES01-KA203-082090; Artificial intelligence in education.

Process effects

Erasmus+ appears to have an effect on the processes of other programmes. 77% of respondents to the NA/EACEA survey agreed that they undertook specific actions to ensure synergies and complementarity between Erasmus+ and other programmes, and 69% strongly agreed that enhanced synergies between Erasmus+ and other programmes were built as a result of the National Agency hosting and managing programmes other than Erasmus+[642]. 16 key informants highlighted examples of the added value of Erasmus+ in terms of process.

The examples of process effects identified refer to the harmonisation of administrative rules and procedures of national/international schemes with Erasmus+ rules. Some relevant examples include:

- EEA and Norwegian Financial Mechanisms 2014-2021 require that 'the national practices for the management and financing of the educational programmes shall be established following the principles of Erasmus+ and/or Horizon 2020 EU programmes'[643].
- Some 2021-2027 Cohesion policy programmes in Portugal refer to Erasmus+ unit costs funding model[644].
- National programmes in Bulgaria setting similar goals and priorities and using similar application procedures to the European ones, aiming at synchronisation particularly with Erasmus+ (national Key informant interview).
- Spain currently developing a programme to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities, with an application form that will be similar to that of Erasmus+ (national Key informant interviews).

Regarding the added value for organisations and systems in terms of process:

- In higher education, Erasmus+ has been crucial to fund the European Universities initiative, which in the 2024 Call has an envelope of EUR 189 million as indicated in 2024 Erasmus+ Annual Work Programme[645], and overall for the 2021-2027 a total budget of around EUR 1,2 Billion. The objective of the European Universities alliances is to foster closer long-term structural and strategic cooperation to establish 'European Universities'. Following the 2024 call, Erasmus+ supports 64 alliances involving more than 560 HEIs in 35 countries in 2024. European Universities alliances are enhancing capabilities and raising excellence and innovation levels by pooling resources and expertise of their partner higher education institutions, driving educational excellence, fostering balanced mobility and pedagogical innovation, all across Europe. The alliances enhanced attractiveness and competitiveness of European higher education, strengthening its quality and internationalisation, and contributing to shaping higher education policies in Member States.
- In vocational education, Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) have also led to additional added value, for example by growing networks in each country of the partnership, to create skills eco-systems that are responsive to the needs of the labour market and society and ensure impact on VET systems. For example, the

[642] See Annex III - NA/EACEA survey, section 3.2.3

[643] See EEA Financial Mechanism and Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2014-2021, Guideline for educational programmes. Rules for the establishment and implementation of programmes falling under programme area 3 "Education, Scholarships, Apprenticeships and Youth Entrepreneurship, p. 5. https://eeagrants.org/sites/default/files/resources/2014-2021%20Guideline%20for%20educational%20programmes.pdf

[644] See Norte Regional Programme 2021-2027: https://portugal2030.pt/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2023/05/sfc2021-PRG-2021PT16FFPR003-1.2_PRNorte.pdf

[645] Case studies TU Berlin - ENHANCE Alliance (HED, DE) and CHARM-EU, University of Barcelona (ES)

project Pilot PoVE Water initially involved five regional CoVEs[646] and the network grew from 11 to 23 partners in total. The BARCOVE project[647], funded under the 2022 Erasmus+ forward-looking projects call, was subsequently set up as a spin-off of the PoVE Water project to develop applied research in VET in CoVEs.

- In school education, Erasmus+ Teacher Academies, of which 27 are currently funded under Erasmus+[648], create partnerships and cooperation between teacher education and training providers, and contribute to tackling some of the most relevant issues in the teaching community. For example, the Erasmus+ Teacher Academy (KA2) 'ContinueUp'[649] aims to support the development of digital competences for teachers based on DigCompEdu and through a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) module. The International Center for STEM education, coordinated by the Pädagogische Hochschule Freiburg under the Erasmus+ Teacher Academies, has become an international center for research and best practice exchange for innovative STEM pedagogy. The Centre supports intercultural understanding, better collaboration and better teaching for European learners.
- In the adult education sector, participation in Erasmus+ has led to greater capacity and know-how in grant applications for the Association AFEJI-Hauts-de-France, which has strengthened this part of its organisation to support its network members.
- In the sport sector, Erasmus+, through individual staff mobilities (KA1), partnerships (KA2) and large-scale sport events (KA3), is the only programme to fund physical mobilities at grassroot level and professional opportunities in its participating countries. This is the case in the Netherlands, as highlighted in the case studies on the organisation Stichting Flik-Flak, or in Belgium, as in the Case study on the European Hockey Federation[650]. In addition to making the activities concerned possible, access to Erasmus+ provides an opportunity to build connections and to consider new initiatives through a multiplier effect in sport, for the organisation to gain experience in the process of creating partnerships and to gain visibility and recognition by being associated with a well-known European programme (see Case studies on the project "European Young Women programme" run by FiA, France).
- In the youth sector, Erasmus+ has had an impact on whole national fields, as highlighted in the case of Latvia and touched upon in EQ23.1. In Latvia, the insertion of inclusion in the national priorities for the youth field and the development of youth work (all the Latvian municipalities being required to engage in youth work) were inspired by Erasmus+ according to an interviewee. Erasmus+ promotes the diffusion of information, for example through Eurodesk, the YouthWiki, or the funding of network of thematic and regional SALTOs in the field of youth. It is also a lifeline to fund the activities of youth organisations in many countries, e.g. Belgium (Youth for Exchange and Understanding), Hungary (E29, formerly Ifjúsági Nomád Klub), Malta (Agenzija Zghazagh), and Romania (Asociatia Sprijin+)[651].

[646] The Netherlands – West EU with 5 partners, Czechia– Central EU with 2 partners, Scotland with 1 partner, Latvia - Baltic with 2 partners and Malta – Mediterranean with 2 partners

[647] "BARCOVE - Building an Applied Research facility into COVE": https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/101086595 and https://www.povewater.eu/barcove/

[648] European Commission, '16 new Erasmus+ teacher academies to promote excellence in teacher education in Europe', 2023, https://education.ec.europa.eu/news/16-new-erasmus-teacher-academies-to-promote-excellence-in-teacher-education-in-europe

[649] "ContinueUP - Co-constructing the continuum between initial teacher education and continuous professional development": https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/101103641

[650] Case studies Stichting Flik Flak (SPO, NL) and European Hockey Federation (SPO, BE).

[651] Case studies Youth Wiki (MT, FR, CY), E29 (formerly, Ifjúsági Nomád Klub) (YOU, HU); Youth for Exchange and Understanding (YOU, BE), and Asociatia Sprijin+ (YOU, RO)

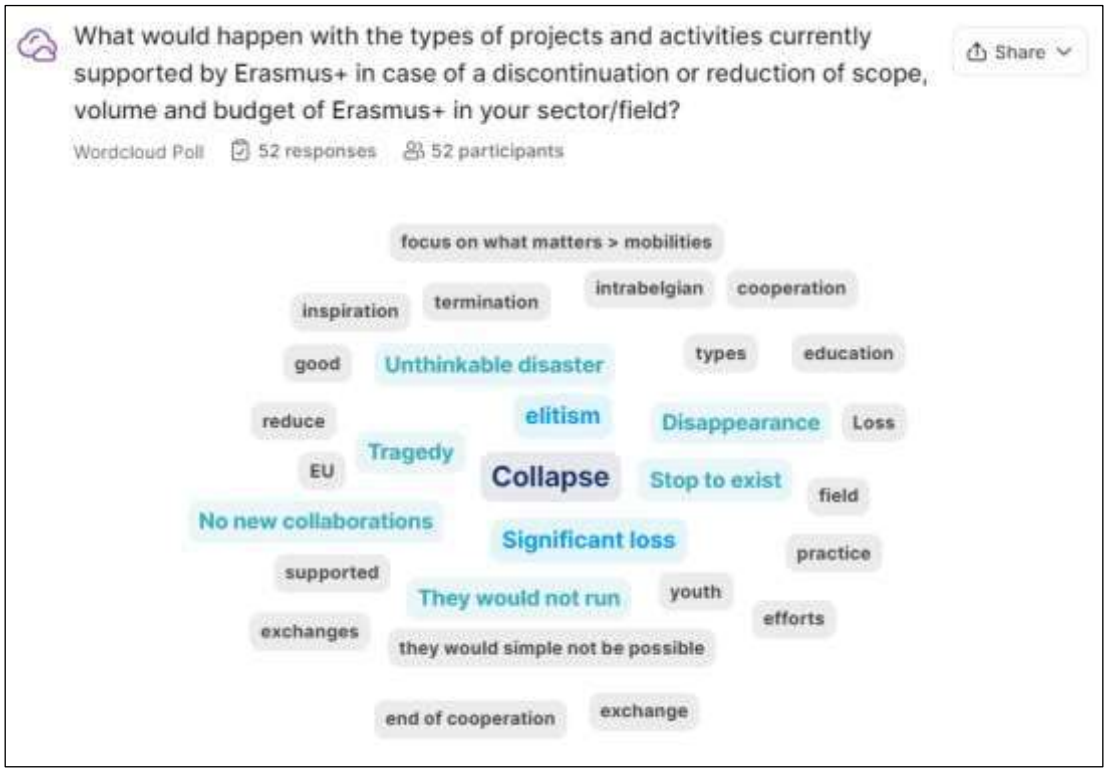
However, according to two interviewed European level stakeholder organisations, concerns persist regarding the programme's effectiveness in reaching smaller, less experienced organisations and achieving a truly inclusive impact. According to other European level key informants, there is also a need for more targeted efforts, improved awareness, and simpler application procedures to ensure equitable access to opportunities for all learners.

EQ 23.3: What would be the most likely consequences of stopping the Erasmus+ programme?

This section complements the analysis provided in EQ7 concerning the likely consequences of having no Erasmus+.

Stopping Erasmus+ would have significant negative effects, according to participants[652] from the workshop held on 9 July 2024 to present and discuss the findings from this evaluation's draft final report, as illustrated by the word cloud of their views expressed in a live poll.

Figure 31: Consequences of stopping Erasmus+ - Word cloud of responses from workshop participants



Stopping Erasmus+ would remove in average EUR 4 billion of annual funding across the sectors education and training, youth and sport. The analysis of comparator programmes suggest that this would have a significant effect, as the programme is currently the main scheme supporting mobility, cooperation and internationalisation in its sectors for most participating countries. Most case studies indicate that beneficiary organisations would not be able to pursue the same activities at the same scale without Erasmus+. Maintaining the current levels of international mobility and cooperation without Erasmus+ would require considerable budgetary efforts at national level to compensate, which many of the

[652] Representatives from Erasmus+ National Authorities, Erasmus+ National Agencies, stakeholder organisations active at European level in all Programme fields, representatives from the other EU institutions, Commission's Inter-Service Group members assisting with the preparation of the Erasmus+ evaluation.

programme countries may not be able or willing to make. It is likely that the internationalisation of programme sectors would be reduced to close to zero in several countries, due to the limited funding available for similar activities, especially in sport and youth.

In higher education, Erasmus+ is the primary funding tool for short-term (at least three months) mobility across the programme countries. Based on Eurostat data, Erasmus+ supported around 55% of the credit mobilities at EU level, including Serbia and Norway, in 2022. EU programmes are the only possibility to go abroad for a short period during studies in some countries, like Cyprus and Ireland, where 100% of short mobility is financed by Erasmus+. This share ranges from 95% to 98.8% in six other countries (RO, BG, EL, LT, MT and SK) according to data from Eurostat. If Erasmus+ were to be halted, and no similar alternative were to be provided, 12 programme countries would see higher education international mobility virtually disappear (with under 100 grant-supported mobilities a year[653]).

Brexit and the resulting withdrawal of the United Kingdom from Erasmus+ provides a 'real-life experiment' of what stopping Erasmus+ may mean for a country and how much a replacement national scheme may cost. The UK Government launched the Turing Scheme, with a budget of around 130 million euros - GBP 110 million - per year[654], for students in universities, colleges and schools to go on study and work placements abroad. The grants provided are not the same in Erasmus+. Grants to help cover living costs are higher under Erasmus+ for placements lasting over eight weeks to countries outside programme countries; however, the Turing Scheme has more generous support for travel costs[655]. The number of UK higher education students going abroad has increased under Turing, reaching a maximum of 41,024 in 2021/22. This is currently higher than the number of UK student mobilities that were funded by Erasmus+ before Brexit – around 19,853 of UK students participated in the Erasmus+ call for studies abroad or work placements in 2018, when Erasmus+ funded the majority (53%) of UK students travelling abroad[656].

However, the Turing Scheme has a much narrower scope than Erasmus+: it does not include dedicated actions in the fields of youth and sport; there is no provision for staff placements; and it does not provide funding for incoming student mobility. The social media analysis conducted for this evaluation found some discontent with the replacement of Erasmus+ with the Turing Scheme in the UK. Complaints centre on Turing's lower coverage of living costs, and lower accessibility for students from financially disadvantaged backgrounds, as compared to Erasmus+.

[653] Bulgaria, Czechia, Greece, Croatia, Cyprus, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, and North Macedonia. Data source: Eurostat,

https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/EDUC_UOE_MOBC01__custom_2996798/bookmark/table?lang=en&bookmarkId=d0a7e851-3c49-4d2e-a808-f6890306b3dd (own calculations).

[654] Confirmed for academic years 2021/2022, 2022/2023 and 2023/2024.

[655] Lewis, J. (2023). The Turing Scheme. House of Commons Library. https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9141/

[656] House of Lords (2019). Brexit: the Erasmus and Horizon programmes, p.9 https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201719/ldselect/ldeucom/283/283.pdf; House of Commons (2021). 'The Erasmus programme', p. 10 https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/7985705e-41b7-11ea-9099-01aa75ed71a1/language-en; European Commission Erasmus+ Annual report 2018, p.38, https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/7985705e-41b7-11ea-9099-01aa75ed71a1/language-en

3.5.2 EQ 24 Contribution to Europeanness

EQ 24.1: To what extent does the Erasmus+ programme contribute to developing knowledge of European integration matters, raising awareness of EU common values, and fostering a European sense of belonging?

One of the main distinguishing features of Erasmus+, as compared to other schemes, is its ambition to foster a sense of European belonging/identity.

The evidence to answer this question comes from the national reports, the public consultation results, survey results, desk research and results from the case studies and Key informant interviews.

Erasmus+, as a key contributor to the development and achievement of the European Education Area, aims to raise awareness and understanding of the EU, notably with regards to common EU values, and increasing participation in democratic processes, both within Europe and beyond. In particular, Jean Monnet Actions focus specifically on spreading knowledge about European integration matters. Jean Monnet Actions, including the Designated Institutions, aim at supporting the development of European integration through teaching, research and policy debates, and their benefits are further explored in question Q24.2.

Evaluation findings suggest **widespread recognition of the added value of Erasmus+ to develop knowledge of the EU, raise awareness of EU common values and foster a sense of European belonging**:

- 23 national reports on the implementation and impact of Erasmus+ refer to the positive impact of the programme on promoting awareness of shared European values, European identity[657], and intercultural understanding and openness[658] .
- Among PC respondents familiar or partly familiar with Erasmus+, 91% 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' that the programme contributes to building a European identity or sense of belonging to the EU and raises awareness of EU values[659]. The contribution of Erasmus+ to EU values and European identity is roughly similar among respondents from the different sectors and fields: 92% in school education, 84% in higher education, 88% in VET, 90% in youth and 97% in sport.
- Results from the beneficiary learners survey show that 88% of the participants in mobility since 2014 felt that they had increased their sense of belonging to the EU. Programme participation is positively associated with respondents' sense of European identity and positive feelings towards the EU[660]. Participation in Erasmus+ led to an increase of the likelihood of having a sense of EU identity by a statistically significant 0.231 unit, and of the likelihood of feeling positive about the EU, by 3.672 unit (on a composite index measured on a scale of 0 to 100), particularly for participants from higher education (statistically significant increase in the likelihood of feeling positive toward the EU by 3.011 unit) and for young people on long term mobility (statistically significant increase of the likelihood of feeling positive toward the EU of 6.532 unit, including for participants to the European Voluntary Service,

[657] AT, BEde, BEfr, BEnl, CZ, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, IT, LU, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, SE, SK, TR.

[658] AT, BEde, BEfr, BEnl, CZ, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, IT, LU, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, SE, SK, TR.

[659] Annex II - Public consultation report, section 3.5.1.

[660] As indicated in the methodology section, some degree of caution should be exercised when interpreting the impact estimates calculated on the basis of the beneficiary survey data, which should be considered as only indicative of the real impact exerted by Erasmus+ on the outcomes explored.

DiscoverEU and the Youth Exchange)[661]. Those with fewer opportunities were also more likely to experience positive feelings toward the EU, by a statistically significant 3.377 unit (statistically significant positive effects were also noted for those participants who did not identify themselves as having fewer opportunities and who did not repeat a grade). 49% of surveyed programme participants indicated that they saw themselves as European, compared to 40% of non-participants. Also, 79% of surveyed programme participants indicated positive feelings towards the EU, compared to 74% of non-participants.

- Results from the beneficiary staff survey show that participation in the Erasmus+ programme also led to a positive and significant impact on the strength of a positive feeling towards the EU for participating staff in general (with a statistically significant increase of 1.468 unit), and particularly for staff members from the school education field (statistically significant increase of 1.853 unit). A positive correlation not statistically significant, was also noted for staff members from the higher education, sport and youth sectors.
- Some case studies also demonstrated the value of participation in Erasmus+ to develop participants' sense of European identity and belonging[662], and there is also some evidence of an increased engagement with Europe and the EU among participants from non-EU countries. The most recent Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Graduate Impact Survey provides some evidence regarding the programme's contribution to the promotion of European values among graduates from non-EU countries (87% of graduates from the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master programme are non-EU).[663] 68% reported that their Erasmus Mundus studies impacted their attitude towards Europe and the EU. Participants to the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Programme assessed that they were more likely to still be in touch with their fellow students and lecturers. 88% of former Erasmus Mundus graduates still had ongoing interactions with their host countries after graduation in 2019/2020 which suggests that the programme contributes to the formation of strong interactions. Participants from non-EU countries were more likely to recommend studying in Europe and to be of the view that more countries should cooperate as the EU does than EU participants. Most graduates also reported improvements in areas of social and political engagement due to EMJMD, as part of their personal and intercultural development, assessing in particular improvements in the tolerance towards others' values/opinions (89%). The survey targeted all graduates from academic years 2010/11, 2015/16 and 2019/20 who held an Erasmus Mundus scholarship, and 85% of graduates explained that participation in Erasmus Mundus had an impact on their attitude towards Europe and the EU, likely due to more involvement with the topic of Europe and the EU, greater intercultural competencies and impact on career choices than before participation in Erasmus Mundus[664].

Two points of debate relate, however, to how much the Erasmus+ programme itself contributed to increasing this sense of European identity, as opposed to beneficiaries having these characteristics prior to participating in the programme; and to the impact of this increased sense of identity on life decisions after participating in the programme.

[661] The results related to the beneficiary survey are reported on the basis of positive effects and/or statistically significant effect. A positive effect indicates a less than 95% confidence that the positive impact observed in the sample of respondents can be observed in the surveyed population. The difference in the level of confidence is that the impacts observed can be extended to the population may be due to heterogeneity in the sample size of respondents across various sectors/fields.

[662] Case studies Agenzija Zghazagh (YOU, MT); European Institute of Public Administration (NL).

[663] Juhlke, R. & Unger, M. (2022). Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Graduate Impact Survey 2020/21. Comprehensive report of results. Institut für Höhere Studien – Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS). Pp. 40 and 43, https://www.esaa-eu.org/fileadmin/esaa/content/news/files/2022/gis_202021_definite_report.pdf

[664] Out of a population size of N=2,013.

Regarding the former point, the meta-analysis carried out by the evaluation team (topic 3: EU values) found that mobile students tended to be a highly self-selected group (meaning that they already had stronger than average European identities when they applied for the exchange programme) and their mobility experience did not lead to much of a change in their sense of European identity. However, the meta-analysis mostly found evidence relating to mobility activities that took place before the two programming periods under analysis (before 2014)[665].

In terms of the impact of an increased sense of European identity on life decisions, the analysis of the beneficiary learners survey data[666] shows a positive association between participation in Erasmus+ and the likelihood of moving to another EU country *permanently* to work or study, in particular for participants in the VET field (significant positive impact of 0.401 unit), youth participants on long-term mobility (statistically significant increase of 0.607) and those taking part in the European Voluntary Service (statistically significant increase of 0.845); however when summing up these results with those of the other fields, no positive correlation is found for the programme overall. In the aforementioned survey of Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Programme graduates, participation in the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master was found to have a possible impact on openness to live abroad: 26% of graduates to the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Programme lived in an Erasmus Mundus host country when surveyed, and 51% of graduates who returned to their country of origin would like to live in one of the Erasmus Mundus host countries but had not had the chance yet[667].

EQ 24.2: What is the benefit of direct support to designated institutions named in the Erasmus+ Regulation?

Jean Monnet Designated institutions (JMDIs) have, as an objective to support teaching, learning activities, research and debates on European integration matters, including on the EU's future challenges and opportunities.

At the organisational level, the operating grants that the seven JMDIs receive (EUR 41.033.112 according to the 2023 Erasmus+ Annual Work Programme [668]) make it possible for them to deliver their teaching, training, research and dissemination activities focused on the EU – that they could not do otherwise according to the representatives from JMDIs consulted for the case studies[669]. These operating grants make it possible for JMDIs to offer a specialised focus on EU-related schemes and to have a scale of impact that they would not otherwise have, because this is not typically covered by other institutional or national funding. Jean Monnet funding provides targeted financial support specifically for EU-related education and research, which is crucial for the development of programmes and initiatives that enhance understanding of EU integration and policies. This core added value of Jean Monnet funding prevails through the range of thematic activities covered by JMDIs. For example, according to a representative from the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (EASNIE), interviewed for this evaluation, Jean Monnet funding allowed EASNIE to enhance an understanding of EU integration and policies as well as inclusive

[665] Annex VI - Meta-analyses, section 3.3.

[666] As indicated in the methodology section, some degree of caution should be exercised when interpreting the impact estimates calculated on the basis of the beneficiary survey data, which should be considered as only indicative of the real impact exerted by Erasmus+ on the outcomes explored.

[667] See Juhlke, R. & Unger, M. (2022). Op. Cit., figure 28, p. 46, out of a population size of N=2,015.

[668] Excluding funding for the Jean Monnet Chairs, modules and Centre of excellence, policy debates and actions in other fields of education and training. Indicative amounts for the seven Jean Monnet Designated Institutions Erasmus+ under the 2023 Annual Work Programme adopted on 9 March 2023, pp. 97-98, https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2023-03/erasmusplus-awp-review-mar23_en.pdf

[669] Case studies with the European University Institute, the College of Europe, the European Institute of Public Administration, as well as additional interviews with the Centre international de formation européenne (CIFE) and the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education. (No representative from the Academy on European Law could be consulted).

education, which is the core focus area of EASNIE. Jean Monnet funding also allows, for instance, the European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA) to provide its events and dissemination outputs for free, thereby reaching a larger audience, outreach activities that EIPA could not have delivered without Jean Monnet. The Jean Monnet-funded conferences and dissemination events created valuable networking opportunities, fostering cross-sectoral cooperation and dialogue between academia and policymakers across the 10 different policy areas covered in the International Benchmarking Study. This led to a leverage effect, allowing EIPA to establish strong cooperation with various national ministries who commit funding for specific initiatives implemented by EIPA. For instance, the Dutch Ministry of Interior funded the establishment of the European Housing Policy Network (EHPN), which held its first conference in June 2024.

These grants also act as leverage to expand on other relevant activities and secure additional funding which would not otherwise have been available. For instance, the Erasmus+ grant was instrumental in allowing the European University Institute (EUI) to secure matched funding from the Italian Government to set up the School of Transnational Governance STG, a public policy school.

In terms of impacts which would otherwise not have been achieved, other leading European academic institutions such as the College of Europe, the EUI and the EIPA actively contribute to promoting cultural diversity, cohesiveness and inclusiveness, intercultural and multilingual understanding, and provide a space for research and debate.

One main contribution of JMDIs is to increase knowledge about the EU among their learners, as well as the broader community. The courses and activities provided by JMDIs increase knowledge about the EU, the core mission of JMDIs. For example, the European University Institute has run the Max Weber programme for talented postdoctoral researchers with an EU focused-research interest. It has also created the School of Transnational Governance, which would not have been possible without Erasmus+ funding. The School of Transnational Governance runs a masters in Transnational governance and trains mid-career professionals on the topic of transnational governance with a focus on the EU.

Erasmus+ funding also supports relationships with other countries, including neighbouring and third countries not associated to the programme. The Natolin Campus of the College of Europe builds knowledge on relationships with EU neighbours and enlargement, for example by having part of its curriculum focusing on the EU's external relations wider neighbourhood, and having admitted students from Central and Eastern European Countries which were not yet part of the EU at the time, in order to support European integration in these post-communist transition countries[670]. In addition to academic scholarship and education, it also contributes to setting up and fostering networks with the local community and relevant NGOs such as the Red Cross.

An additional benefit of direct support to designated institutions is support for professionals entering into EU careers, who can obtain training through the EIPA, CIFE, the EUI or the College of Europe[671] for example.

Erasmus+ also supports the **European Youth Forum**[672] with an operating grant of EUR 3.3 million[673] in 2024 (see 2024 Erasmus+ Annual Work Programme) and EUR 2.8 million in 2023 (see 2023 Erasmus+ Annual Work Programme). Through support from Erasmus+, the European Youth Forum can advocate for national youth councils and international non-

[670] College of Europe of Natolin, activity report 2009-2019, 10-Year-Activity-Report-of-the-College-of-Europe-in-Natolin.pdf

[671] The College of Europe has a network of 17,000 alumni, forming a network of professionals across the public and private sectors, some of them in distinguished positions (e.g. commissioners). See Case study College of Europe (BE and PL).

[672] https://www.youthforum.org/

[673] This represents an increase of 0.5 million euros in comparison to previous years for the European Youth Forum to organise the event LevelUP.

governmental youth organisations in Europe; influence national youth policy processes through consultations; and support access to further funding.

The Erasmus+ funding makes it possible for the European Youth Forum to coordinate members' positions and work on key policy issues affecting youth at the EU level, something that no other organisation carries out in the Youth sector, and would not be possible for the European Youth Forum to perform without the support of Erasmus+, because the organisation would be more tied to project-based funding with other earmarked objectives. The European Youth Forum also supports access to funding information from Erasmus+ at the centralised and decentralised level, and access to funding for grassroots organisations which would be more limited without Erasmus+ (and variable across the EU due to heterogeneity across national donors).

3.5.3 EQ 25 Benefits of participation

EQ 25.1: What is the benefit and added value of Erasmus+ 2021-2027 for individuals or organisations participating in the programme, compared to non-participants?

Participating in Erasmus+ has significant benefits for individuals and organisations.

Benefits for individuals

Participating in Erasmus+ leads to a range of benefits related to academic performance and skills formation, employment prospects as well as transferrable skills and competences, which are valuable both for academic performance and on the labour market. Participation in Erasmus+ also leads to an enhanced sense of European belonging, compared to non-participants, as indicated in EQ 24.1. The evidence collected is based on the meta-analysis, the beneficiary surveys of staff and learners, which compare the perception of participants and non-participants[674], the case studies and the national reports on the implementation and impact on Erasmus+.

Strong positive individual impacts were identified in 33 national implementation reports[675], including improved language skills, intercultural competences, self-confidence and employability.

Regarding academic performance and skills development. These benefits may be especially significant in terms of language skills acquisition and cultural cognitive performance, as evidenced by the body of academic research explored in the meta-analysis[676].

According to the survey of beneficiary learners[677], Erasmus+ supports participants' ability to learn. Results in this sense emerge in particular for school pupils, for whom participation in Erasmus+ was found to lead to a 2.832 unit increase in the propensity to learn, measured by a composite index on a scale of 0 to 100 (and for whom the impact of participation in Erasmus+ on the ability to learn is particularly strong when mobility takes place in person[678]

[674] 25,413 Erasmus+ participants and 2,094 non-participants responded to the survey of beneficiary learners; and 26,332 Erasmus+ participants and 2,894 non-participants responded to the survey of beneficiary staff.

[675] AT, BEde, BEfr, BEnl, BG, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, EL, HR, HU, IE, IS, IT, LI, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, RS, SE, SI, SK.

[676] Annex VI – Meta-analyses, table 3.2.

[677] As indicated in the methodology section, some degree of caution should be exercised when interpreting the impact estimates calculated on the basis of the beneficiary survey data, which should be considered as only indicative of the real impact exerted by Erasmus+ on the outcomes explored.

[678] Erasmus+ participation leading to a statistically significant increase in learning propensity of 3.003 units for school pupils taking part in in-person learning mobility.

rather than in blended format), for VET learners attending blended mobility[679] and for participants from the youth sector. Participation in Erasmus+ was most likely to positively relate to learners' propensity to learn for youth sector participants in DiscoverEU (participation in Discover EU was found to lead to a 5.271-unit increase in the index on propensity to learn), Youth Dialogue, (increasing learners' propensity to learn by 4.519 units), Volunteering under the European Voluntary Service (increasing propensity to learn by 3.265 units) and the Youth Participation Activity (increasing learners; propensity to learn by 2.820 units).

Participating in the Erasmus+ programme also increased the likelihood of completing studies. In general, participation in Erasmus+ led to a statistically significant increase in the likelihood of completing studies of 0.319 unit, particularly for VET learners, who become more likely to complete their studies by 0.605 unit, and for adult learners, with a statistically significant increase of 1.017 unit. The effect was found for those with fewer opportunities (0.254 statistically significant increase) as well as for their peers not identifying themselves as havingewer opportunities (0.418 statistically significant increase), those who repeated a grade (0.462 statistically significant increase) as well as those who did not repeat a grade (0.320 statistically significant increase). The survey of beneficiary learners also shows that Erasmus+ increased personal beliefs which relate to academic performance. Participating in Erasmus+ was found to increase the likelihood of feeling confident in education, training or job success, particularly for school pupils, by a statistically significant 1.129 unit, for VET learners attending blended mobility, by a statistically significant 0.603 unit, and for adult learners, by a statistically significant 1.65 unit. Participating in Erasmus+ was also found to reduce the likelihood of feeling one would achieve poor performance despite putting in effort (with a statistically significant reduction of 0.869 unit among school pupils and 0.556 unit among higher education students, particularly for those who took part in long-term mobility). In addition, participation in Erasmus+ was found to lead to a higher likelihood of feeling a sense of belonging towards their school/lerning organisation (particularly for VET learners, by a statistically significant 0.127 unit, and those who had repeated a grade, by 0.956 unit), of feeling liked by other students in one's place of learning (in particular for school pupils by a statistically significant 0.45 unit and adult learners by 1.171 unit).

Participation in Erasmus+ also increased the likelihood of feeling fully responsible for one's education, training or job success, by a statistically significant 0.259 unit for VET learners in blended mobility activities, and for youth participants in DiscoverEU by 0.669 unit.

In addition, school pupils participating in Erasmus+ were also less likely than non-participants to feel that they could not put time in education, training or job due to family demands or other problems, with a statistically significant decrease by 0.395 unit.

Better prospects on the labour market. According to the meta-analysis, it is difficult to attribute better prospects on the labour market with certainty to participating in Erasmus+, because a range of factors influence labour market prospects beyond Erasmus+ – this includes for example how well the economy is doing and the number of job openings in a given country[680]. However, some of the evidence collected supports a positive impact of participation in Erasmus+ on employability, as was highlighted in 22 national reports[681]. In the Czechia for example, almost all respondents to a survey by the Czech Agency for International Education were of the view that participation in Erasmus+ leads to students gaining language and other knowledge and skills and that this experience will contribute to their future employability[682].

[679] Erasmus+ participation leading to a statistically significant increase in learning propensity of 4.573 for VET learners attending blended mobility programmes.

[680] See Annex VI - Meta-analyses, box 3.5.

[681] AT, BEde, BEfr, BEnl, CZ, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, IT, LU, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, SE, SK.

[682] Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (2004). 'the National Report on the implementation and impact of Erasmus+ in Czechia', p. 10.

According to the survey of beneficiary learners[683], participation in the Erasmus+ programme increases the perceived likelihood of quickly finding a job, with a statistically significant increase of 0.197 unit of the likelihood of finding a job three months after graduation in general, particularly for VET learners (with an increase of 0.563 unit), higher education students (with an increase of 0.193 unit), participants with fewer opportunities (with an increase of 0.333 unit) and those who did not repeat a grade (with an increase of 0.149 unit). The benefits of Erasmus+ participation on the likelihood of finding a job seem to reduce over time as no statistically significant positive effects of participating in Erasmus+ were found over longer periods of time. Participation in Erasmus+ is however perceived as being positively recognised by employers: participation in Erasmus+ was found to increase the likelihood of believing that employers in the respondents' sector valued the mobility experience by a statistically significant 0.428 unit in general, particularly among adult learners (statistically significant increase of 2.119 unit), VET learners (statistically significant increaseof 0.349 unit), higher education students on long-term mobility (statistically significant increase of 0.549 unit), young people who took part in long-term mobility (statistically significant increase of 0.66 unit), as well as those with fewer opportunities (statistically significant increase of 0.424 unit) and those who repeated a grade (statistically significant increase of 0.669 unit) as well as those who did not repeat a grade (statistically significant increase of 0.397 unit)[684].

Participation in Erasmus+ also has a positive impact on a range of **transferable skills and competences,** which are valuable both for academic performance and on the labour market. This positive impact is evidenced through the national reports as well as the survey of learners and staff beneficiaries. In particular, Erasmus+ increases **self-confidence and personal development**: as emphasised in 21 national reports[685].

According to the beneficiary learners and staff survey results[686], participation in Erasmus+ was also found to increase:

- **Problem-solving and autonomy skills**, by a statistically significant 2.512 unit for a typical participant learner on a composite index measuring problem solving and autonomy skills built on a scale of 0 to 100. The increase was particularly notable for learners from schools (statistically significant increase of 5.898 unit for school pupils in general, 8.132 unit for school pupils having attended in-person mobility and 4.287 for school pupils on a blended mobility programme), for VET learners on long-term mobility (statistically significant impact of 2.689 unit), for higher education learners (statistically significant impact of 1.120 for higher education learners in general, and of 1.171 for higher education participants having taken part in long-term mobility), and for participants from the youth sector. In the youth sector, participation in the EU Youth Dialogue was found to lead to a statistically significant increase of 3.043 unit in the index of problem-solving and autonomy skills[687]. Participating in Erasmus+ was also found to have increased problem-solving and autonomy skills for those with

[683] As indicated in the methodology section, some degree of caution should be exercised when interpreting the impact estimates calculated on the basis of the beneficiary survey data, which should be considered as only indicative of the real impact exerted by Erasmus+ on the outcomes explored.

[684] For higher education, these findings are corroborated by an earlier study conducted by ICF and CHE on the impact of Erasmus+ in higher education. In this study, 72% of Erasmus+ beneficiaries from higher education who had completed a period of mobility for study or training said that it had been beneficial for their first jobs. European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (2018). Erasmus+ higher education impact study – Final report, Publications Office, p.1, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/162060

[685] AT, BEde, BEfr, BEnl, CZ, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, IT, LU, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, SK.

[686] As indicated in the methodology section, some degree of caution should be exercised when interpreting the impact estimates calculated on the basis of the beneficiary survey data, which should be considered as only indicative of the real impact exerted by Erasmus+ on the outcomes explored.

[687] Action implemented under KA3 in the 2014-2020 and moved to KA1 (Youth participation activities) under the 2021-2027 programme.

fewer opportunities, by a statistically significant 2.840 unit, and those who did not repeat a grade, by 2.558 unit.

- **Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship**, by a statistically significant 1.17 unit out of a composite index measured from 0 to 100. Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship increased in particular for VET learners having taken part in a blended mobility activity (by a statistically significant 3.229 unit increase) and for participants in the youth sector (especially when taking part in the European Voluntary Service with a statistically significant 4.492 unit increase, in DiscoverEU with a statistically significant 4.483 unit increase, and in the Youth Dialogue with a statistically significant 4.412 unit increase). Participating in Erasmus+ was also found to lead to an increased sense of initiative and entrepreneurship for those with fewer opportunities (statistically significant increase by 1.404 unit), and those who did not repeat a grade (statistically significant increase by 1.311 unit).
- **Desire for future civic engagement**, with a statistically significant 0.663 unit increase out a composite index measured on a scale of 0 to 100. This was particularly the case for school pupils, having taken part in either physical or blended mobility (0.797 unit increase), and for those who didn't identify themselves as having fewer opportunities (statistically significant increase of 0.396).
- **Cultural awareness and expression**, in particular for school pupils, VET learners, young people, participants with fewer opportunities, and to a lesser extent higher education students and adult learners. Positive and statistically significant effects[688] were found for school pupils (for whom participation in Erasmus+ led to a statistically significant increase of 6.983 units of the composite measure of cultural awareness and expression, measured on a scale of 0 to 100), VET learners (statistically significant increase of 3.080 unit), and positive effects for higher education students (1-unit increase, although not statistically significant), young people (statistically significant increase of 3.115) and adult learners (increase of 7.052, although not statistically significant). Participation in Erasmus+ was also found to increase cultural awareness and expression for those with fewer opportunities (by 3.081 units) and those who did not repeat a grade (by 3.749 units). This finding is also applicable to staff members from the youth sectors, for whom participation in Erasmus+ increased cultural awareness by a statistically significant 1.828 units. The impact of participating in Erasmus+ on cultural awareness is variable depending on the type of mobility in the youth sector: Erasmus+ beneficiary staff members from the youth sector on short-term mobility see a statistically significant increase of 2.198 units, and Erasmus+ staff participants from the youth sector who are trained abroad see a statistically significant increase of 3.019 units.
- **Digital competence**, with a statistically significant increase of 2.339 units in a composite index of digital competence measured on a scale of 0 to 100 for beneficiary learners. Participation in Erasmus+ was found to have increased digital competence in particular for VET learners by 2.429 units, young people (in particular those on long term mobility who saw an increase in digital competence of 2.963 units, and those participating in the Youth Dialogue, for whom digital competence increased by a statistically significant 4.579 units). An increase in digital competence by around 2 units was found for those with fewer opportunities, those not identifying

[688] A positive and statistically significant effect means that Erasmus+ was likely to increase cultural awareness and expression and that we can say with 95% confidence that the positive effect observed in the surveyed sample of respondents would be observed in the surveyed population. A positive effect means that we are less than 95% confident that the positive impact observed in the sample of respondents can be observed in the surveyed population. The difference in the level of confidence we have that the impacts observed can be extended to the population may be due to heterogeneity in the sample size of respondents across various sectors/fields.

themselves as having fewer opportunities and those who did not repeat a grade. Participation in Erasmus+ was also found to have a statistically significant positive effect on digital competence for staff in general (with an increase of 0.773 units), in particular for school staff members, (with a statistically significant increase of 1.272 units), higher education staff members on short term strategic partnerships (statistically significant increase of 1.865 units), and certain groups of VET staff members on short and long-term mobility (with an increase of respectively 2.228 and 5.965 units), those who received training abroad (3.243 units increase) or took part in a long-term strategic partnership (15.045 units increase).

- **Job satisfaction**, with a statistically significant increase of 1.098 units on the composite index measuring job satisfaction on a scale of 0 to 100 for staff members in general, and particularly for school staff members who deliver training abroad (statistically significant increase of 6.831 units) or who receive training abroad (statistically significant increase of 2.083)[689]. A positive impact was also detected for higher education and VET staff members and for youth workers, though not statistically significant.
- **Likelihood to change teaching practices**, noted for school, higher education and adult education staff members (although the effects were not statistically significant). The role of participation in Erasmus+ in driving innovation in teaching methods and curricula was also mentioned in 18 national reports[690].
- **Quality of youth work**, with a statistically significant positive and large impact of participation in the programme of 7.088 units on the composite index measuring the quality of youth work, measured on a scale of 0 to 100, and in particular for the groups who participated in short-term mobility and went abroad for a traineeship. This positive impact was particularly observed for staff in the youth sector taking part in job shadowing abroad (statistically significant increase of 8.025) and those who take part in other activities abroad (statistically significant increase of 8.194).
- **Likelihood to engage in international collaboration**, for staff participants in general (with a statistically significant 8.784 unit increase), and in particular for staff from schools (statistically significant 9.86 unit increase), higher education (statistically significant increase of 2.169), VET (statistically significant increase of 10.927) and the youth sector (statistically significant increase of 18.194)[691].

Finally, participation in Erasmus+ was linked to an **increased perception of barriers participants felt were experienced by peers and colleagues for teacher mobility** (statistically significant increase of 9.830 units on the composite index measuring perceived barriers to teaching mobility), and to an **increased perception of barriers to international cooperation** in general (by a statistically significant 3.946 units increase in the composite index measuring perceived barriers to international cooperation), particularly among staff members from schools and higher education. This may indicate that participants in Erasmus+ become more aware of existing barriers to mobility as a result of their participation in the programme.

Benefits for organisations

For organisations, participating in Erasmus+ also offers several advantages in comparison to non-participation, beyond the funding received. Erasmus+ allows for an expansion in

[689] A strong impact of Erasmus+ was also found on the job motivation of adult learners on long-term strategic partnerships, but this only applied to a sample of one staff beneficiary. This finding was therefore discounted due to the negligible sample size.

[690] AT, BEde, BEfr, BEnl, CZ, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, IT, MT, NL, PL, PT, SK.

[691] The question was not asked for sport staff members.

beneficiaries' perspectives and enables them to develop collaboration on key European topics, to exchange good practices, to undertake activities which would not have been possible without the programme, and to develop partnerships and collaborations, according to several interviewees and case studies[692].

Organisations also benefit from participating staff members being more likely to engage with international professional networks or with the organisations' international strategies. The beneficary staff survey reveals that, in general, staff participation in Erasmus+ makes an organisation more likely to have a clear strategy to develop an international network or activity, by a statistically significant 0.545 unit. This positive correlation is found to be statistically significant across all sectors (except in the sport sector were a positive impact was found but this is impact was not statistically significant).

The programme also supports the internationalisation of participating organisations, as reported in 22 national reports[693]. It enhances quality and innovation in education, as highlighted by 19 reports[694] and strengthens institutional capacity and partnerships, as emphasised in 19 reports[695]. In addition, organisations benefit from the knowledge and skills from individual mobility and cooperation experiences acquired by their staff members, as explained for example in the national report of France[696].

EQ 25.2: To what extent are the results of Erasmus+ sustainable beyond the projects' duration?

There is some evidence, albeit limited and/or anecdotal, of sustainable results beyond the project duration in terms of tangible outputs (deliverables and training courses). There is evidence of outcomes such as the strengthening of international cooperation and broader impact, including the development of competencies and skills as well as the promotion of active citizenship and improved employability[697]. In terms of tangible outputs (deliverables including training courses), some examples of sustainable results mentioned by the beneficiaries interviewed for the case studies include continuing and/or rolling out some of the deliverables, such as training courses, as was the case for the strategic partnerships undertaken by the organisations AFEJI-Hauts de France for adult learning, and Agenzija Zghazagh, a youth organisation in Malta. Partnerships set up during Erasmus+ are also used to conduct other projects within and outside of Erasmus+. For example, in the case of AFEJI-Hauts-de-France, collaborations have been used beyond Erasmus+, for example to set up a convoy to Ukraine with a Romanian partner and exchanging ideas on older people with another partner[698].

Initiatives developed through Erasmus+ can also lead to postive effects beyond the actual project activites or duration. For example, thanks to participation in Erasmus+, the Technical University of Berlin and the other higher education institutions members of European Universities alliance 'ENHANCE' also experience 'internationalisation at home' as a spill-over effect. This includes language learning, cultural exchange, exposure to different education systems and new opportunities for academic collaboration. The youth organisations 'Ifjúsági Nomád Klub' and 'Youth for Exchange and Understanding' (YEU), as

[692] Cross-cutting finding across Key Informant Interviews and case studies.

[693] AT, BEde, BEfr, BEnl, CZ, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, IT, LU, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, SE, SK.

[694] AT, BEde, BEfr, BEnl, CZ, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, IT, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SK.

[695] AT, BEde, BEfr, BEnl, CZ, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, IT, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SK.

[696] General Inspectorate for education, sport and research (2024) 'Interim evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027', p. 37.

[697] EQ18 discusses the limited sustainability of KA2 projects more extensively. For a classification of the tangible results of Erasmus+, see for example the Erasmus+ Impact tool developed by the Dutch National Agency for education and Training, https://www.erasmusplus.nl/impacttool-mobiliteit#impactHeading

[698] Case studies AFEJI-Hauts-de-France (ADU, FR) and Agenzija Zghazagh (YOU, MT).

participants in the Erasmus+ programme, became more likely to apply for other EU programmes, including the European Solidarity Corps and Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs, to continue to sustain activities[699]. Furthermore, YEU successfully leveraged results from projects funded by the Council of Europe to inform Erasmus+ applications, and vice versa, demonstrating effective cross-programme pollination. This approach allowed them to scale up successful initiatives, implement working groups based on project outcomes, and feed insights from one programme into activities supported by another.

In terms of outcomes, such as the strengthening of international cooperation, 17 of the position papers received in response to the public consultation highlighted that the programme has a tangible and long-lasting impact, especially in higher education. Eight stakeholders from across the education and training sectors valued the range of benefits that the Erasmus+ programme offers to learners, teachers, and the whole community involved in and affected by the programme implementation (e.g., educational institutions and research organisations). The programme is also valued for supporting projects and developments at individual, organisational, and system levels in various areas: recognition and validation of skills and qualifications, inclusiveness and cohesiveness, promotion of academic freedom, professional and personal growth of young Europeans, and creation of transnational cooperation networks boosting the international dimension of higher education.

In terms of broader impacts, Erasmus+ has an impact on the sense of European belonging of participants and employability, as documented in EQ24.1 and EQ 25.1.

3.5.4 EQ 26 International added value

EQ 26.1: To what extent does Erasmus+ 2021-2027 promote cooperation between Member States and third countries associated with the programme?

Participation in Erasmus+ promotes cooperation between Member States and third countries associated to the programme. In line with eligiblity rules of the programme, quantitative data shows that the number of Erasmus+ partnerships and grants involving organisations from third countries associated to the programmes remains lower than those involving EU Member States (but higher than with third countries not associated to the programme) – the heterogeneity in number of partnerships is also a function of the financial envelope available to the different types of countries. In addition, volumes of mobilities are higher from third countries associated to the programme toward EU Member States than vice versa.

However, qualitative data shows that there is a clear added value of Erasmus+ in fostering cooperation between Member States and third countries associated to the programme, given the benefits of such cooperation in these countries.

Regarding the quantitative analysis, the first element of evidence collected pertains to the number of participating organisations, partnerships and grants as an estimate of cooperation between Member States and third countries associated to the programme, as well as third countries not associated to the programme.

The overview of Erasmus+ participating organisations, partnerships and grants presented in the table below shows that, across the period 2021-2023, Erasmus+ has funded a number of partnership projects including with organisations from third countries associated to the programme. Organisations from third countries associated to the programme were involved in 42,098 Erasmus+ partnership projects, while those from third countries not

[699] Case studies TU Berlin-ENHANCE Alliance (HED, DE), E29 (formerly fjúsági Nomád Klub) (YOU, HU) and Youth for Exchange and Understanding (YOU, BE).

associated to the programme were involved in 17,304, corresponding respectively to 10.6% and 4.3% of the number of projects in form of partnerships involving orgnisations from EU Member States. Organisations from third countries associated to the programme were involved in partnership projects for a total maximum grant amount of EUR 1.6 billion over this period (and organisations from third countries not associated to the programme for EUR 1.18 billion) in comparison to total grants of EUR 25.7 billion to partnership projects granted to organisations in EU Member States. The volume of projects and grants awarded across Key Actions is also a function of the financial envelope available (rather than the demand/number of applications received).

Table 25: Number of participating organisations and grants awarded per key action - Erasmus+ (2021-2023)

K			EU MS	Third countries associated to the programme	Third countries not associated to the programme
KA1	Nb of partnerships	Coordinating countries	123,241	16,166	N/A
		Participant countries	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Grants awarded	Coordinators	5,516,642,656	359,778,544	N/A
		Participants	N/A	N/A	N/A
KA2	Nb of partnerships	Coordinators	50,763	3,816	1,562
		Participants	223,517	21,817	14,569
	Grants awarded	Coordinators	3,145,592,132	168,976,887	127,312,696
		Participants	16,730,208,978	1,092,021,886	1,008,356,819
KA3	Nb of partnerships	Coordinators	902	68	12
		Participants	2,912	147	12
	Grants awarded	Coordinators	101,642,458	7,540,602	713,076
		Participants	171,435,702	10,949,676	838,076
JMA	Nb of partnerships	Coordinators	411	36	326
		Participants	978	48	823
	Grants awarded	Coordinators	23,351,056	1,162,989	11,655,276
		Participants	53,171,747	2,162,989	36,488,448
Total	Nb of partnerships	Coordinators	175,317	20,086	1,900
		Participants	227,407	22,012	15,404
		Sum nb. partnerships	**402,724**	**42,098**	**17,304**
	Grants awarded	Coordinators	8,787,228,301	537,459,022	139,681,048
		Participants	16,954,816,427	1,105,134,551	1,045,683,343
		Sum grants	**25,742,044,729**	**1,642,593,573**	**1,185,364,390**

Source: Elaboration by ICF based on two data sources: Sum of directly managed projects dataset (2021-2023) and Erasmus+ Programme Results Dashboard (for KA1). The dataset used for projects under direct management (provided by DG EAC) corresponded to data extracted in August 2023, consequently data related to 2023 Call are incomplete.

Another indicator of cooperation is the number of individual mobilities. In general, third countries associated to the programme have sent more students and staff to EU Member States than they have received. the number of outgoing mobilities from Member States to third countries associated to the programme represents between 1% and 3% of the total programme mobilities over the period 2021-2023 as illustrated by the table below[700]. The number of incoming mobilities from third countries associated to the programme to Member States varies from 4% to 8% of the total over the same period. From 2021 to 2022, there was an increase in outgoing mobilities to associated third countries and a decrease of incoming mobilities from these countries to Member States. The changes in mobilities in 2023 are not known as data from the 2023 call year are not complete.

[700] The data underpinning this analysis is the available mobilities Programme data covering the period 2021-2023. Years correspond to the years of the calls that funded the mobilities. These may not correspond to the year in which the mobility took place. In particular, during the COVID-19 pandemics, mobilities were delayed and some could have taken place after the year of the corresponding call.

Table 26: Mobility statistics between Member States and third countries associated to the programme

	2021	2022	2023
Total sending mobilities between all programme countries	648,963	745,303	179,550
Mobilities from Member States to third countries associated to the programme	5,959 (1%)	21,706 (3%)	4,960 (3%)
Mobilities from third countries associated to the programme to Member States	50,495 (8%)	40,747 (5%)	6,516 (4%)

Source: Programme data. Erasmus+ MFF 2021-2027 Dashboard. Extracted 5 January 2024. Datarelated to 2023 Call are incomplete.

Qualitative opinions collected during the case studies and Key informant interviews, complement these quantitative indicators, and were positive regarding opportunities for cooperation between Member States and third countries associated to the programme:

- Cooperation with associated third countries, particularly in the higher education and youth sectors, is highlighted in 16 national reports (BG, DK, ES, FR, HR, IE, LV, LU, MT, PL, PT, SE, SI, SK, RS, TR).
- The Key informant interviews (national level) included discussions with policy officers and stakeholders from North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, and Türkiye[701]. Interviewees from all four countries referred to the relevance of Erasmus+ in promoting cross-country cooperation in Europe. A Serbian interviewee observed that Erasmus+ plays a crucial role in promoting a balanced cooperation among European countries. Without the programme, partnerships between European countries would likely take a different form, possibly relying more on geographical proximity.
- The case study on the primary school Anton Skala in Serbia reinforces this point. The school benefitted from the external expertise brought by Erasmus+ funded transnational cooperation. Collaboration between Member States and Serbia led to project results which are used across the countries who participated in those projects: Social stories for learning social skills are to be integrated into the national curriculum for children on the autism spectrum in Croatia. In the framework of the KA220 project, the methodology of creating customised teaching materials will be applied to the training on the national platform for teachers in Slovenia. The materials they created are used in inclusive schools throughout Serbia and schools for students with developmental disabilities.
- In addition, a Norwegian interviewee added that Erasmus+ provided a framework for exchange that was consistent across Europe and allows for long-term planning (in education and training) as it was not dependent on political party priorities. An interviewee from North Macedonia highlighted that Erasmus+ was a unique programme within the country, while those from Romania noted its unique ability to provide mobility opportunities for both staff and learners. Erasmus+ funding enabled staff and students from higher education, in particular in Türkiye, to form international partnerships and study in internationally renowned universities. One of the positive externalities of Erasmus+ is the 'healthy' competition for Erasmus+ grants which drives quality upward according to a Turkish interviewee.
- 14 interviewees highlighted cooperation in specific sectors, such as higher education (North Macedonia, Norway, Türkiye), VET (North Macedonia), and youth (Norway).

[701] Based on one interview per country.

According to an interviewee from Türkiye, the most significant contribution of Erasmus+ for third countries associated to the programme was in the higher education field, giving Turkish students an opportunity to study abroad in the best universities and staff members the opportunity to form valuable cooperations. Interviewees from North Macedonia explained that all the universities in the country, and most VET schools, participated in Erasmus+. Norwegian interviewees observed that the programme helped VET by allowing apprentices to train abroad and acquire intercultural skills. This is particularly important for the country given that the Norwegian economy is export dependent.

EQ 26.2: To what extent does Erasmus+ 2021-2027 promote cooperation between these countries and third countries not associated with the programme?

Erasmus+ also promotes cooperation across the world with third countries not associated to the programme. The evidence collected to answer this question comes from the analysis of partnership projects and grants presented in EQ26.1, the network analysis, and interviews conducted with Key informants and as part of the case studies.

As indicated in EQ26.1 and table 92 of the Technical Annex, Erasmus+ has supported the participation of countries not associated to the programme taking part in 17,082 partnership projects[702] for a total grant value of EUR 1.157 billion[703] over the period 2021-2023. This volume of partnership projects is lower than for EU Member States and countries associated to the programme, because it is dependent on the funding available and based on a lower number of Calls and actions than those available for programme countries. In the period 2021-2023, third countries not associated to the programme were estimated to be eligible for 15 actions according to the 2023 Erasmus+ Work Programme (and 22 actions out of 106 summarised from the Erasmus+ Annual Work Programme 2024 and the dataset of projects under direct management[704]).

Participants in KA1 mobility activities between 2021 and 2023 came from all over the world, covering 14 regions[705]. This means that citizens from almost every country in the world participated in the Erasmus+ programme.

Between 2021 and 2023, third countries not associated to the programme sent over 152,000 learners and staff to Erasmus+ programme countries, and they received around 129,000 learners and staff in return.

Table 27: KA1 – Mobility statistics: third countries not associated to the programme[706]

	2021	2022	2023	Total
Mobilities from third countries	34,710	69,582	48,220	**152,512**
Mobilities to third countries	28,484	57, 271	43,033	**128,789**

[702] Sum of projects involving countries not associated to the programme across Key Action 2, Key Action 3 and Jean Monnet as coordinator or participant countries, as detailed in Table 92 of the Technical Annex.

[703] Sum of grant amounts awarded to countries not associated to the programme across Key Action 2, Key Action 3 and Jean Monnet as coordinator or participant countries, as detailed in Table 92 of the Technical Annex.

[704] This Dataset reflects the state of play of August 2023, as such the information on 2023 Erasmus+ actions/grants under direct management is incomplete.

[705] As shown in the Erasmus+ Programme Guide and represented according to the EU's external action instruments, the Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation – Global Europe Instrument Official Journal L 209/2021 and the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/1529).

[706] Please note that the number of countries in this table covers the 14 regions plus overseas countries and territories (OCT) (Aruba, Bonaire, Saint Eustatius and Saba, Curaçao, Greenland, New Caledonia, French Polynesia, Sint Maarten, French Southern Territories, Wallis and Futuna) and territories such as Gibraltar and Tokelau (which are part of the UK and New Zealand but mentioned separately in the mobilities programme data).

Source: Programme data. Erasmus+ Country Factsheet: Completed mobilities, Downloaded 05 January 2024. Data cover both MFF periods (calendar year is used as basis for the calculation of mobilities). Note: The data made available to ICF by the European Commission, DG EAC.

Mobility flows with third countries not associated to the programme is dependent on the funding available to these countries.

The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic is evident in the total number of sending third countries in 2021 (N=32). Those that sent staff and learners in 2021 were predominantly located geographically close to Europe. There were a few exceptions to this, such as Japan[707]. By 2022, the total number of sending third countries had significantly increased, suggesting that the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic were fading out. The trends in mobilities in 2023 are not discussed here as data from the 2023 call year are not complete.

Third countries not associated to the programme represented a minority of total mobilities, sending around 1.7% and receiving 2.8% of the total number of mobile staff and learners under KA1 over the period 2021-2023.

Notwithstanding the proportion of total mobilities covered by third countries not associated to the programme, Erasmus+ has had a significant impact in some of these third countries.

Feedback from the interviews

For example, key informants explained that:

- Erasmus+ has significantly impacted individuals, organisations, and the higher education system in Sri Lanka. Participants experienced personal and professional growth, such as securing internships abroad and pursuing higher education opportunities. The programme facilitated the development of new courses, master's courses, and MOOCs, enhancing university-industry collaborations and improving graduates' employability. Additionally, it boosted language skills, intellectual competence, and global competitiveness, with positive unintended effects including a sense of European identity, social cohesion, and breaking down cultural barriers.
- In Thailand, the Erasmus+ programme is reported to have promoted higher education internationalisation, establishing it as a key quality indicator at both institutional and national levels, and strengthening relationships with European institutions and the EU.
- An example of Erasmus+ priorities influencing institutional practices is the establishment in Morocco of the Centre for Students with Disabilities, enabling the development of dedicated course material. In Ukraine, Erasmus+ has led to revisions to the curriculum for VET teacher training, incorporating more practical elements to enhance work-based learning. Erasmus+ funding is also used to develop the offer of micro-credentials and to use micro-credentials for the professional development of teachers in higher education.

In line with Erasmus+ conditions and budget allocation, third countries not associated to the programme are mainly involved in actions in the field of higher education. According to EU Delegations to countries in Asia (Region 5), while Vietnam, Bangladesh, and Pakistan share common trends of aligning with Erasmus+ priorities, focusing on capacity building in higher, and promoting internationalisation, they differ in their specific focus areas and the presence of unaddressed policy priorities. Vietnam and Pakistan are more aligned in their current

[707] The countries that sent people in 2021 during the pandemic were Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Armenia, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, Russia, Israel, Jordan, Azerbaijan, Tunisia, Aruba, United Kingdom, Palestine, Morocco, Curaçao, Egypt, Algeria, Wallis and Futuna, Greenland, Sierra Leone, Tokelau, Lebanon, Switzerland, French Polynesia, French Southern Territories, Japan and Sint Maarten.

educational priorities, whereas Bangladesh has unmet needs in TVET and skills development.

One of the EU Delegations to countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (Region 9) reports overall good alignment between Erasmus+ priorities and the priorities of the concerned countries. More specifically, mobility and capacity building in higher education and VET are central to Erasmus+ initiatives in these countries. In Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Kenya, South Africa and Tanzania alignment is reported in relation to the Global Gateway programme, particularly regarding support to digitalisation and the green transition. Enhancing connectivity, digitalisation, and innovation are key areas of alignment with Erasmus+, also reflecting broader trends in global education and development.

At practitioners' (staff) level, Erasmus+ projects bring different perspectives to teaching and learning. In higher education, professors can gain access to resources and exchange with professors working in their fields of knowledge abroad, which directly influences the quality of teaching.

Several key informants commented on the interest in capacity building actions and their impact in the field of higher education (notably interviewees from EU delegations in Bangladesh, Georgia, Pakistan and Vietnam, from a public agency in Ukraine; as well as from the SALTO South East Europe). Interviewees from Georgia dn Ukraine considered that capacity building actions had an impact in upgrading and modernising the higher education curricula. The interviewee from Vietnam commented that capacity building was the most successful action in the country and helped enhance institutional management, foster international cooperation, and encourage the adoption of innovative practices in education. In Burkina Faso, a project was conducted in cooperation with the University of Helsinki to develop laboratory equipment for researching antimicrobial resistance and a capacity-building project succeeded in improving the English proficiency of doctoral students and teachers in scientific domains.

Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters (EMJM) were particularly highlighted by a Brazilian interviewee, who explained that many of the EMJM programmes were relevant to the country policy priorities, such as gender, climate issues and inclusion. The fact that the Joint Masters involve a scholarship is also very important for Brazilian students. According to the interviewee, Brazil had the highest number of Joint Masters scholarships in the world for many years and only recently lost the first spot to India. A notable example, highlighted by a Key Informant, includes a Brazilian student introducing adapted physical education for the blind in Europe.

Some of the interviewees discussed system-level impacts that exemplify how Erasmus+ can facilitate peer learning and bring EU expertise to other countries. Ukrainian interviewees considered that the strong quality assurance culture in the Ukrainian education system has been due to the impact of Erasmus+ projects in the country.

Interviewees in eight countries across the adult learning, education and youth sectors flagged the role of Erasmus+ in fostering international cooperation and establishing networks, which often extend beyond the programme's immediate scope. This can lead to increased knowledge exchange, resource sharing, and shared initiatives. For example, Finland mentions the continuation of Erasmus+ partnerships in development aid projects at the EU level, while Czechia notes the programme's ability to facilitate networking with organisations like the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

In Bosnia Herzegovina, according to interviewees, the NEO coordinates the Higher Education Reform Experts (HERE) group (comprising representatives of the Ministry, higher education institutions, accreditation agencies and students), which participates in activities funded by Erasmus+ (such as training, seminars, or technical assistance by international higher education experts). Through this group, they have addressed the accreditation of study programmes through a strategic capacity building project that will be implemented in the next three or four years. In addition, an interviewee from the Albanian NEO explained

that the NEO is often invited by the Ministry of Education or the Cabinet of the Prime Minister to provide information on Erasmus+ as an input to national policies.

A sizeable majority of the international stakeholders interviewed shared the view that youth unemployment is one of the most pressing issues in their countries. The EU Delegation in Brazil, Vietnam, as well as the NEOs and SALTO Southeast Europe recognise that Erasmus+ contributes to the employability of young people and graduates as they can acquire skills acquired through mobility allowing them to gain international experience, develop new skills, and broaden their horizons. More specifically, they highlight that it addresses important socio-economic needs of learners and young people regarding digital transformation. Digital skills nowadays represent an integral part of citizenship skills, while also bringing inclusiveness in societies and helping to address the barriers to mobility, communication, or languages.

Interviewees from EU delegations in three Sub-Saharan African countries (Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, South Africa) as well as in Vietnam also mentioned **practical barriers** related to cooperation in Erasmus+, including:

- Differences in possibilities to apply for or to take part in joint activities due to visa requirements, limits to eligibility (third countries not associated to the programme do not have access to the same funding opportunities as programme countries), or difficulties with variations in exchange rates. To address such issues, they suggested that future Erasmus+ financial contingency plans could consider incorporating currency instability in certain regions.
- The need for more knowledge of the programme, coordination and communication. Two organisations in third countries not associated to the programme involved in implementing Erasmus+ projects highlighted that implementation has improved over the years and has become more flexible in terms of financial management and reporting. They noted that the Erasmus+ National Focal Points (ENFPs), established under Erasmus+ 2021-2027, represented a step in the right direction in terms of management efficiency. However, they remarked that ENFPs still lacked knowledge of the programme and the sectors it covered, leading to limited responsiveness. Therefore, the same two organisations noted a need to improve the method of selecting ENFPs – it may also be that there is a need to invest more in training of the ENFPs so they have thorough information. In terms of finding appropriate partners to build consortia, the assistance provided by EACEA was considered as helpful. Four EU Delegations acknowledge that communication and coordination efficiency has improved under Erasmus+ 2021-2027, attributed to the establishment of ENFPs. These ENFPs promote Erasmus+ through events targeting higher education institutions and meetings with ministries.

EQ 26.3: How has the EU leveraged the Erasmus+ programme in its international relations?

The EU is leveraging the Erasmus+ programme on a global scale to strengthen its international relations. These effects are not only applicable to neighbouring countries that are part of the EU policy priorities (e.g. Eastern Partnership), or countries that are either economically wealthy or geographically closely located to Europe; they also cover all the other regions of the world. For example, Erasmus+ funding increased considerably for cooperation with Sub-Saharan Africa as part of the Africa-EU Investment Package – Global Gateway.

As for the cooperation between the programme countries and third countries not associated to the programme, it should be noted that only a few actions include international mobility. Hence, mobility activities to and from third countries not associated to the programme

represent only a fraction (2%) of those taking place between EU Member States and third countries associated to the programme. However, the geographical coverage of such actions is global. Most countries in the world participate in the programme, either as a recipient of a learner or staff, or as a sender, although the level of collaboration between regions and countries varies.

Key informant interviews at European level[708] have indicated that Erasmus+ may be particularly effective at enhancing EU international relations with candidate countries.

- Erasmus+ has had a large influence on the perception by citizens and on boosting priorities aligned with EU priorities as part of accession negotiation processes, as reported in particular by interviewees from NEOs in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Albania.
- In addition, National Agency representatives consulted during the KIIs[709] noted that the programme's learning mobility component, particularly in higher education, has facilitated international cooperation and boosted relations with neighbouring countries. Erasmus+ fosters the development of global skills and addresses global challenges, as exemplified by policy dialogues with Japan and China. The programme also plays a role in attracting talent and bridging gaps in international mobility.
- Erasmus+ is widely recognised by NEOs, SALTOs, and EU Delegations for its role in supporting institutional capacity building across various fields. This impact is particularly noted in countries such as Georgia, or Uzbekistan and regions such as Africa, where the programme has significantly contributed to upgrading and modernising teaching curricula. Policy stakeholders in these regions often use Erasmus+ to enhance their training structures, pedagogical programmes, and mobility schemes.
- Comments from several interviewees and six stakeholder organisations in particular, have suggested that Erasmus+ can be further used to extend EU international influence in third countries and regions (examples given being the Balkans, Brazil and Vietnam). For example, one interviewee considered that: “Erasmus+ could increase synergies with the bilateral actions with EU Member States”. All of the 18 Member States that have representatives in Hanoi have their own bilateral programmes with Vietnam. As an example, there is an ongoing initiative focusing on green and digital skills, supported by France and Germany, to support the reform of technical VET programmes, reinforce the capacity of several institutions, and increase the attractiveness of the field. The consultees suggested that cooperation in VET under Erasmus+ should be expanded.
- A few respondents to the public consultation explained that the programme had helped foster the internationalisation of higher education. As mentioned in question EQ 23.2, 97% of respondents to the public consultation (N=1,231) ‘agreed’ to ‘strongly agreed’ that Erasmus+ contributes to the internationalisation of the participating organisations. In addition, 84% of academic/research institutions (N=458) and 81% of EU citizens (N=270) ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ with the statement that Erasmus+ is performing well in ‘fostering mobility and cooperation opportunities with the rest of the world, thanks to its international dimension’. In turn, this has added value by creating opportunities for international mobility and collaboration in education. It was explained that this *“collaboration allows for the*

[708] Five interviews with Commission services.

[709] Higher Education, VET, International Cooperation

sharing of best practices in promoting inclusion and diversity and encourages the development of joint initiatives that address social and cultural challenges"[710].

3.5.5 EQ 27 Evolution of European added value

EQ 27.1: What is the benefit and added value of Erasmus+ 2021-2027 compared to the benefit of Erasmus+ 2014-2020? What is the added value of repetitive actions/activities in the two programmes?

In general, when comparing the two programming periods, Erasmus+ 2021-2027 shows a clearer added value in terms of its scale, scope, effects and cooperation with third countries, as documented in EQ23 and EQ26. Erasmus+ has achieved its expected outcomes, which yield significant benefits such as improved skills, konwledge and competences, for 2014-2020 and the achievement of the outcomes for 2021-2027 are generally on track, as indicated in EQ1. There is less evidence so far on the programme's role effects (in incentivising and mainstreaming internationalisation and innovation) and process effects (see EQ23). The evolution of individual mobilities for staff and learners under KA1 across the two programming periods[711] is not indicative of the added value of Erasmus+ given that the period 2021-2023 has been impacted by conjectural factors such as the Covid-19 pandemic and data for 2023 is incomplete, hence provisional.

Evidence of the increased added value of the current programming period in comparison to the previous one includes the following:

- 90% of respondents to the NA/EACEA survey were of the opinion that the current generation of Erasmus+ support action was more aligned with EU priorities than the previous programming period; and 62% thought that the current generation of Erasmus+ support action was more aligned with national priorities than the previous programming period.
- 68% of respondents to the NA/EACEA survey explained that, in their view, the current programme was more relevant to the current and emerging needs of the main target groups[712].
- Interviews carried out at European level with European Commission services and agencies corroborated this opinion, noting that the programme has evolved positively over time, becoming more responsive to emerging needs and expanding its reach. The introduction of short-term mobility activities, flexibility to address urgent needs, and broader target group inclusion are positive developments. .
- Learner mobility can be considered the most significant added value of the programme. It is unquestionable that there is a clear added value of sustained actions in the two programmes in this regard. The high numbers of programme beneficiaries add up over time, expanding the benefits of mobility to an increasing share of learners, as well as staff and organisations.
- International mobility has in general increased over the period 2014-2019 (a decline in mobility occurred in 2020 due to the COVID pandemic), particularly from third countries associated and not associated to the programme as sending countries, and more substantially over the 2020-2022 period.

[710] Annex II - Public Consultation report, section 3.5.2.

[711] Annex I – Technical Annex, Tables 5 and 18

[712] Annex III NA/EACEA survey, section 3.1.3

Table 28: Mobility statistics: third countries associated and not associated to the programme, 2014 to 2023

Year	Sending countries	Receiving countries
2014	21,877	17,852
2015	67,104	48,335
2016	80,367	47,965
2017	93,505	50,754
2018	104,073	61,635
2019	115,028	74,625
2020	36,550	23,234
Total 2014-2020	**518,504**	**324,400**
2021	97,382	76,106
2022	184,858	142,034
2023	123,062	99,317
Total 2021-2023	**405,302**	**317,457**

Source: Programme data. Erasmus+ Country Factsheet: Completed mobilities, Downloaded 05 January 2024. Data cover both MFF periods (calendar year is used as basis for the calculation of mobilities). Data for 2023 are provisional. Note: Data made available to ICF by the European Commission, DG EAC.

Participants have also benefited from a greater alignment betweeen Erasmus+ and national priorities. Around half of the countries consulted as part of national level Key informant interviews report that the alignment between Erasmus+ and national priorities has strengthened in the current programming period compared to the previous one. This improvement is often attributed to the clearer and more focused priorities set by the programme, which have better resonated with national policy objectives. For instance, Norway credits the clearer horizontal priorities and the European Education Area (EEA), to which Erasmus+ contributes, for enhancing directionality and aligning with national objectives.

For the priority 'inclusion and diversity': the number of participants with fewer opportunities has exceeded targets over both programming periods and has continued to increase over the period 2014-2022 in higher education and vocational education and training in particular. The greater weight of inclusion and diversity in the current programming period is reflected by the increase in the number of participants with fewer opportunties, comprising those with special needs and from disadvantaged backgrounds (based on a comparison of annual averages of numbers of participants with fewer opportunties presented in tables 17 and 31 of the Technical Annex) as well as in the increase in participants from outermost regions, when comparing annual averages[713]. Comparison for the other Erasmus+ priorities is more difficult to make due to limitations in data availability[714].

Finally, based on the case studies, a comparison between the two-programme period suggests that:

- The programme may have greater impact in the current programming period, with interest from learners and staff members increasing[715].
- Some elements of the Erasmus+ programme have been streamlined which makes it more user friendly, for example to facilitate staff mobility[716].

[713] Annex I – Technical Annex, tables 83 and 84.

[714] Annex I – Technical Annex, tables 43 and 44.

[715] Case study TU Berlin – Enhance Alliance (HED, DE).

[716] Case study Universidad de Sevilla (HED, ES).

EQ 27.2: Was any European added value lost as a consequence of the discontinuation of some actions from Erasmus+ 2014-2020?

A couple of actions undertaken under Erasmus+ 2014-2020 have been discontinued in Erasmus+ 2021-2027, as discussed in EQ 1.7 and presented in table 1 of the Technical Annex. These are:

- The Student Loan Guarantee Facility in the higher education field; and
- The European Voluntary Service (EVS), comprising the Volunteering Charter, and the EVS card and insurance, in the youth field.

The EVS was removed from Erasmus+ in 2017 and EVS-related actions were phased out by 2020 and included in the European Solidarity Corps (ESC), which emerged as a separate programme and took over as the main EU programme providing volunteering opportunities.

The midterm evaluation of Erasmus+ 2014-2020 and the EVS impact study found evidence of EVS effectiveness[717] (see EQ1.7). In terms of its added value when compared with other programmes promoting transnational volunteering, project leaders at the time highlighted that the grants were channelled to the organisation and not directly to the volunteer. The funding provided to receiving organisations was considered a guarantee of resources and believed to contribute to organisational capacity-building and empowerment[718]. The European Solidarity Corps has kept this feature of the EVS.

As discussed under EQ19, 28% of National Agencies surveyed (n=164) considered that removing the EVS from Erasmus+ affected programme coherence. Concerns around the overlap between the youth chapter of Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps was also noted in EQ18.1. However, there were no comments on the relative added value of EVS and European Solidarity Corps when compared to other national or transnational volunteering schemes[719].

The other action that was discontinued in the current programming period was the Student Loan Guarantee Facility (SLGF). The midterm evaluation of Erasmus+ 2014-2020 identified the main added value of this action as being the reduction in interest rates (compared to what the same financial intermediary would normally charge, assuming it would cover that segment), the removal of the guarantor/collateral/resource requirement, or the opening of new product lines (if the segment would not have been served at all otherwise)[720]. As discussed under EQ1.7, despite the generous funding allocated to this action, the take-up was very low. The evaluation detected several factors that were hindering the effectiveness of the scheme, among which were overlaps with national schemes where these existed. Based on these evaluation findings, it can be concluded that suspending the SLGF has not provoked a loss in the European added value of the Erasmus+ programme.

Overall, the evidence collected does not point to any lost added value as a consequence of the discontinuation of actions from Erasmus+ 2014-2020. The main action that was halted, the EVS, has been moved under a separate programme, the European Solidarity Corps. As the action still exists in a similar form, it cannot be said that its added value has been lost. Any concerns seem to focus on the adequacy of the positioning of the volunteering programme, as a separate programme as opposed to being under Erasmus+, rather than on its benefits. As for the SLGF, it was considered that the added value can be more suitably

[717] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Study on the impact of transnational volunteering through the European voluntary service, Publications Office of the European Union, 2017, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/87737

[718] Ibid.

[719] See Annex III - NA/EACEA survey: Taking the EVS out of Erasmus+ did not affect the programme coherence'.

[720] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Combined evaluation of Erasmus+ and predecessor programmes – Final report – Evaluation of the student loan guarantee facility (Volume 2), Publications Office, 2017, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/2

achieved in the context of the InvestEU programme; hence its discontinuation cannot be said to have provoked a loss in the programme's added value.

4 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusions

Overall, the evidence collected for this evaluation shows that the programme continues to deliver strong European added value and keeps constituting one of the flagship achievements of the EU.

As presented in the response to the evaluation questions, the study shows a strong performance of the programme against the five evaluation criteria, while also revealing areas or aspects of the programme that could be further improved. As for the key objectives of the evaluation specified in the Erasmus+ Regulation, the study highlights the following key aspects:

- **Delivery of inclusion measures: An increasing number of people with fewer opportunities take part in the programme** (from around 10% overall in the previous programme to around 15% in 2023). The collected evidence shows that they benefit from the participation in the programme in comparable ways and extent as other participants, in terms of personal development, skills acquisition, social integration and career prospects. Inclusion and diversity is considered **the most successfully addressed and implemented horizontal priority**, with progress being recorded it in the various programme countries and across the programme's sectors. The Framework of Inclusion Measures and the Inclusion and Diversity Strategy, introduced in the current programme, are assessed positively as they enable better outreach to more participants with fewer opportunities. A variety of challenges however persist in terms of data collection, addressing cumulative barriers, availability of funds to address the complex needs of hard-to-reach groups, or the varied perceptions or understanding of the concept of 'people with fewer opportunities' across programme countries.
- **Simplification**: a number of simplification measures were introduced in the current generation of the programme to reduce the administrative burden on participants, beneficiary organisations and programme management and implementing bodies. All these simplification measures have been successfully implemented and are increasingly being used. They are viewed positively by programme stakeholders and have contributed to minimising administrative costs associated with participation and management, and thus to enhancing the efficiency of the programme's implementation. The administrative burden especially on small organisations with limited capacity remains however heavy and requires further corrective measures in terms of guidance and simplification.
- **New programme initiatives**: a full assessment of the new initiatives introduced in Erasmus+ 2021-2027 is not possible at this stage as they are still in their early implementation or deployment phases, however the evidence collected for this evaluation, in particular through case studies and key informant interviews, suggests that they have been successfully implemented, have met significant demand among programme beneficiaries and participants, and are already demonstrating their relevance, effectiveness and added value. This is in particular the case for the 'flagship' initiatives such as European Universities, Erasmus+ Teacher Academies, Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) and DiscoverEU, for which evidence points to broad and positive impacts at various levels:
    - 64 **European Universities** alliances have already been established under Erasmus+ supporting long-term structural and strategic institutional level cooperation between over 560 higher education institutions across Europe. Available evidence suggests that these alliances are meeting or exceeding

expectations, bringing transformative changes for their partner higher education institutions and to the higher education sector as a whole. The European Universities alliances have demonstrated their efficiency and effectiveness for enhancing capabilities and raising excellence and innovation levels by pooling resources and expertise of their partner higher education institutions, sparking innovation, driving educational and research excellence, fostering balanced mobility and pedagogical innovation, all across European regions. The alliances enhanced attractiveness and competitiveness of European higher education, strengthening its quality and internationalisation, and contributing to shaping higher education policies in Member States. The alliances contribute to tackle Europe's skills and talent shortages in key sectors such as the green and digital transitions, bridging the gap between education, training, research and industry, driving regional cohesion and removing silos between university missions, with benefits for the entire higher education sector. Furthermore, the alliances acted also as testbeds for new innovative instruments by piloting approaches and criteria for a possible European degree, institutionalised cooperation instruments such as a possible legal status for alliances of higher education institutions, or piloting flexible learning approaches leading to micro-credentials, etc.

- 27 **Erasmus+ Teacher Academies** have already been funded under the Erasmus+ programme, exceeding the target to support 25 academies by 2025. Available evidence suggests that they provide a wide range of formats for collaboration and contribute to tackling some of the most relevant issues in the teaching community, ranging from the development of digital skills to the implementation of innovative pedagogic methods and tools.
- **CoVEs** have quickly become pillars of excellent vocational education in Europe, with a growing number of projects and networks created. 41 CoVEs had already received Erasmus+ funding by the end of 2023, on track to reach the target of 100 projects funded under Erasmus+ by 2027. Evidence collected for this evaluation, in particular through case studies, shows that CoVEs are having broad impacts at the individual, organisational and system level and that they are fostering greater collaboration between education institutions and businesses to tackle Europe's skills gaps in key areas.
- **DiscoverEU**, which gives 18-year-old citizens the opportunity to discover Europe through travelling across the continent, is viewed very favourably by National Agencies and is considered to provide a high added value for young people, allowing them to not only learn about Europe but also acquire skills of value for their future. It contributes to expand the programme's reach and visibility through its ability to attract young individuals, including those outside traditional youth organisations, and serves as a gateway to other Erasmus+ opportunities, fostering ongoing engagement. DiscoverEU has already benefitted over a million 18-year-olds, sparking interest in EU opportunities, and promoting engagement among young people. While the full extent of the initiative's impact may not be immediately apparent, evidence suggests that it contributes to foster personal growth, shape future decisions and aspirations, and forge lifelong friendships and professional ambitions. It also contributes to the green transition priority by giving young people the chance to explore Europe through sustainable travel. The initiative is found to largely meet expectations overall, even if there is room for improvement with regard to the promotion of inclusion through greater flexibility of eligibility criteria, and the provision of enhanced support for planning and preparation.

Conclusions are further presented below for each of the evaluation criteria as well as for cross-cutting areas covered by the evaluation study, highlighting each time key headline conclusions with related action points when areas for improvement are identified.

4.1.1 Conclusions per evaluation criteria

4.1.1.1 Effectiveness

Overall, the analysis carried out for this evaluation indicates that the expected **outputs, results and impacts** of the programme have been achieved to a large extent in both programming periods. This is particularly the case concerning the volume of mobilities (despite the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mobilities, both at the end of the 2014-2020 programme and at the start of the 2021-2027 one), the improvement in participants' skills and competences, the influence of Erasmus+ on policy, and improvements in the practices of participating organisations.

For the 2014-2020 programme, expected outputs, results, and impacts were generally on track and on target until call years 2019 and 2020, which were heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the continued impacts of the pandemic, the 2021-2027 programme got off to a relatively slow start, but its outputs, results, and impacts are now on track to meet targets and expectations.

The specific **objectives of the programme**, addressing various levels of expected impact in the 2014-2020 programme (individual, organisational and systemic), have been streamlined in the 2021-2027 period around the three programme fields of education and training, youth, and sport, and in each of them around the promotion of: a) learning mobility, and b) cooperation, quality, inclusion, quality and innovation at levels of organisations and policies.

The stakeholder consultations conducted for this evaluation show that **these objectives are consistent, relevant and comprehensive**, and that the views of programme stakeholders on their degree of achievement are largely positive. The evaluation does not reveal any need for a further review or streamlining of the programme's objectives at this stage, nor for the addition of further objectives.

The evidence collected and analysed for the evaluation study suggests that the inclusion in Erasmus+ 2021-2027 of four **horizontal priorities** (inclusion and diversity, digital transformation, green transition, participation in democratic life and civic engagement) has had some transformative effect on systems, values and norms among beneficiary organisations and participants. The programme has in fact demonstrated a positive impact on promoting all four priorities, though to a varying degree:

- The programme has had in particular a positive impact on the promotion of **inclusion and diversity** throughout its activities. Evidence shows that an increasing number of people with fewer opportunities take part in the programme, and that they benefit from this participation to a comparable extent as other participants. It also shows that Erasmus+ participants learn about inclusion and diversity issues during their participation and become more committed to taking action on these issues as a result of their participation. Progress is also being recorded in implementing this priority in the various programme countries. Even if challenges persist in reaching certain target groups and improving their access to and participation in the programme, this horizontal priority is widely perceived as the most successfully addressed and implemented by Erasmus+ 2021-2027.
- The programme has also demonstrated a positive impact on promoting the **digital transformation** priority throughout its activities, through funding projects directly addressing this priority within the programme activities, supporting the development of digital skills among participants, and also supporting the digital transformation of education ecosystems – a process that was accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Available evidence also points to positive behavioural change among participants towards the use of digital technologies.

- The programme has also shown a positive impact concerning the **green transition** priority (environment and fight against climate change), through funding projects directly or indirectly addressing this priority and providing rising support and incentives for sustainable travel across programme activities and sectors. Evidence points to an increased awareness and knowledge related to environmental sustainability among programme participants, even if the extent of this impact in terms of behavioural change doesn't emerge clearly from the collected evidence.

  The evidence is mixed concerning the **contribution of the programme to climate action** and the reduction of its own environmental impact. Erasmus+ provides support and incentives for beneficiary organisations and for participants to incorporate green practices in projects when designing and implementing activities. A key aspect of this is the adoption and promotion of sustainable travel practices. Significant progress was observed concerning the share of green travel in programme activities, with sustainable/low-emissions transport being used in one third of mobilities in 2023, a 25% rise compared to 2021. However, the extent of green travel varies by sector and by country, and some challenges to the use of sustainable/low emissions transport remain, including insufficient financial support and additional time and costs associated with green travel. Overall, the performance of the programme with regard to reducing its carbon footprint and contributing to the achievement of climate objectives remains insufficiently understood.

- The programme has also demonstrated a positive impact on promoting the priority of **participation in democratic life and civic engagement** throughout its activities. Participants in the programme have shown increased knowledge about democratic values and a willingness to engage more actively in democratic processes, and the data also indicates a rise in awareness and behavioural change among participants since the beginning of the current programming period.

Concerning the programme's **alignment with the EU political priorities** and its contribution to their pursuit and achievement, significant progress can be observed under Erasmus+ 2021-2027 compared with its predecessor, due to the adoption of the four horizontal priorities and their close alignment with the EU's 2019-2024 political priorities. Based on the evidence collected and analysed for this evaluation, the forms of cooperation and the types of action under Erasmus+ 2021-2027 are having significant effects contributing to the pursuit of these political priorities, including at the international level through actions supporting institutional cooperation, capacity building and people-to-people contacts and exchanges with third countries. In doing so, Erasmus+ contributes to promoting European values beyond the EU and thus supports the EU's public diplomacy, even if the extent of this contribution is difficult to evaluate.

If the programme's overall effectiveness is assessed largely positively, variations exist between its various actions.

- Activities under **Key Action 1 (learning mobility)** are widely viewed as being very effective, with staff mobility and learner mobility consistently viewed as the most effective actions across all programme fields and sectors.

- Actions under **Key Action 2 (cooperation among organisations and institutions)** are also well established and are similarly viewed as very effective, though to a lesser extent. Partnerships for Cooperation, including Cooperation Partnerships and Small-scale Partnerships, tend to be perceived as the most effective actions under KA2 across programme sectors and fields.

- Actions under **Key Action 3 (support to policy development and cooperation)** are perceived as somewhat less effective by programme stakeholders as well as implementing bodies, likely reflecting the fact that policy related activities are

predominantly institutionally focussed and as such have a less tangible impact for beneficiary and participants. In the longer-term perspective, they however convey sector-wide benefits at system level that are widely recognised.

- Based on the stakeholder consultations conducted, **Jean Monnet Actions** are also found to be largely effective in respect of the specific needs they are addressing, i.e. spreading and furthering knowledge about the EU and European integration matters.

Most of the actions funded under Erasmus+ 2014-2020 have remained in the 2021-2027 programme, while only a few have been discontinued. This overall stability of the programme's architecture between the two periods, enables exposure to and participation in similar types of interventions over time, which is likely to achieve stronger results and impacts, especially at organisational and system levels, due to the build-up of capacity and experience. Even if no firm conclusions can be drawn at this stage on the long-term impacts of Erasmus+ 2021-2027, it can **reasonably be assumed that it will end up being more effective and impactful than its predecessor**.

The evidence analysed for this evaluation also demonstrates that without the existence of the Erasmus+ programme, the activities currently funded via the programme in the relevant sectors (e.g. learning mobility activities, cooperation actions, support to policy reform under KA1, KA2 and KA3 respectively) would not be supported to a comparable extent and the level of relevant activities taking place would be significantly lower. Also, the positive results achieved for individual participants and beneficiary organisations through participation in Erasmus+ would not be achieved to the same extent. The programme’s funding is particularly crucial in certain countries and in certain fields (VET, higher education – and less so in school education). In a number of countries, Erasmus+ funding plays a crucial role in supporting learning mobilities as well as cooperation projects, most of which would simply not be funded without the programme.

4.1.1.2 Efficiency

The cost effectiveness of the progamme’s activities varies between key actions:

- The **cost-effectiveness of Erasmus+ KA1 activities** is high and results from several factors: the clear links between mobility activities and the outcomes and impacts for learners and staff, the clear evidence of European added value of these activities, a lack of evidence of inefficiencies and the favourable comparison with other schemes and programmes. Stakeholder consultations suggest that the cost-effectiveness of mobility activities has even improved between the previous and current programme periods. Mobility restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic have affected the first year of the programme, but the demand for mobility has quickly reached higher levels when programme activities normalised, raising concerns about the adequacy of the programme’s budget to meet its ambitious objectives and demand for funding in all sectors and fields (with the partial exception of adult education). Despite inflation and rising living costs in the 2022-2023 period, the average mobility funding provided by the programme remain competitive and similar to comparable programmes. The introduction of the accreditation path for school education, adult education and youth has simplified access to funding and reduced administrative burdens for beneficiary organisations and implementing bodies, enhancing the overall cost-effectiveness of the programme.
- The **cost-effectiveness of activities under KA2** is of more challenging assessment, given the variety of activities it covers. The analysis, performed through a partial cost-effectiveness analysis (CEA) and mainly based on qualitative feedback, suggests that there are strong arguments to support a positive cost-

effectiveness judgement. Cooperation partnerships are broadly viewed as effective across all participants, in particular in school education, VET and sport, and Small-scale Partnerships are similarly viewed as effective, in particular in school education and youth. Regarding large-scale initiatives of more recent launch like the Erasmus+ Teacher Academies, it is not possible to provide conclusions given also the long duration of these projects.

- Similarly to KA2, only a partial CEA largely based on qualitative feedback from stekeholders, could be conducted for the policy support actions in the education, training, youth and sport sectors under KA3. These activites are generally viewed as less cost-effective than KA1 and KA2 activities, while still providing recognised benefits to individuals and especially at organisation and system-level. These activities are typically focussed more on institutions and policies than individuals, and their outcomes tend to be delivered over a longer term, which makes it more difficult to assess their cost-effectiveness. Moreover, the policy and support character of these activities makes them less well-known, reducing their perceived effectiveness. Overall, stakeholders consulted for the evaluation consistenly outline positive long-term and systemic effects from KA3 activities. Concerning support activities and networks funded under KA3, the change of funding model from real cost to lump sum for some of them (e.g. Eurodesks, national VET teams and SALTO resource centres) seems to have improved their cost-effectiveness, however evidence is still limited as this change is very recent, and this improvement needs to be confirmed over a longer period of time.
- Limited evidence could be collected on the cost-effectiveness of the Jean Monnet Actions, especially about the newly introduced ones in the fields of school education and VET. Also for JMA, only a partial CEA based on qualitative inputs was performed. This analysis was generally positive, with improvements observed in areas that had not met initial expectations, such as applications for JMA in schools. Potential enhancements in the future include improvements to the communication processes for JMA, as well as possible changes in the management type of JMA in schools (from direct to indirect management). The novelty of the action makes any considerations in this regard premature. Further analysis will be necessary once the activities have become more established.

In terms of budget, the financial envelope of Erasmus+ 2014-2020 was considered as insufficient to fully satisfy demand in most of the programme's sectors in the previous programming period. Hence, the increase in funding available for the 2021-2027 period (+74%) has been welcomed by stakeholders. Still, stakeholders consistently report that additional funding is necessary to achieve the programme's objectives, and especially to improve the engagement of participants with fewer opportunities and those from remote areas, particularly in school education, adult education and youth. The **distribution of funds across the programme fields and key actions** remains, in Erasmus+ 2021-2027, broadly similar to what it was in the previous programme period, i.e. with the largest share going to education and training (and in particular to higher education), and to KA1 mobility activities. The relative share of the budget allocated to KA2 cooperation activities increased at the beginning of the current programming period, due to the COVID-19 pandemic which suddenly reduced the volume of mobility activities. This also implied a higher volume of transfers applied at NA level towards KA2 in the first year of the current programme given the high demand and absoption capacity despite Covid-19 impact. This contributed to an increase of the success rates for KA2 actions under indirect management (from an average of 28% in the 2014-2020 period to 38% between 2021 and 2023). For the period 2021-2023, the average success rate for actions under direct management is 25%. Yet the stakeholders consulted for this evaluation indicate that, despite the increased resources, demand still exceeds available funding across the board and call for higher funding for all actions and sectors, especially for mobility and capacity-building activities and especially

for youth and VET, as well as for allowing even greater flexibility in budget allocation and management to meet evolving needs.

Compared with its predecessor, the current programme already allows greater flexibility for transferring funds between programme for activities under KA1, KA2 and some KA3 within the education and training sector, on one side, and within the youth sector on the other. A standard 35% variation rule is applied to all budget headings in the context of the contribution agreements signed between the Commission and National Agencies (higher than the standard 25% variation in the Commission's contribution agreement template used for other EU programmes implemented under indirect management). This flexibility has resulted in larger values of transfers compared to the previous programme. Overall, the first years of the current programme, transfers occurred mostly from KA1 activities (affected by the COVID-19 pandemic) and some KA3 activities (TCA for education and training and youth, and the DiscoverEU learning cycle for youth) towards KA2 activities, for which demand has been growing significantly. Such trend, particularly marked for higher education and VET already in 2020, continued in 2021 especially in school education and adult education. However, the figures for most recent years show higher and stable absorption rates (close or above 100%) as the effects of the pandemic subside, with persisting difficulties for mobilities in adult education (under KA1), education and training TCA and DiscoverEU learning cycle (both under KA3).

When compared with other similar schemes at national or international level, Erasmus+ stands out for its extensive coverage across multiple countries, sectors, fields, and activities, which is not matched by any other programme. The prospect of other policy instruments or mechanisms providing a better cost-effectiveness ratio than Erasmus+ therefore seems limited.

The programme's **management architecture**, which has remained largely stable between programming periods, is an important contributor to its efficiency. The current implementation and management structure and arrangements are, for the most part, efficient and appropriate.

Collaboration and communication mechanisms are well-established and appreciated, and the support and guidance provided by the Commission is very much valued. Improvements were however called for by the stakeholders consulted as regards cooperation and communication between National Agencies and the EACEA. A number of measures have already been adopted in that respect. In particular, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the EACEA and National Agencies in 2023, which establishes a legal framework to enhance collaboration and allows the EACEA to share the selection results of Calls under direct management with National Agencies at preliminary stage (i.e., before the information is made public). Since December 2023, National Agencies also have full access to data on selection progress and projects under direct management, including grants awarded and beneficiaries, via dedicated dashboards. These measures will probably show their effects in the coming years, and their effectiveness should therefore be assessed at a later stage.

Simplified forms of grants (mostly unit costs) were introduced in the 2014-2020 Erasmus+ programme to ease the administrative burden on both beneficiaries and implementing bodies. The use of simplified grant modes was further extended in the 2021-2027 period with the introduction of additional simplified forms of grants, such as lump sum contributions for partnerships under KA2. Lump sum is now the key form of funding across the programme except for KA1 where the largest share of the overall programme budget is allocated to learning mobility on the basis of unit costs. The consultations conducted for this evaluation indicate that simplified forms of grants are viewed positively by programme stakeholders and have contributed to streamline funding rules and minimising administrative costs associated with participation and management.

Additional simplification measures introduced in the 2021-2027 programme are also viewed positively, including the introduction of new types of **smaller grants** such as KA2 Small-scale Partnerships, offering smaller and more accessible grants to small, less experienced organisations and newcomers to the programme, or the extension to all education and training fields and the youth sector of the **accreditation scheme**, which provides simplified access to funding under KA1 every year for beneficiaries. Stakeholder consultations conducted for this evaluation show that this scheme contributes to streamlining programme management and to fostering long-term planning and financial security for beneficiaries, and suggest that its extension contributed to improve the cost-effectiveness of mobility activities between the previous and current programme periods.

Some issues however remain concerning these simplification measures. Some degree of uncertainty persists among stakeholders around the lump sum model, in particular regarding activity eligibility and flexibility. In addition, questions were raised regarding the proportionality of the lump sum with the size of the partnerships supported, or the gap existing between the available lump sums for Small-scale Partnerships. Concerning the accreditation scheme, some consulted stakeholders called for further simplification of the procedures for beneficiaries and for more training and guidance to be provided to National Agencies, as well as for an increase of the budget made available for accredited organisations.

The **management support tools** provided by the Commission, among others Programme Guide and Grant Agreements, are considered as comprehensive by stakeholders, but also as overly complex, insufficiently accessible and user-friendly, requiring further simplification:

Key conclusion 1: The simplification measures introduced in Erasmus+ 2021-2027 have been welcomed by stakeholders and have contributed to increase the efficiency of the programme's implementation, but there is scope for further simplification and reduction of administrative burden in various areas.

Action points:

- **Make the Programme Guide more accessible.** The Programme Guide constitutes the entry point to Erasmus+, and while acknowledging its comprehensiveness stakeholders called for its shortening and simplification, for the use of more accessible language and for the development of more user-friendly ways of presenting its content. This would help, in particular, organisations with little to no experience of the programme and hence contribute to make it more accessible and inclusive.
- **Simplify Grant Agreements**, which currently appear to be disproportionately complex for smaller-size grants, especially for small beneficiary organisations.
- **Further simplify access to the programme**, in particular for newcomer and less experience organisations through the provision of clearer guidance to orient them through the different funding opportunities, clarify funding models and applicable rules.
- Work with National Agencies and EACEA to **assess the administrative burden** for participants, beneficiaries and implementing bodies, across various projects stages, and design ways of reducing it wherever needed.

The programme's **IT tools for actions under indirect management** were considered at the time of the evaluation as not yet fit for purpose, and they represent an important hindrance factor for the programme as well as a reputational risk.

The rollout of Erasmus+ 2021-2027 introduced an entirely new IT landscape for the management and implementation of actions under indirect management. The new IT systems offered functionalities / features, which were insufficiently tested to allow full alignment with the unique and complex rules of the Erasmus+ programme. The IT systems were not fully developed to support all project stages (application, implementation, reporting). Additionally, functional issues, such as errors, time-outs and lack of communication between systems, hindered data collection needed for programme management and, monitoring. Evidence shows that functional problems of crucial parts of the IT landscape and the underlying infrastructure for actions under indirect management were experienced until the end of 2023, and that important and urgent corrective actions had to be put in place and should be continued.

The **Erasmus+ monitoring framework** appears appropriate overall, with clearly established mechanisms, tools and responsibilities. The current set of indicators laid down in the 2021-2027 Erasmus+ Regulation and the Delegated Act adopted in 2023 makes it possible to provide a complete overview of programme performance, and the establishment of a single and integrated data portal is a welcome step in that respect. The increased use of qualitative indicators is also a positive development, even if according to stakeholders consulted the emphasis continues to be on quantitative data, whilst qualitative information is used to a much lesser extent. Despite its improvements, the current monitoring framework is found to be insufficiently capturing longer-term outcomes and impacts. Possible areas for improvement also include the allocation of additional resources for monitoring, the consistency and clarity of the tools and templates used for reporting results, and the streamlining of monitoring requests to reduce the burden of the monitoring process, which tends to affect smaller organisations disproportionately.

Key conclusion 2: Improvements are needed concerning some of the programme's IT tools and its monitoring mechanisms

Action points:

- **Tackle the remaining issues affecting the IT tools** used for indirect management actions, improving in particular the functionalities of Programme Management Module and of the Beneficiary Module and ensuring a more responsive IT ticketing system.
- **Enhance monitoring systems** to ensure an increasing use of qualitative data, as well as to better integrate monitoring data and outcomes into the management of the programme's actions.
- **Enhance impact evaluation** to fully capture longer-term outcomes and impacts and better utilise monitoring data and integrate feedback into programme design and policymaking.

4.1.1.3 Relevance

The evidence analysed for this evaluation consistently suggests that the policy priorities, objectives and actions/activities of Erasmus+ 2021-2027 adequately reflect and are highly relevant to the **current and emerging key socio-economic needs and challenges** that Europe is facing internally and globally. This applies both to the high-level challenges identified and priorities set by the EU, and to newly emerging ones arising from the crises and disruptions of recent years. In particular, stakeholders at various levels highly appreciate the introduction of the four horizontal priorities and perceive a good alignment of the programme with both European and national priorities.

The 2021-2027 Erasmus+ programme places a strong emphasis on supporting Europe's **digital transformation and green transition** through contributing to enhancing green and digital skills and supporting the digitalisation and greening of education ecosystems. Europe's needs regarding both the green transition and digital transformation are appropriately reflected in the programme objectives and priorities, and relevant programme actions are in place to meet upskilling/reskilling needs and to support the required transformation of education ecosystems in both domains.

Erasmus+ funds a number of actions and activities that support digital skills development under KA2 and KA3, and also contributes to improving digital skills through learning mobility in KA1. However, activities for the development of digital skills under KA1 remain focussed on specific programme elements rather than being an overarching feature of Erasmus+ learning mobility, and further progress would be needed to mainstream digital skills development across KA1 mobility activities.

Erasmus+ includes a strong set of relevant actions, activities and tools to support the digital transformation of education ecosystems in several ways, in particular through KA2 long-term cooperation actions such as the Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs), Erasmus+ Teacher Academies, or European Universities alliances, as well as through initiatives such as the European Student Card Initiative. CoVEs contribute to the development of skills for the digital transition by promoting the creation of ecosystems for sustainable collaboration between education and training providers and other stakeholders, including companies in this area; Erasmus+ Teacher Academies contribute to support the creation and application of digital pedagogies and teachers' digital expertise. The European Universities alliances are contributing to the digital transition by reinforcing the development of digital skills necessary to progress innovation and sustainability goals, and maintain Europe's competitiveness, democratic and open European society, as well as by developing innovative models of digital learning and teaching, for example by promoting Open Education or by interinstitutional digital campuses. The European Student Card Initiative and its underlying digital components (Erasmus Without Paper, The Erasmus+ App and the European Student Card) aim to simplify, facilitate and boost student mobility in Europe by substantially reducing the administrative burden in terms of time, expense and effort.

In addition, the Digital SALTO Resource Centre produces resources and materials to help applicants to integrate the digital transformation priority in their projects.

The programme similarly contributes to the green transition by supporting the development of green skills and the "greening" of education ecosystems. It does so through various actions, including the Alliances for Innovation, European Universities alliances and CoVEs, but also through its quality standards and the accreditation requirements that organisations need to meet to be granted simplified access to the programme. The European Universities alliances, for instance, help develop climate and environmental skills for their students across all levels and disciplines and offer climate upskilling and reskilling through lifelong learning opportunities embedded in flexible learning modules such as micro-credentials. They also inform education with work on climate relevant research activities, inform the public at large through community engagement and contribute with creating knowledge for environmental-related policies, innovation and measures. The programme requires or incentivises participants and beneficiaries to adopt environmentally-friendly practices, support sustainable means of travel and reduce the negative impact of mobility on the environment.

There is however a need to ensure that the relation between the digital and green horizontal priorities is better articulated to effectively contribute to the 'twin transition' and also balanced with the other horizontal priorities (e.g., greening and digitalisation requirements may, in some cases and situations, raise barriers to participation rather than favour wider inclusion).

Overall, the evaluation found Erasmus+ 2021-2027 to be **highly relevant to the needs of the various stakeholders and sectors that the programme addresses**. Erasmus+ attracts a wide range of participants with different profiles across its various sectors/fields. The needs of individuals from the various target groups are generally considered to be well addressed by the programme, even if Erasmus+ remains best known for its well-established higher education student mobility activities and if other participants and in other sectors may not benefit from the same breadth of opportunities and level of support. Furthermore, equal participation of individuals with fewer opportunities remains a concern. Outreach could thus be further improved by better sharing information and targeting communication about the programme.

The programme is also found to be highly relevant to the needs of beneficiary organisations. However, despite efforts to attract newcomer and less experienced participants, and the progress achieved in that respect, the programme is still perceived as being better oriented towards larger, better-resourced organisations as opposed to smaller ones that would need more support. This remains an issue in particular in the youth sector, where organisations often lack the resources to engage with the programme and benefit from its opportunities.

In terms of **awareness**, the evaluation shows that the programme is well known to the education and training, youth and sport communities, with many stakeholders noting an improvement with respect to the previous programming period. However, awareness remains higher in the education and training sector, and more particularly in the higher education field. Improvements in the level of awareness were reported in the youth and sport sector, however difficulties in increasing awareness persists in those sectors, as well as in the adult education field, calling for (even) more targeted communications to reach new participants in these sectors.

In terms of relevance to the needs of **hard-to-reach groups**, the programme's approach to identifying and targeting these groups is found to be well aligned with the structure of barriers to participation. It is also well received by the various stakeholder groups, as are the efforts to promote hard-to-reach groups' access to the programme. While available data confirms that many programme participants come from such groups, the extent of their participation in the programme cannot be fully assessed from the data available at this stage. Stakeholders call for paying attention to some differences in the way barriers to participation are perceived, and in the way hard-to-reach or disadvantaged groups are considered in the various programme countries, pointing to a need for enhanced guidance on how to interpret the European definition in the national context, in order to further improve the programme's inclusiveness.

The relevance of the Erasmus+ programme is found to have improved since the previous generation. The introduction of the horizontal priorities was instrumental in that respect as it provided clear and well-defined reference points for participants, and as these priorities are well aligned with key challenges and priorities at the EU but also Member State level.

4.1.1.4 Coherence

The Erasmus+ programme is found to demonstrate a **strong internal coherence**. The programme's architecture comprising of three Key Actions, a mix of direct and indirect management, opportunities for individuals and organisations, with regard to mobility, cooperation and policy development, is considered clear and consistent by programme stakeholders. The overall value of JMA is also clearly recognised, although its current separation from the structure of Key Actions is found to be confusing in some cases.

The current programme's increasing focus on **cross-sectoral collaboration** is welcomed by stakeholders and strengthens its internal coherence. Cross-sectoral cooperation occurs most frequently between the youth and sport sectors, which target audiences often show

similarities. Some collaboration also exists between the various education and training fields, in particular between school education, higher education and VET (e.g. between VET and higher education in actions such as the Alliances for Innovation, or between universities, schools and VET institutions through CoVEs).

Implementing actions under both **direct and indirect management** is seen as a key strength of Erasmus+, but the coordination and communication between the National Agencies (in charge of implementing actions under indirect management) and the EACEA (in charge of implementing actions under direct management) is perceived as insufficient. Strengthened coordination and communication between the two levels would be needed to ensure greater alignment in the overall implementation of the programme. Some initiatives have already been adopted in that respect, which have yet to fully deliver their intended benefits.

The Erasmus+ programme's **external coherence** is found to be very high in relation to **other EU programmes** with complementary objectives, such as Horizon Europe or ESF+. Complementarities concern the programme's objectives but also their design and implementation. Important elements of synergy include the possibility introduced in the current programming period to transfer funds from ESF+/ERDF to Erasmus+ – though this possibility seems to be still little known and little used. Opportunities for improvement of the programme's coherence with other EU instruments exist, in particular regarding the European Solidarity Corps. Some risks of overlaps between Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps were mentioned in the stakeholder consultations, and a clarification of the two programmes' respective scopes, focus and complementarities was called for.

The evaluation also found Erasmus+ to be generally coherent and complementary with relevant **national schemes and initiatives** that exist across programme countries, in the fields of education and training, youth and sport. The availability and scope of national programmes varies between countries and sectors, with some countries having no comparable programmes while multiple similar programmes exist in others. The varying number of national programmes with similar objectives indicates differing levels of coherence between Erasmus+ and national interventions across Europe, with **a greater potential for synergies and complementarity to enhance overall impact where a higher number of national programmes exists**. In some cases, national programmes are in fact designed to complement Erasmus+ by providing additional funding to supplement Erasmus+ grants or by focusing on bilateral mobility with countries not covered by the programme.

The evaluation, finally, found a high degree of synergy and complementarity between Erasmus+ and **relevant programmes at international level**, such as the EEA and Norway Grants or NordPlus. Many of these international initiatives target regions where Erasmus+ offers limited mobility opportunities, thus being complementary to the programme.

The **internal coherence** of Erasmus+ 2021-2027 is found to have **significantly improved** compared with the 2014-2020 period, with a more streamlined and consistent structure facilitating better implementation and stakeholder navigation. **Externally**, Erasmus+ 2021-2027 maintains **high coherence** with EU policies, national initiatives, and international cooperation, although clarity and coordination with the European Solidarity Corps and further alignment with national and international-level initiatives constitute areas for potential enhancement.

Key conclusion 3: The internal and external coherence of the Erasmus+ programme have improved over time, but external coherence could be further reinforced to maximise efficiency and impacts.

Action points:

- **Reduce the risks of overlaps** between Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps
- **Strengthen cooperation with the EU programmes** with highest potential of synergies with Erasmus+, such as ESF+ and Horizon Europe, in order to maximise the impact of the programme.
- Enhance synergies and complementarities with **key national and international level initiatives** to further maximise combined impacts and benefits.
- Foster the **sharing of existing synergy practices** to inspire stakeholders and facilitate their replicability.

4.1.1.5 European Added Value

The evaluation shows that Erasmus+ conveys **considerable added value and benefit compared to what could be achieved** by programme countries at national and/or international level. These benefits stem, in particular, from the support provided by the programme to the internationalisation of organisations, systems and policies, from the funding it provides for activities that would in many cases not be possible otherwise, and from its contribution to building a sense of European identity/ and awareness of European values across programme countries.

Compared with other education and training support schemes available at both national and international level, Erasmus+ 2021-2027 provides a **unique, consistent framework for mobility, cooperation and policy development** in the education and training, youth and sport sectors, in Europe and beyond. The evaluation shows that the programme is unparalleled in terms of scale, scope and potential to foster collaboration. Compared with other education and training support schemes, it has a higher capacity to offer more funding to more (and more diverse) beneficiaries and participants, and to provide them with a broader set of opportunities in a wider variety of formats, across more countries and sectors/fields.

Therefore, **the consequences of stopping the Erasmus+ programme would be massive and massively negative**. Not only would it remove in average EUR 4 billion of annual funding across education and training, youth and sport, it would also massively curtail support for learning mobility, cooperation and internationalisation in its sectors in most programme countries. Maintaining the current levels of support without Erasmus+ would require considerable budgetary efforts at national level to compensate, which many of the programme countries may not be able or willing to make. It is likely that the internationalisation of programme sectors would be massively reduced in several countries, due to the limited funding available for similar activities, especially in sport and youth.

In addition, the Erasmus+ programme is found to play an essential role to support the development of knowledge of **European integration** matters, to raise awareness of **EU common values**, and to foster a **European sense of belonging**. It does so, in particular, through the Jean Monnet Actions, which enhance EU literacy, including now among school pupils, and which support teaching and learning activities on European integration matters in higher education. It also does so through the provision of direct support to designated institutions that conduct research on the EU's future challenges and opportunities, or that support engagement and involvement of young people in policy-making. This direct support

contributes to increase the knowledge base about EU integration matters, to improve the quality of related research, to develop EU-related skills among learners, including current and future policy-makers, thus indirectly contributing to better informed policy-making at EU level and in the Member States.

Erasmus+ is found to yield significant **added value for individuals and organisations** who take part in the programme, compared with those who do not. For individual participants, Erasmus+ contributes to academic performance and skills development, but it also helps develop transversal skills, including intercultural awareness, self-confidence, problem-solving skills, autonomy, and the willingness and capacity to engage in civic life. It also contributes to enhancing access to (better) opportunities on the labour market, resulting in higher wages and increased professional satisfaction. For beneficiary organisations, participation in Erasmus+ brings benefits in terms of opportunities for collaboration, capacity building, organisational development and internationalisation.

Erasmus+ also conveys **international added value** through promoting cooperation between EU Member States and third countries associated to the programme, as well as with third countries not associated to the programme. The programme provides equal participation opportunities to associated third countries as to Member States. Erasmus+ plays an essential role in many of these associated countries in terms of providing access to learning mobility and cooperation opportunities, as well as to opportunities for policy development and alignment. This is particularly crucial in the perspective of some of these countries' preparation for EU adhesion.

Concerning cooperation with third countries not associated to the programme, their participation occurs on a more limited scale, and in some sectors or actions only. Mobility to/from these countries represents a small share of the total number of mobilities supported by the programme, yet they benefit participants from virtually all countries in the world, and the programme also enables EU education institutions to foster their internationalisation through supporting cooperations with organisations across the world. Through this international dimension, the programme contributes to building capacity in many countries, but also to strengthen the EU's international relations on a global scale. Through actions supporting institutional cooperation and people to people contacts, Erasmus+ contributes to the EU's public diplomacy and to the promotion of EU values and views globally.

Overall, the evidence collected for this evaluation suggests that Erasmus+ 2021-2027 has a clear value added and that the programme has **evolved positively** in comparison to the 2014-2020 period, responding to emerging needs and expanding its reach. It also suggests that the discontinuation of some actions between the two programming periods did not result in any loss of value-added for the programme.

4.1.2 Cross-cutting conclusions

Based on the outcomes of this evaluation study, a set of cross-cutting conclusions emerge with respect to the performance of the programme and key objectives of the evaluation, identifying related areas for improvement.

4.1.2.1 Inclusion

This evaluation study shows that the efforts put in place under the current programme generation have been largely successful, and that inclusion and diversity is the most successfully addressed and implemented horizontal priority in Erasmus+ 2021-2027. An **increasing number of people with fewer opportunities take part in the programme** (from around 10% overall in the previous programme to around 15% in 2023). The collected evidence shows that they benefit from the participation in the programme in comparable ways and to a comparable extent as other participants, in terms of personal development,

skills acquisition, social integration and career prospects. Progress is being recorded in implementing this horizontal priority in the various programme countries and across the programme's sectors.

However, some challenges persist in reaching certain target groups and improving their access to and participation in the programme. The participation of people with fewer opportunities remains uneven across the programme's sectors and is still below 10% in school education. Identified challenges include:

- the cumulative effects of the barriers to participation;
- the lack of funds to address the often-complex needs of hard-to-reach groups and develop the more targeted forms of support required to address them;
- the varied perceptions or understanding of the concept of 'fewer opportunities' across the various programme countries; and
- the difficulties to collect detailed data on participants with fewer opportunities.

Further efforts are therefore needed to ensure an even more inclusive implementation of the programme. This is in particular the case as the level of ambition in terms of inclusion and diversity is rising. The Council Recommendation 'Europe on the Move'[721], adopted in May 2024, includes an aspiration to "*collectively reach a share of at least 20 % for people with fewer opportunities among all learners benefiting from learning mobility abroad by 2027*", i.e. by the end of the current generation of Erasmus+. In order to reach that goal, additional measure and resources will be needed.

Key conclusion 4: Significant progress has been achieved to embed inclusion and diversity across the programme's actions and dimensions, yet further efforts are needed to ensure a more inclusive implementation.

Action points

- **Provide more guidance to National Agencies to interpret the European definition of 'fewer opportunities' in the national context to ensure consistency of implementation across programme countries.** The concept of 'fewer opportunities' is broad and based on barriers faced by participants or potential participants, yet the evaluation study found that its implementation across Member States and third countries associated to the programme is not always consistent, reflecting in some cases local interpretations of the concept. While an understanding of local and national contexts is essential to foster effective inclusiveness, a clearer EU-wide framework is key to enhance the consistency of the concept's operationalisation across the programme's activities and countries. Also, the coverage of aspects like age-based discriminations, or barriers associated with mental health and well-being, already covered as part of the eight barriers faced by programme participants, should be more clearly specified under the programme's Inclusion and Diversity Strategy.
- **Develop a methodology for data collection to measure more precisely the share of people with fewer opportunities participating in the programme**. At present, this share is estimated based on reporting data that remains insufficiently precise and consistent across programme countries and sectors. A more granular analysis of the various types of barriers faced and of their relative importance in various circumstances and for various target groups could also help devise specific objectives concerning certain types of barriers or more targeted strategies for certain groups.

[721] OJ C, C/2024/3364, 14.6.2024.

- **Collect, analyse and share good inclusion practices across countries, sectors, fields, and programme actions**. At present, information regarding what works (and also what doesn't) for promoting inclusion and diversity, and for ensuring a successful and sustained participation of people with fewer opportunities, is not systematically shared among the various relevant stakeholders. Exchanging experiences and good practices among programme implementation bodies and stakeholders would be beneficial for the effective and consistent inclusion of a larger number of people with fewer opportunities across Member States and third countries associated to the programme, actions and dimensions.
- **Design and implement a more proactive approach to attract participants with fewer opportunities and other hard-to-reach target groups and to support their participation.** This requires identifying more effective ways to reach out to the various types of people with fewer opportunities and hard-to-reach groups, including participants from the EU outermost regions as well as overseas countries or territories, and of attracting them to the programme's opportunities (including through targeted support or incentives to participation).
- **Increase programme resources for actions/activities benefitting the most participants with fewer opportunities**. Some programme sectors and fields, in particular school education and VET, have the potential to reach a diverse population and to contribute more directly to the development and acquisition of basic skills, which are essential to foster social cohesion and equality. These fields currently show a high demand.

4.1.2.2 Programme response to unforeseen events

In recent years, several large-scale external factors have had influenced participation in Erasmus+ at the individual and organisational level, and on the overall effectiveness of the programme, although on different scales. This was especially the case for the COVID-19 pandemic, which impacted the closing stage of the 2014-2020 programme and the early years of the 2021-2027 programme. The pandemic, in particular, affected the programme's mobility activities, and many planned projects and/or activities were cancelled or postponed as a result. The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine had a much lower impact on the programme as a whole, affecting only organisations and participants directly involved in mobilities and other projects with Russia and Ukraine.

Evidence suggests that, in the face of these significant challenges and disruptions, the programme responded and adapted remarkably well, demonstrating a high degree of responsiveness and resilience. In particular, the programme swiftly adapted to the COVID-19 pandemic through accelerated digitalisation and transition to online collaboration, the development of new mobility formats such as blended mobilities, flexibility in implementation and enhanced support mechanisms. The programme also responded efficiently and effectively to the outbreak of war in Ukraine, offering increased support for Ukrainian participants in terms of mobility opportunities for students and staff, flexibility in recognition of their qualifications and prior learning and support to their integration.

The inflation surge of 2021-2023, on the other hand, has had a more profound and lasting negative impact, both on individual participants and on beneficiary organisations, and the programme's response seems to have been less effective. Measures were introduced to cushion inflation, adjusting in particular the rates of individual support, with a focus on supporting individual mobility participants most affected by the increase in the cost of living. Stakeholder consultations however suggest that Erasmus+ grants were not sufficiently rapidly adjusted to rising inflation rates, resulting in insufficient budget provision at the

beneficiary organisation's level and increased financial uncertainty which, in turn, hindered mobility activities. Many participants and organisations had to adjust and scale back their programme activities as a result.

Lessons learned from the programme's response to the disrupting events of recent years therefore confirm its resilience and adaptability. Despite these challenges and disruptions, the programme has indeed managed to deliver according to plan, and it has adapted to the external context and needs, with limited repercussions on the budget allocation planned initially for the period 2021-2023. Yet this experience also points to possible improvement areas. In particular, a more proactive and flexible approach to financial planning may be needed to respond more effectively and efficiently to price level fluctuations, so as to better contain or reduce their negative impacts on programme participants and beneficiaries. Specific mechanisms could be embedded in the programme's management for that purpose.

Key conclusion 5: The Erasmus+ programme has responded and adapted well to the disrupting events of recent years. However, its resilience could be further strengthened and embedded in the programme's management

Action points:

- Increase **budgetary and operational flexibility** for beneficiary organisations to better react and adapt to disruptions during project implementation.
- Review regularly the **impact of price fluctuations** on the programme's activities and participants, and set up mechanisms for quick response and adaptations.

4.1.2.3 Effects on individuals and organisations

Participation in the programme yields a number of sustained effects for both individuals and organisations. Tangible and lasting impacts from participation are in fact widely acknowledged by the stakeholders consulted. At the individual level, these include improved soft skills, such as intercultural competence, language proficiency and adaptability, increased European identity and active citizenship. At the organisational level, the recognised lasting effects of programme participation include increased internationalisation and improved teaching practices.

However, the evaluation highlighted some of the challenges associated with ensuring lasting effects of Erasmus+ projects, in particular the often-limited use of their outputs and outcomes beyond direct participants and beneficiaries. Several challenges to assessing or supporting the sustainability or Erasmus+ project results were also mentioned in the national reports, including: the limited longitudinal data on long-term effects; the persistence of a significant administrative burden, potentially hindering further participation; and the difficulty in sustaining effects beyond the directly involved individuals and institutions.

The Erasmus+ Project Results Platform (EPRP) is a key pillar supporting the sustainability of project results. Its recent revamping has enhanced its functionality, navigation, and layout and the website traffic analysis indicates a relatively positive trend in its usage. However, further improvements are possible, concerning in particular the extent and consistency of the project information available on the platform.

Key conclusion 6: Participation in the programme yields a number of sustained effects for both individuals and organisations, yet the sustainability of programme and project results should be further enhanced

Action points:

- identify measures to enhance the sustainability of results
- ensure a more systematic exploitation and uptake of project results
- enhance the user-friendliness and visibility of the Erasmus+ project result platform

4.1.2.4 International dimension

Erasmus+ promotes cooperation also with third countries not associated to the programme, thanks to a broad international dimension providing learning mobility opportunities, to both learners and staff in higher education, VET and youth, as well cooperation opportunities to organisations involved in different programme fields in higher education, VET, youth and sport beyond Member States and third countries associated to the programme. These opportunities are possible, to a great extent, thanks to financial contributions from the external financial instruments, i.e. the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III), and the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI-Global Europe). Over the period 2021-2027, a total amount of around EUR 2.1[722] billion has been allocated for Erasmus+ under the framework of NDICI-GE and IPA III instruments via a Multiannual Indicative Programme for Erasmus+[723], with the purpose of supporting education and youth partnerships between the Member States and/or associated countries on the one hand, and countries worldwide on the other. A total budget, respectively, of approximately EUR 147 Mio (IPA III) and EUR 688 Mio (NDICI-Global Europe) was allocated in the Erasmus+ annual work programmes 2021-2023. Compared to the 2014-2020 programming period, the total budget envelope from external policy instruments has increased by around 24% under the 2021-2027 programming period, marking a strong commitment to reinforce cooperation with non-associated third countries in education and training, youth and sport. Nevertheless, Erasmus+ actions funded thanks to the contribution from both instruments are largely oversubscribed, with an overall success rate of 21% (call 2023) for the Capacity building projects funded under KA2 in the HE, VET, youth and sport fields.

Some international activities (notably Higher education and VET outgoing mobilities to third countries not associated to the Programme, as well as youth mobility activities in neighbouring third countries) are funded through the Erasmus+ budget. International mobility and cooperation is further reinforced through complementary funds from the EU external action instruments (IPA III and NDICI-GE). These instruments provide support for a number of international actions, including international mobility in higher education, additional Erasmus Mundus scholarships, capacity building projects in higher education, VET, youth and sport as well as Jean Monnet Actions in higher education.

The international dimension of Erasmus+ contributes to strengthening the EU's international relations on a global scale, by supporting 2019-2024 Commission's priority 'Europe as a stronger global actor'. This also ensures a stronger alignment of Erasmus+ with

[722] This amount takes into account the MFF mid-term review agreed in 2024.

[723] https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/funding-and-technical-assistance/funding-instruments/global-europe-programming_en

Commission's priorities, including the Global Gateway strategy[724], which has education and research as one of its investment priorities.

The contribution from IPA III and NDICI-Global Europe correspond to 8,3% of the Erasmus+ budget. Individual learning mobilities involving countries not associated to the programme represent around 2% of all mobilities. However, participating individuals and organisations derive significant benefits from these projects and mobilities, particularly in terms of forming relevant networks and exchanging knowledge, as well as in terms of capacity building, confirming that learner and institutional needs are addressed by Erasmus+.

The geographical scope of Erasmus+ extends to most of the countries across the world. This creates a unique potential for further increasing its contribution to the EU's public diplomacy and the promotion of its values and views globally. The international dimension of Erasmus+ contributes to promoting systemic changes in education and training, youth and sport in third countries, as well as EU external action objectives, which includes geopolitical priorities and policies. This is an increasingly important endeavour as the international environment becomes more uncertain and volatile, and as competing value systems represent a mounting threat to the EU's global influence.

Key conclusion 7: The programme's international dimension has gained increased prominence, but it should be further strengthened to support the EU's international influence in an increasingly uncertain world.

Action points:

- Assess how to further support EU strategic priorities addressing cooperation with third countries not associated to the programme through programme actions
- Pursue synergies with relevant EU external action instruments and strategies as well as with bilateral actions from EU Member States to further leverage Erasmus+ in the EU's international relations

[724] Global Gateway - European Commission

4.2 Recommendations

Building on the key conclusions of this evaluation, a set of recommendations can be formulated, as follows:

1. Further **simplify** procedures to reduce administrative burden
2. Enhance the programme's **IT tools** and monitoring system
3. Reinforce external **coherence** with other programmes
4. Enhance the **inclusive implementation** of the programme
5. Further strengthen the programme's **resilience**
6. Enhance the **sustainability** of programme and project results
7. Strengthen the programme's **international dimension**

Each of these recommendations is subdivided in a set of more detailed proposed recommendations or measures, which are presented below.

4.2.1 Further simplify procedures to reduce administrative burden

1.1 Continuously pursue and systematise simplification efforts, in particular with regards to the Programme Guide and simplifying grant agreements.

The Programme Guide is the first reference point for information on the programme, and there should be a continuous effort by the Commission to make it simpler and more accessible – in particular for newcomer organisations, which the programme seeks to attract with its inclusion strategy. Similarly, opportunities to simplify the grant agreements should be explored, so as to make them more accessible to a broader array of beneficiaries, and more proportionate to grant sizes, especially for projects of small scale.

1.2 Simplify access to the programme through the provision of clearer guidance and overviews, such as interactive funding maps.

This could entail elaborating an interactive funding map or a clear and appealing visual overview of the programme opportunities, along with a better/simpler description of their objectives, to ensure programme opportunities can be easily found and understood, including by newcomer and less-experienced organisations. The funding map could also be linked to the support mechanisms available to potential applicants and clearly outline the resources and efforts needed at proposal/management/reporting stage of an Erasmus+ project .

1.3 Establish collaborative processes and mechanisms to measure and reduce administrative burden and other costs associated with the application process and participation.

The Commission should work collaboratively with National Agencies and the EACEA to assess administrative burden for participants, beneficiaries and implementing bodies, across various projects stages, and design ways of reducing it wherever needed. These efforts could in particular concern reductions of administrative burden and other costs associated with the application process and participation targeting specific types of actions (e.g. Small-scale Partnerships) or certain sectors (e.g. youth and sport, in which organisations often have limited resources and capacity to deal with the administrative aspects of Erasmus+ participation). Targeted simplification

should not, however, lead to inflating the number of applicants by attracting organisations with little or no relevance to the programme, which would in turn increase the administrative burden on National Agencies, the EACEA, assessors and the European Commission.

4.2.2 Enhance IT tools and monitoring system

2.1 Continue tackling remaining issues with the current IT tools used for actions under indirect management.

Efforts have already been made to address and fix the most pressing issues, as shown by the slight decrease of submitted IT tickets in 2024. However, further work is needed to improve the functioning and performance of several tools, in particular of the Project Management and Beneficiary modules. In addition, the ticketing system itself could be made more responsive and efficient, and sufficient functional and technical testing efforts involving end users (e.g. NAs) should continue to be carried out when fixing issues and improving tools. Consideration should also be given to possible ways of leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) to enhance the functioning of the systems by automating routine administrative tasks, making tools and platforms more functional and user-friendly, and better supporting proposal assessments.

2.2 Improve the programme's monitoring system to improve its effectiveness and efficiency and to better understand longer-term outcomes and impacts.

The programme's monitoring systems should be further improved to be able to make increasing use of qualitative data, better integrate monitoring data and outcomes into the management of the programme's actions, and support the understanding of longer-term outcomes and impacts. The performance of robust and long-term studies examining Erasmus+ impacts at individual, organisational and system-level, could be considered. The integration of all programme data into the Data Portal should be completed, to provide a reliable and up-to-date overview of Erasmus+ performance at any point in time. Consideration should also be given to possible ways of leveraging AI to enhance the functioning of the programme's monitoring systems, e.g. to uncover significant trends and patterns or to identify possible issues and deviations and their causes at an early stage.

4.2.3 Reinforce external coherence with other programmes

3.1 Further strengthen cooperation with other EU programmes showing the highest potential for synergies with Erasmus+

The Commission should aim to enhance cooperation with key EU programmes like Horizon Europe and ESF+ to maximise synergies and combined impacts. In particular, this could aim to further facilitate budgetary transfers and combinations between instruments, to better articulate timelines, to harmonise project application and assessment processes as well as reporting requirements and formats, and in general to facilitate access to complementary opportunities for beneficiaries while decreasing administrative burden for both beneficiaries and implementing/ management bodies.

3.2 Clarify and reinforce coherence between Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps.

The Commission should assess ways to clarify the respective scope and focus of Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps, to avoid or reduce risks of overlaps

and ensure that the role and focus of each programme as well as their complementarities are well understood by all concerned stakeholders. This could include assessing the opportunity and feasibility of bringing the European Solidarity Corps - thus reintegrating volunteering activities - into the framework of Erasmus+.

3.3 Support sharing of information and good practices regarding the maximisation of synergies between Erasmus+ and other programmes.

The Commission should, in cooperation with relevant authorities, identify, analyse and disseminate good practices concerning existing synergy practices and complementarities with other programmes and initiatives, at EU level as well as at national and international levels.

4.2.4 Enhance the inclusive implementation of the programme

4.1 Provide more guidance for the uniform interpretation of the European definition of 'fewer opportunities' across programme actions.

The Commission should work with National Agencies in Member States and third countries associated to the programme to provide more guidance for a uniform interpretation of the concept of 'fewer opportunities' and define a clearer EU-wide framework to enhance the consistency of its operationalisation across the programme's activities and countries.

4.2 Collect, analyse and share best practices on Erasmus+ successes in attracting people with fewer opportunities, across countries, sectors and fields, and programme actions.

A good practice framework for the exchange and sharing of experiences regarding what works (and what doesn't) to ensure a successful and sustained participation by people with fewer opportunities should be designed and implemented by the Commission, in cooperation with National Agencies, across all programme sectors.

4.3 Design and implement outreach and support activities and initiatives to attract people with fewer opportunities and other hard-to-reach target groups.

The Commission, working with National Agencies, should carry out a review of the Framework of Inclusion Measures of the 2021-2027 Erasmus+ programme as well as of its inclusion and diversity strategy, in order to enhance its overall outreach and support framework to attract more participants with fewer opportunities and other hard-to-reach target groups. The updated framework and strategy should assess whether the current coverage of target groups, support bodies and identified barriers is appropriate and effective. Furthermore, the review process should look into potential additional measures to reinforce the outreach of the various types of people with fewer opportunities and hard-to-reach groups taking into account sectoral specificities, and to attract them to the programme. The Commission should explore ways to ensure the most effective monitoring of any additional measures put in place.

4.4 Develop targeted communication campaigns about the benefits of Erasmus+ participation for the various categories or types of people with fewer opportunities.

This evaluation has shown that the provision of information about the possible 'entry doors' to the programme, how to access information on programme opportunities and enhancing information on programme benefits, can contribute to lifting barriers to participation. Targeted communication campaigns should be devised an implemented to highlight the individual benefits of participating in the programme for people facing various types of barriers and explain how more information relevant to them can be

accessed. These campaigns should be developed and implemented both at European and national levels, to ensure that they can effectively reach their intended audience. The Commission should work to develop tailored outreach and communication activities for those sectors and actions where progress on inclusion is most needed, applying communications tools and leveraging relays and amplifiers relevant to the target audiences.

4.5 Closely monitor the implementation of the programme's inclusion and diversity strategy and adapt it as and when needed.

Together with the National Agencies, the Commission should regularly review and adapt its inclusion strategy on the basis of the results obtained and emerging challenges. It could also assess the opportunity to devise specific objectives concerning certain types of barriers or to make clearer that aspects like age-based discriminations, or barriers associated with mental health and well-being are already covered.

4.6 Assess the possibility of increasing programme resources for activities benefitting the most participants with fewer opportunities.

This could require increasing financial resources of sectors and fields that contribute more directly to the development of basic skills and social cohesion, which can reach a diverse audience and also show a significantly higher demand for opportunities than the ones available in the current programme (for instance, school education, and Vocational education and training). This may mean, also, assessing the possibility of encouraging sustained co-funding from Member States on some actions including in higher education.

4.2.5 Further strengthen the programme's resilience

5.1 Provide increased flexibility for beneficiary organisations in terms of operational and budgetary management during project implementation to better react and adapt to disruptions.

The disruptions of recent years have shown that reactivity and responsiveness to unexpected and often unpredictable events is essential to ensure the programme's resilience. The Commission should assess the opportunity and feasibility of granting beneficiary organisations with enhanced flexibility in the case of major disrupting events, in several areas, including in project timelines, the delivery of project outcomes, or the use of project budgets.

5.2 Perform regular reviews of the impact of price fluctuations on the programme's activities and participants, and set up efficient processes to implement relevant adaptations.

The inflation surge of 2021-2023 has shown the need for a more rapid reaction and adaptation of the programme to price fluctuations impacting its activities and participants. Mechanisms should be devised to enable a faster response, in particular in terms of the funding provided by the programme (e.g. of the parameters used to calculate the mobility grants).

4.2.6 Enhance the sustainability of programme and project results

6.1 Encourage the explicit identification, at project design stage, of concrete pathways to maximising the impact of the expected project results.

The identification of measures to enhance the sustainability of results should be given more importance in the project application and assessment process, including through the provision of related support to applicants and a higher weighting for project sustainability measures in the assessment process and award criteria. This could include, whenever relevant, the identification of possible follow up actions to up-scale the project (including the early identification of related funding options).

6.2 Implement measures to ensure a more systematic exploitation and uptake of project results.

The Commission should work to enhance the user-friendliness and visibility of the Erasmus+ Project Results Platform, and explore possible ways to generate increased traffic and engagement rates with its content as well as more consistent reporting of project results by beneficiaries. It should also explore ways to promote a wider and more structured sharing of good/best practices and of ideas, across beneficiary organisations, concerning the measurement, maximisation and sustainability of project impacts and the valorisation of experiences acquired through mobility, cooperation and partnerships projects.

4.2.7 Strengthen the programme's international dimension

7.1 Assess how to further support EU strategic priorities addressing cooperation with third countries not associated to the programme through programme actions.

A thorough reflection should be tabled among Commission services and relevant stakeholders on the most appropriate measures to reinforce the international dimension of the programme taking into account EU strategic priorities, the current level of demand and the obstacles hindering the participation in the programme. The reflection should take into account the number of opportunities open to the various regions/ third countries not associated to the programme in terms of type of actions and target groups, the level of funding as well as the existing patterns of participation. These efforts should in particular aim to contribute to i) attracting talents from abroad and to raise awareness of the EU as an attractive destination with regards to opportunities in education and training, youth and sport, and ii) reinforcing cooperation ties between Member States and third countries associated to Erasmus+, on one hand, and third countries not associated to the programme, on the other, through learning mobility, education exchanges and capacity building.

7.2 Pursue synergies with relevant EU external action instruments and strategies as well as with bilateral actions from EU Member States to further leverage Erasmus+ in the EU's international relations

A regular dialogue should be established with relevant Commission services and Member States authorities to ensure that Erasmus+ can best contribute, jointly with other programmes and initiatives, to extending the EU's international influence in third countries not associated to the programme and promoting its values globally.

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