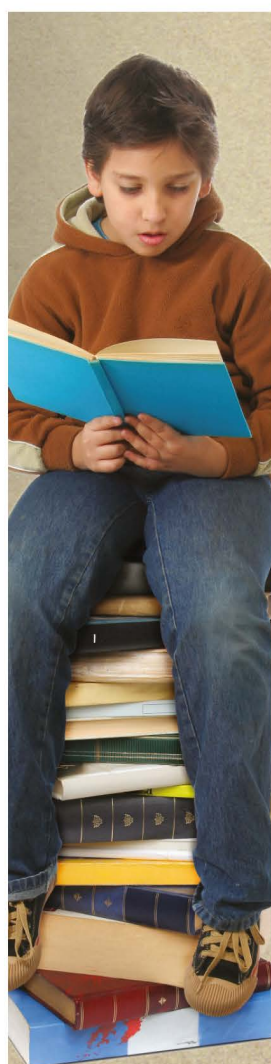


DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR INTERNAL POLICIES

POLICY DEPARTMENT **B**

STRUCTURAL AND COHESION POLICIES



Agriculture and Rural Development

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RESEARCH FOR CULT COMMITTEE - ERASMUS+: DECENTRALISED IMPLEMENTATION - FIRST EXPERIENCES

STUDY



DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR INTERNAL POLICIES
POLICY DEPARTMENT B: STRUCTURAL AND COHESION POLICIES

CULTURE AND EDUCATION

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This document was requested by the European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education (CULT).

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DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR INTERNAL POLICIES
POLICY DEPARTMENT B: STRUCTURAL AND COHESION POLICIES

CULTURE AND EDUCATION

RESEARCH FOR CULT COMMITTEE - ERASMUS+: DECENTRALISED IMPLEMENTATION - FIRST EXPERIENCES

STUDY

Abstract

Erasmus+ is the Union programme in the field of education, training, youth and sport for the financial period from 2014 to 2020. This study looks into the implementation of the decentralised actions of the Erasmus+ programme by National Agencies, two and a half years into the programme period. Its aim is to map the opportunities and challenges encountered in the implementation of these actions and to formulate recommendations for improvement.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACA	Academic Cooperation Association
AE	Adult Education
CULT	Committee on Culture and Education
DG EAC	European Commission Directorate-General for Education and Culture
DG EMPLOYMENT	European Commission Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion
EACEA	Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
HE	Higher Education
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
ICM	International Credit Mobility
KA1	Key Action 1
KA2	Key Action 2
KA3	Key Action 3
LLP	Lifelong Learning Programme
NAs	National Agencies for Erasmus+
OLS	Online Linguistic Support
SE	School Education
VET	Vocational Education and Training

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

This study, entitled "*Erasmus+: decentralised implementation - first experiences*" was produced by staff of the Brussels-based Academic Cooperation Association (ACA) based on research carried out between April and June 2016. The study was produced for the Committee on Culture and Education (CULT) of the European Parliament.

Aim

The aim of the study was to help identify opportunities and challenges brought about by the Erasmus+ programme, specifically in its decentralised actions, i.e. those managed by national agencies for Erasmus+ (NAs)¹ as well as to collect suggestions for improvement. While this initiative was carried out in parallel to the mid-term evaluation of Erasmus+ managed by the European Commission (EC), the two are separate initiatives. Unlike the mid-term evaluation, this study does not aim to make a full-scale assessment of the programme implementation, addressing only a selection of aspects related to it.

Methodology

The report exclusively builds on two data sources:

- the answers to a questionnaire-based online survey addressing the 61 Erasmus+ NAs in all programme countries. The questionnaire contained a mix of closed and open questions (see Annex 1). 38 NAs replied to the online questionnaire via 36 written responses². The total response rate to the survey was thus 62.3%.
- telephone/Skype interviews with representatives of 10 NAs. Two NAs involved in the interviews did not originally respond to the online survey, making the total number of involved NAs 40.

Of the 36 responses to the online survey, nine (25%) were "full portfolio NAs" (i.e. managing all sectors of Education and Training and Youth), 12 (33.3%) were "education and training only" ("E&T only") NAs, eight (22.2%) "Youth NAs", and seven (19.4%) came from sectoral portfolio NAs (the "other types of NAs"). While Youth NAs responded under average, all other types were slightly overrepresented compared to their share of the sample. As this analysis is carried out rather early in the programme period – after two and a half out of the seven years of total programme duration – the majority of NAs did not yet have the necessary data available for a full quantitative analysis. Therefore, most of the responses reflect primarily the perceptions of the respective NAs and their experiences thus far, but are not yet based on full figures.

¹ The decentralised actions are all activities under Key Action 1 of Erasmus+ with the exception of Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees and Erasmus+ Master Loans and the Strategic Partnerships under Key Action 2.

² The difference is explained by the fact that the NAs from 2 countries provided a joint response.

Main findings

The large majority of NAs are very positive about the future achievement of the Erasmus+ programme objectives, both in the field of E&T and of Youth. Apart from one Youth-related objective, half or more of the NAs expect all the objectives to be reached “to a high or very high extent” by the end of the programme period.

The biggest advantages of Erasmus+ in the words of NAs are the potential for “more cross-sectoral cooperation and mutual learning (applicants and NAs)” (mentioned by 66.7% of NAs), the “streamlined architecture (three Key Actions) and harmonisation of rules and regulations” (58.3%), the “simplified financial management (unit cost system³) and increased budget flexibility” (52.8%) and the “potential for wider impact” (52.8%).

The biggest challenges are the “reduced functionality of IT tools and their sheer number” (80.6%), “too high administrative complexity and red tape (Programme Guide, procedures, etc.)” (75.0%), and “too much focus on large-scale projects (smaller applicants disadvantaged) (41.7%).

Along the main axis of analysis, the core results are as follows:

- **Cross-sectoral cooperation:** while Erasmus+ has great potential for cross-sectoral cooperation, almost two-thirds of the respondents reported only a “moderate increase in cross-sectoral cooperation” under the programme, showing there is ample room for improvement, which needs however concrete actions in order to materialise. One such action would be a clear definition of ‘cross-sectoral’ in order to facilitate promotion, identification and tracking of truly cross-sectoral projects. Cross-sectoral cooperation of NAs at national level has evidently increased as the majority reports much closer and regular cooperation within (multi-sectoral) NAs as well as between (sectoral) NAs in a single country.
- **Streamlining of programme rules across sectors:** opinions on the degree of harmonisation of rules and regulations vary across the NAs. While some welcome the current streamlining of the programme and would welcome even more alignment (especially the education and training only NAs), others (the sectoral and Youth NAs) feel that harmonisation has gone too far.
- **Financial management and funding:** NAs largely appreciate the general use of the “unit costs system”, which they feel has significantly simplified the financial management of the programme. In some countries, however, beneficiaries encounter extra difficulties as they are obliged under national legislation to work on a “real cost basis”, implementing thus two systems in parallel. Some NAs also noted that the levels of unit costs are not always in line with actual expenses, which is a cause for concern, especially for beneficiaries. As for the levels of funding per Key Action (KA) and sector, KA2 is particularly seen as severely underfunded (only 22.9% of the NAs declare it is “adequately funded”). The NAs argue that this causes

³ In predecessor programmes of Erasmus+, funding levels were still very often based on real costs beneficiaries had, for example for travel and accommodation, or for staff time. In Erasmus+, funding on the basis of unit cost has, in principle, replaced the real-cost-based system. In other words, instead of calculating real cost of expenses, applicants are awarded a grant on the basis of the number of units (days, participants, etc.) in project activities.

very high selectivity of project applications, which could turn out to be counter-productive in the medium term if no action is taken to remedy the situation.

- **Applicants and beneficiaries:** Most NAs report higher numbers of other types of applicants (enterprises, public bodies, NGOs) in Erasmus+ than in the previous programmes. Another change, and one that NAs are generally worried about, is the size of applicants. NAs are concerned that the programme favours institutional approaches to projects and large-scale applicants, disadvantaging smaller-size organisations and youth groups. They feel that some positive discrimination actions should be taken.
- **Cooperation between NAs, EC and EACEA:** NAs had very difficult collaboration with the EC at the start of Erasmus+, but the situation has markedly improved, to the point that only less than one in five agencies are currently “unsatisfied” with this collaboration. Given that the cooperation with the EACEA is close to non-existent, the NAs would appreciate much more information exchange with the former.
- **Digitalisation of the programme – the IT tools:** most NAs welcome the large-scale introduction of IT tools under Erasmus+. However, they were deeply affected by the reduced functionality of the tools at the beginning of the programme. While significant progress has been made, there is still scope for improvement. Some NAs recommend to not only technically improve the tools, but also to streamline them and reduce their number, to make the process more manageable both for the NAs and applicants.
- **Promotion of the programme:** while the promotion of Erasmus+ is felt to be very important, NAs also caution about the danger of “over-enthusiastic” promotional activities, given the programme’s limited funding and already very high selectivity in some actions (e.g. KA2). Although most NAs strongly opposed the name Erasmus+ for the new programme, due to the loss of prominence of sectoral programme names, many NAs report that the new programme enjoys greater visibility than the predecessor programmes. They find it much easier to promote one programme with one single name, especially to mass media and the general public. Some confusion seems to remain, however, at the level of beneficiaries over Erasmus+ covering more than higher education.

Recommendations

The study concludes with eight recommendations, which are described in greater detail in the final section of the report. The recommendations, presented in a summary form below, are fully based on suggestions by the NAs that contributed to this report.

- Recommendation 1: Making cross-sectoral cooperation “really happen”
- Recommendation 2: A halt on further harmonisation, with some fine-tuning
- Recommendation 3: More flexibility in the use of the budget
- Recommendation 4: Making room for smaller-size applicants
- Recommendation 5: A formalised cooperation framework with EACEA
- Recommendation 6: Not more, but better and fewer IT tools
- Recommendation 7: Proportional promotion to the funding available
- Recommendation 8: No more change for the sake of change

While there is clearly room for improvement, it is noteworthy that the majority of NAs describe the Erasmus+ programme as an “important step forward” and have a high level of trust in its capacity to reach its objectives.

1. INTRODUCTION

The present study was produced by the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA) for the European Parliament's CULT Committee. It attempts to capture and analyse the first experiences with the implementation of the decentralised actions of the Erasmus+ Programme, namely all activities under Key Action 1 (KA1), with the exception of Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees and Erasmus+ Master Loans, as well as Strategic Partnerships under Key Action 2 (KA2) and Structured Dialogue in the youth field under Key Action 3 (KA3). The study aims to show what works well and what does not in its implementation.

1.1. EU engagement in education, training, youth and sports

The Erasmus+ Programme is the European Union's chief support scheme for cooperation in the fields of education, training, youth and sport. It was launched in 2014 and represents the so far last stage of development in the history of the EU's engagement in these policy areas. This history started in the latter half of the 1980s⁴, when the EC created a whole series of programmes, such as COMETT (1986), ERASMUS (1987) and TEMPUS (1990s) in higher education, as well as the Youth for Europe Programme (1988), Eurotecnet (1989) and FORCE (1990), both for vocational training, as well as LINGUA (1989), for languages. In the roughly 25 years since then, the development can be characterised with the terms expansion, concentration, streamlining and simplification (economies of scale), as well as decentralisation.

Expansion took place in at least four respects. First, the budgets available grew considerably over time. The budget of Erasmus+, for example, is 40% higher than that of the predecessor programmes. Second, progressively more and more sectors were covered. School education and adult education were added, for example, as was distance (later online) education. Third, the regional coverage of the programmes grew continuously. This was not only a consequence of the end of the east-west division of Europe and the later accession of new member states. EU education and training programmes also reached out to neighbouring areas (TEMPUS), to industrialised and developing countries outside of Europe (for example ALFA for Latin America). With Erasmus Mundus (2004), the Union finally created a global scheme for cooperation in higher education. In Erasmus+, support measures to the European dimension of sports were added, building on pilot activities and European cooperation in areas such as dual career of athletes and social inclusion through sports. And fourth, new types of activities were 'exported' to new sectors or regions. The most notable example under Erasmus+ is the introduction of the International Credit Mobility (ICM) sub-action. ICM represents the extension of the Erasmus type of intra-European student and staff mobility to non-European countries⁵.

⁴ Strictly speaking, the beginnings reach even further back, to the Education Action Programme (1976-84), which included for example the Joint Study Programme, a try-out for what later became ERASMUS.

⁵ The non-European countries with which the programme supports ICM are those targeted in the EU's foreign and neighbourhood policy. As a result, the funding for the ICM actions comes from 11 different 'envelopes' (i.e. budget sources) of the European Commission. Student and staff exchanges with non-European countries took place also under the predecessor programmes, but in the framework of projects, under the centralised actions of the programme (e.g. TEMPUS, ALFA, etc.).

Concentration is the second trend characterising the history. Step by step, individual programmes were being merged or put under the umbrella of larger schemes. This trend set in in the mid-1990s, when the intra-EU education and training programmes were regrouped under SOCRATES (education) and Leonardo da Vinci (vocational education and training) respectively. The Lifelong Learning Programme brought both schemes under one roof. However, some single programmes with non-EU countries continued their separate existence, chief amongst them Erasmus Mundus, as well as the Youth in Action programme. Erasmus+ was the final step of the process of integration, bringing everything under its remit, inclusive of youth and sports.

Streamlining and creating economies of scale is the third trend. We would like to exemplify this with the history of the (original) ERASMUS Programme. In the years until the integration into SOCRATES, ERASMUS had been funding so-called Inter-University Cooperation Programmes (ICPs). ICPs were groupings of discipline-based university departments for the exchange of students and project. A university could easily be involved in 30 or 40 ICPs. Under the newly created “institutional contract” in SOCRATES, a university would put in only one single application. While the reform was supposedly policy-driven - higher education institutions (HEIs) would develop ‘institutional strategies’ – it really boiled down to the simplification of programme management. The integration into SOCRATES produced further streamlining efforts, because the technical assistance providers of the EC understandably aimed at economies of scale, in the form of a joint programme database, selection procedures, etc. This trend continued, and finds its epitome in the ‘streamlined’ architecture under Erasmus+, which seeks to pursue common administrative approaches across sectors by Key Actions (KAs) and thus provides economies of scale via a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach. To a certain extent, administrative ease has taken precedence over substantive considerations. The Erasmus+ programme is consequently organised in three KAs and two special activities, as follows:

- KA1: Learning mobility of individuals
- KA2: Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices
- KA3: Support for policy reform
- Jean Monnet activities and Sports.

All these changes were made in the name of (perceived) simplification.

Decentralisation or, to be precise, decentralised management, is the fourth trend in the history of EU education and training engagement. One must be aware that already the initial formula of programme management was characterised by partial decentralisation of decisions to the beneficiary organisations, for example the selection of exchange students to the ICP or, later, HEI. In some of the initial programmes more than in others, part of the programme delivery was devolved to national agencies (NAs) from the start. The share of the work that was devolved to the national level grew with every new generation of programmes. In Erasmus+ for instance, the most notable transfer of competencies from the central to the national level is the implementation and monitoring of transnational cooperation projects (called “Strategic Partnerships” under Erasmus+). ‘Centralised’ management by the EC or its executive agency (EACEA) has, in relative terms, been reduced accordingly.

The transition from the LLP (and the other still separate schemes) to Erasmus+ marks the culmination of the above trends.

Erasmus+ brought about the biggest changes in programme design of all EU programmes in the field of E&T and Youth. Beyond the outlined trends, the programme was also significantly shaped by the ambition to bring more “added-value” and to have a wider, systemic impact. This translated into a shift of focus from individuals taking part in the programme to institutions and institutional participation.

Clearly, many of the novelties were controversial when they were first introduced in the EC’s proposal for (initially the “Erasmus for all” programme, which later became) Erasmus+. Some of the most debated proposals at the time were:

- The move away from a sectoral design towards the streamlining of activities around the three Key Actions covering mobility, partnerships and policy support.
- The idea to bring together all sectoral and regional programmes under the name of “Erasmus”, which was perceived to be the strongest brand name of an EU programme, but also closely associated with EU’s support in the field of higher education. The major concerns at the time were that the sectoral programmes in particular (Comenius, Grundtvig, Leonardo da Vinci, and Youth in Action), but also the international programmes (especially Erasmus Mundus) would lose visibility under the umbrella name Erasmus, while the Erasmus brand would be “diluted” by its extension to new sectors and regions.
- The suggestion to have a single coordinating NA per country, which is the single major proposal that did not ‘survive’ the programme negotiations (excluding the negotiations of the budget).

1.2. Methodology

This study was produced in the period between early April and end of June 2016. Seeking to capture and analyse the first experiences with the implementation of Erasmus+, it addresses exclusively the decentralised actions of the programme. Its findings are mainly based on a questionnaire-based online survey that targeted all of the 61 Erasmus+ NAs in all programme countries and on telephone and Skype interviews with representatives of 10 NAs. The questionnaire contained a mix of open and closed questions. Both the online questionnaire and the interview guidelines are annexed to this study (Annex 1 and 2 respectively).

Of the 61 agencies addressed, 11 were “full portfolio NAs” responsible for all parts of Erasmus+ (18.0%), 19 were in charge of the “education and training sector only” (E&T only) (31.1%), 22 for “Youth” (36.1%) and nine for a mix of categories different from those above (the “other types of NAs”) (14.8%).

36 responses were received. Since two NAs from two countries provided a joint response, the overall number of responsive NAs was 38, i.e. an impressive return rate of 62.3%. Response rates vary per type of NA, ranging from 36.4% to 81.8% (Table 1). Since we managed to also interview two of the NAs which did not respond to the online survey, we reached overall 40 NAs. Of the 36 responses to the online survey, nine (25.0%) were “full portfolio NAs”, 12 (33.3%) were “E&T only NAs”, eight (22.2%) “Youth NAs” and seven (19.4%) came from “other” NAs. While “Youth NAs” responded under average, all other types were slightly overrepresented compared to their share of the sample.

Table 1: Respondent NAs by type of the agency⁶

Type of NAs	N	%	Response rate per type of NA
Full portfolio NAs (E&T and Youth)	9	25.0	81.8%
E&T only NAs	12	33.3	63.1%
Youth only NAs	8	22.2	36.4%
Other types of NAs (one sector only, or mix of sectors)	7	19.4	77.7%
TOTAL	36	100.0	62.3%

Note: N = Number of respondent NAs; % = Percentage of respondent NAs

Table 1 shows the respondents by type of NA. Overall, the responding NAs represent a fairly, though not fully, representative subgroup of all 61 NAs. The share of responding “E&T only” NAs is almost the same the share of this NA type in the overall sample (33.3% vs. 33.1%). The share of ‘full portfolio’ agencies amongst respondents is higher than the share of this group in the total sample (25% vs. 18%). The share of responding Youth only NAs is considerably lower than the share of this NA type in the total sample (22.2% vs. 36.1%). Of the 10 NAs interviewed, two were ‘full portfolio’, three education and training only, two Youth and three ‘other’.

NAs were also classified by size of their country. The categories were very small countries (under 2 million), small countries (2-10 million), medium-size countries (10-20 million) and large to very large countries (over 20 million). Very small-size countries represented some 24% of the sample, small-size countries held the largest share of about 36%, medium-size countries were the smallest group, with about 18%, and large and very large countries only slightly more - 21%.

Table 2: Respondent NAs by size of the country

Size of the country	N	%
Very small	7	19.4
Small	13	36.1
Medium	8	22.2
Large to very large	8	22.2
TOTAL	36	100.0

Note: N = Number of respondent NAs; % = Percentage of respondent NAs

⁶ Response rate calculated against the total of 38 individual NAs that provided the 36 responses to the survey.

Table 2 shows that the distribution of responding agencies comes very close to that of the total sample. In other words, there is a high degree of representativeness.

We classified NAs also according to geographical location. Northern Europe, i.e. the Nordic and Baltic countries, made up 24% of the total sample. Western Europe amounted to 27%. Southern Europe represented 21% of the sample and Eastern Europe 27%. The distribution of the responding agencies deviates slightly from this picture, but it is not distorting, as Table 3 demonstrates.

Table 3: Respondent NAs by region

Region of the NAs	N	%
Northern Europe	7	19.4
Western Europe	14	38.9
Southern Europe	7	19.4
Eastern Europe	8	22.2
TOTAL	36	100.0

Note: N = Number of respondent NAs; % = Percentage of respondent NAs

Respondents made it clear that they were very often expressing perceptions or impressions rather than providing safe (quantitative) facts. This was inevitable, given that in many cases final figures of the second round of applications and selections were not yet available.

2. FINDINGS

2.1. The big picture – objectives, advantages, challenges

In this section we aim to give an overview of the perceptions of NAs that replied to the online survey and participated in the interviews vis-à-vis the objectives of the programme and the likely achievement level thereof. We also present the main perceived advantages, disadvantages and challenges in the Erasmus+ programme's design and implementation. As many of these aspects will be dealt with more in-depth in the following sections, we will abstain here from providing too many technical details or specifications beyond the "big picture".

2.1.1. Expectations towards the Erasmus+ Programme objectives

As this analysis is carried out less than halfway through the programme period, it is too early to talk about the "impact" of the programme as such. Given this limitation, the Erasmus+ NAs were asked to state, based on their experience thus far, the extent to which they expected the programme objectives to be reached both in the fields of education and training (E&T) and Youth by the end of 2020.

The large majority of NAs seemed very positive about the future of the programme and described it as a "major step forward", despite the initial challenges in programme implementation. Between half and three quarters of agencies rated the likelihood of the programme to reach each of its five E&T objectives as "high or very high" (Table 4). NAs showed the greatest trust (74.1%) in the realisation of the fourth objective – to "enhance the international dimension of E&T". In this context, the International Credit Mobility (ICM) action was often quoted as one of the most important and necessary "innovations" of the programme. At the same time, NAs seem to be less hopeful that the fifth objective – "improve the teaching and learning of languages" – will be achieved. Several NAs expressed related doubts, based on the fact that another very welcome novelty of the programme – the Online Language Support (OLS) – is so far only available for the most widely spoken languages.

Table 4: Likelihood of Erasmus+ to reach the E&T Objectives⁷

E&T objectives		A very low to low extent	To some extent	A high to very high extent	TOTAL
Improve the level of key competences and skills...	N	2	9	18	29
	%	6.9	31.0	62.1	100.0
Foster quality improvements, innovation, excellence and internationalisation...	N	1	12	16	29
	%	3.4	41.4	55.2	100.0
Promote the European lifelong learning area...	N	1	11	17	29
	%	3.4	37.9	58.6	100.0
Enhance the international dimension of E&T...	N	0	8	20	28
	%	0	28.6	71.4	100.0
Improve the teaching and learning of languages...	N	6	9	14	29
	%	20.7	31.0	48.3	100.0

Source: Q1**Note:** N = Number of respondent NAs; % = Percentage of respondent NAs

The NAs were equally optimistic about the programme's objectives in the field of Youth (Table 5), with the exception of objective 3 – to “support evidence-based youth policy and recognition of non-formal and informal learning” – for which three in four NAs answered that they expect it to be reached only “to some extent”. On this note, several agencies expressed doubts in the programme's ability “to solve the problems related to the recognition of non-formal and informal learning as such”. This opinion seems to be further supported by the concern voiced by most of the NAs in charge of Youth. These agencies stressed that “the programme is less accessible to young people with fewer opportunities and to informal groups of young people who do not act within a professional institution/organisation” in general.

⁷ The percentages in the table are calculated against the “valid percent”, i.e. against the number of NAs that answered the respective question, and not against the total number of NAs that answered the questionnaire (N=36).

Table 5: Likelihood of Erasmus+ to reach the Youth Objectives⁸

Youth objectives		A very low to low extent	To some extent	A high to very high extent	TOTAL
Improve the level of key competences and skills of young people...	N	0	7	12	19
	%	0	36.8	63.2	100.0
Foster quality improvements and enhanced cooperation in the youth field...	N	0	9	10	19
	%	3.4	47.4	52.6	100.0
Support evidence-based youth policy and recognition of non-formal and informal learning...	N	2	14	3	19
	%	10.5	73.7	15.8	100.0
Enhance the international dimension of youth activities and the capacity of youth workers...	N	0	6	13	19
	%	0	31.6	68.4	100.0

Source: Q1

Note: N = Number of respondent NAs; % = Percentage of respondent NAs

Within the general enthusiasm, several NAs cautioned about the danger to overestimate the impact of the programme. In their words, while the programme is generally “effective”, one should not overlook the fact that its funding is limited, making it very difficult to reach a “critical mass”. Therefore a dose of healthy realism should be kept when discussing the programme, its outreach and ultimately impact.

2.1.2. Main advantages of Erasmus+

NAs addressed through the survey were also asked to name what they perceived as the main advantages of the Erasmus+ programme and the biggest positive effects brought about through the “streamlined architecture” of the programme.

Overall, two thirds of agencies (66.7%) listed the increased potential for “cross-sectoral” cooperation as the biggest positive element of the programme (Table 6). NAs used “cross-sectoral” cooperation with several meanings. First, they meant cooperation between applicants and beneficiaries from the various sectors of E&T and Youth. Second, they referred to the collaboration between these sectors *within* the agencies that incorporate several or all of them. And last but not least, they meant the cooperation *between* the NAs with different portfolios themselves.

As Tables 6.a, 6.b and 6.c in the Annex 3 show, the possibilities for cross-sectoral cooperation were particularly stressed by the “E&T only NAs” (83.3%), by the agencies

⁸ The percentages in the table are calculated against the “valid percent”, i.e. against the number of NAs that answered the respective question, and not against the total number of NAs that answered the questionnaire (N=36).

from “medium-size countries” (87.5%) and from Northern Europe (85.7%). It should be stressed however that the NAs referred here to the “potential” for cross-sectoral cooperation under the programme. The “actual” cross-sectoral cooperation under Erasmus+ thus far is, as we will see in section 2.2, a rather different matter.

More than half of the agencies also mentioned as most positive developments the “streamlined architecture of the programme and the harmonisation of rules and regulations” (58.3%), the “simplified financial management” (52.8%) and the “potential for wider impact” (52.8%) of the programme, the other five advantages being mentioned by less than 50.0% of NAs.

Overall, most of the agencies seem to share a rather positive image of the programme. Erasmus+ has been described as “a huge step has been made towards further integration and cooperation between educational sectors, enabling mutual learning”. It was also pointed out that the “potential for a common approach in all sectors supports the efficient and effective management of the programme”. Several agencies also appreciate the “shift from activities towards impact of projects” and an increased emphasis on the “quality of results” compared to the past.

Table 6: Main perceived advantages of Erasmus+ by NAs⁹

Main advantages	N	%
More possibilities for cross-sectoral cooperation and mutual learning (applicants and NAs)	24	66.7
Streamlined architecture (three Key Actions) and harmonisation of rules and regulations	21	58.3
Simplified financial management (unit cost system) and increased budget flexibility	19	52.8
Potential for wider impact	19	52.8
More visibility – a programme that is easier to promote (to applicants and to media)	15	41.7
Development and use of IT tools (less paper)	14	38.9
More emphasis on quality	9	25.0
Increased budget	7	19.4
Bigger focus on internationalisation (especially through International Credit Mobility)	7	19.4

Source: Q2 and Q11

Note: N = Number of respondent NAs; % = Percentage of respondent NAs; Multiple response questions.

⁹ The percentages in the table are calculated against the “valid percent”, i.e. against the number of NAs that answered the respective question, and not against the total number of NAs that answered the questionnaire (N=36).

2.1.3. Main challenges in Erasmus+

Despite the generally very positive view of the programme and high levels of trust in the achievement of its goals, the agencies also face several important implementation challenges. While on several of these aspects the situation has improved since the launch of the programme, in other areas the same level of difficulty persists.

The “digitalisation of the programme” was one of the most welcome changes brought about by Erasmus+ (38.9% of agencies listed it as a main advantage above). In parallel, the widespread use of IT tools in the programme is also the aspect that posed most problems for virtually all NAs. Four in five agencies mentioned aspects related to the “reduced functionality of IT tools and their sheer number” as *the* top challenge (Table 7). The challenges posed by the IT tools particularly in the first two years of the programme are by now well known. The general opinion is that, as one of the respondents summarised, there are “too many IT tools, too unstable (bugs), too time-consuming and not user-friendly”. Because of the initial problems, many NAs had to develop their own internal tools to be able to cope with the situation, but not all agencies had the necessary resources to do so. Notwithstanding, most agencies do acknowledge that big progress has been made in improving the tools especially in the past year. On a positive note, the NAs highly value the data that is being gathered through these instruments, as evident in this quote: *“The IT tools (with all their flaws and beginner bugs) will eventually open an enormously rich set of data for Europe to analyse and learn from”*.

The NAs felt that the programme’s financial management is simpler on their side largely through the implementation of the unit costs system (52.8% of agencies mentioned this as one of the main advantages – Table 7). However, the overall administrative burden of the programme for beneficiaries as well as for the agencies is felt to be excessive by three in four NAs, in particular for smaller-size beneficiary organisations and in the youth sector.

In this context, agencies often mentioned the Programme Guide. The guide is described by many NAs as too comprehensive, and thus complex, “not user-friendly”, too lengthy and not sector-specific. Many NAs believe that because of the current format of the guide it is often difficult for users to see where they can apply under the programme. This challenge was particularly emphasised by the sectoral agencies (i.e. in the category “Other types of NAs” - 100.0% mentioned this difficulty), as well as by agencies from very small-size countries (85.7%) and from Western Europe (78.6%), as visible in Tables 7.a, 7.b and 7.c in Annex 3.

A significant share of NAs (41.7%) are also worried that *“the programme Erasmus+ becomes more and more a programme for large institutions, which shouldn’t be the goal”*, especially under KA2 (Table 7). This is linked to the *“complex structure of the programme”* and of the application forms, which several agencies fear *“makes the programme less accessible for vulnerable groups, small organisations and individuals”*. This issue is raised by one in two “E&T only” and “Youth only” agencies, by almost two in three NAs in medium-size countries and by one in two agencies in Western Europe (Tables 7.a, 7.b and 7.c in Annex 3).

With regard to the degree of harmonisation of rules and regulations between sectors, the opinions are divided. About a third of the NAs (36.1% - Table 7) feel that one size *does not* fit all, and that, in the integrated programme, important sectoral specificities have been lost or are neglected. Specifically the sectoral (“Other type of NAs”) and the “Youth only”

agencies feel that harmonisation under Erasmus+ has gone too far – 57.1% and 50.0% respectively (Table 4.a in Annex 3).

In contrast, one in three “E&T only” NAs would welcome further harmonisation (Table 7.a in Annex 3) and so would one in four NAs in general (Table 4, 25.0%). These agencies point to the persistence of sectoral divides and to sector specificities that do not seem “justifiable”. Examples are the much higher flexibility in higher education compared to other sectors, the lower unit costs for the youth sector and the continued organisation of DG Education and Culture by sector, which runs counter to the very philosophy of the new programme.

About one in four NAs (22.2%) also perceive as a main challenge the:

- **“slow increase in the budget”**: As the budget increase takes effect only in 2017, the ‘waiting period’ for beneficiaries has been quite long. One agency went as far as saying that *“the rise in the budget only in the second half of the programme is a big mistake in the implementation”*.
- **“delays in the overall communication and administration”**: This refers to the late and at time faulty delivery of online application forms, which posed great challenges, especially taking into account that most NAs had to translate the forms into their national language.
- **“too many changes and constant updates (of forms, IT tools, rules)”** in the first two years of the programme: Many NAs criticised the lack of stability of documents and the constantly changing rules (also retroactively). They felt that these updates forced them to primarily deal with technical and administrative matters, leaving very little time, if any, to discuss about “content” and the wider programme objectives.

Although less often mentioned here compared to the other challenges (19.4%), agencies had a recurrent concern of having to reject many project applications of very high quality. This is due to the mismatch between the high interest in the programme and the limited funding possibilities available (especially in KA2). Many agencies fear that in the medium-term this will result in a decreasing interest in the programme: *“More funding should be allocated to strategic partnerships, particularly in higher education. Lack of funding damages the perception of the programme; this is especially an issue for the higher education sector. Strategic partnerships have huge potential in contributing to the overarching aims of Erasmus+, but the action is so under-funded that in many smaller countries it is impossible to fund a critical mass of projects. This is potentially damaging for the program as such, and, as a minimum, greater flexibility between KAs should be introduced to meet national needs as effectively as possible”*.

And on a related note, several NAs also raised the question of whether the programme should continue to be so actively promoted, given the limited funding available, cautioning that *“too enthusiastic promotion of the programme”* was *“inconsistent with the funding opportunities”*.

Table 7: Main perceived challenges of Erasmus+ by NAs¹⁰

Main challenges	N	%
Reduced functionality of IT tools and their sheer number	29	80.6
Too high administrative complexity and red tape (Programme Guide, procedures, etc.)	27	75.0
Too much focus on large-scale projects (smaller applicants disadvantaged)	15	41.7
Too much harmonisation (sectoral specificities not taken enough into account)	13	36.1
Persistence of sectoral divides/exceptions	9	25.0
Slow budget increase (from 2017 only)	8	22.2
Delays in communication and administration	8	22.2
Too many changes and constant updates (of forms, IT tools, rules)	8	22.2
High rejection rate of good quality project applications	7	19.4
Too low unit costs	6	16.7
Burdensome implementation of International Credit Mobility	4	11.1
Difficulties in promoting the non-higher education sectors (because of the name)	4	11.1

Source: Q3 and Q9

Note: N = Number of respondent NAs; % = Percentage of respondent NAs

2.2. Cross-sectoral cooperation

One of the objectives of the Erasmus+ Programme was to facilitate and increase cross-sectoral cooperation. The 'streamlined architecture', which is based on KAs rather than on education sectors, was introduced to make this possible. To which degree has cross-sectoral cooperation taken place in the first two and a half years of the new integrated programme? Aware that it is too early to have any robust data and concluding evidence, we asked the respondents to share their experience of the degree to which *actual* cross-sectoral cooperation has taken place under the new programme as well as to give their opinion on the *possibilities* for increased cross-sectoral cooperation that the current structure allows.

As can be seen in Table 8, the feedback from the survey shows that almost two-thirds of the respondents reported a moderate increase in cross-sectoral cooperation under Erasmus+. Slightly above a quarter of NAs think that the level of cross-sectoral cooperation

¹⁰ The percentages in the table are calculated against the "valid percent", i.e. against the number of NAs that answered the respective question, and not against the total number of NAs that answered the questionnaire (N=36).

remained at the same level as in the predecessor programmes, whereas only 8.6% see or expect a significant increase in cross-sectoral cooperation under the new integrated programme. Notably, this group of respondents comes from one type of NAs only – those with the competence in the E&T sectors, i.e. those dealing with all sectors except Youth (Table 8.a in Annex 3), and all come from small-size countries (Table 8.b in Annex 3). All participating NAs agree that there has been no decrease in cooperation between sectors – not one single respondent reported lower or significantly lower levels of cross-sectoral cooperation in comparison to the previous programmes.

Table 8: Cross-sectoral cooperation compared under Erasmus+ to predecessor programmes¹¹

		Significant increase	Moderate increase	About the same level	TOTAL
Cross-sectoral cooperation	N	3	23	9	35
	%	8.6	65.7	25.7	100.0

Source: Q4

Note: N = Number of respondent NAs; % = Percentage of respondent NAs

We further asked the respondents to provide some details and illustrate the experiences so far with regard to cross-sectoral cooperation. The feedback has confirmed that the structure of the programme has strong potential for encouraging cross-sectoral cooperation. NAs see this potential as one of the main advantages of the programme and believe that the levels of cross-sectoral cooperation will increase with time as applicants become more aware of the opportunities. The 'mind shift' is gradually taking place as "people are for the first time thinking about it and working on it".

It also became noticeable, not surprisingly, that the emphasis on cross-sectoral cooperation puts a certain level of pressure on applicants to present their projects in *cross-sectoral* terms, whether or not they have a strong cross-sectoral component. Hence there are quite a few projects which are reported as cross-sectoral but *de facto* are not. The NAs find that the elimination of a separate e-form for cross-sectoral projects after 2014 has made it difficult to identify (truly) cross-sectoral projects and to track them. An additional difficulty seems to be caused by the sectoral division in the budget distribution. In other words, even if the projects do involve more than one sector and can be considered cross-sectoral in their design, the applicants must still choose *one single primary sector* in order to be referred to the 'right' budget. Thus the sectoral logic remains intact and results in cross-sectoral projects being at a relative disadvantage as they need to compete within the (primary) sector, as seen by the NAs.

What emerged as a big need across NAs was a clarification or a definition of the 'cross-sectoral approach' so that firstly, the NAs would be better able to explain to the applicants what the expectations are in this regard and secondly, to facilitate the administrative procedures in the identification of cross-sectoral projects and to make data collection possible.

¹¹ The percentages in the table are calculated against the "valid percent", i.e. against the number of NAs that answered the respective question, and not against the total number of NAs that answered the questionnaire (N=36).

Despite the initial challenges, Strategic Partnerships in KA2 are widely regarded conducive for cross-sectoral cooperation, pertaining either to different sectors working (more closely) together or to more diversity in the types of participating organisations than what was the case in the past (e.g. Youth and schools, HEIs and enterprises, municipalities and NGOs, etc.).

Quite a few NAs think that having what one respondent called a “KA4 (*Key Action 4*) – *cross-sectoral pillar*”, i.e. a dedicated budget line for cross-sectoral projects, would encourage more and better cooperation between sectors and would give this priority its ‘fair share’. Another suggestion put forward was the introduction of a set of award criteria for cross-sectoral projects as an incentive or at least, as a means to differentiate between cross-sectoral and sector-specific projects.

At the level of NAs, cooperation has reportedly increased and become more regular within countries. NAs with sectoral portfolios have reported more regular cooperation and exchange of information with their counterparts within the country as well as the joint organisation of information and promotion events for beneficiaries across sectors. The NAs with full portfolios equally report more ‘cross-sectoral cooperation’ and a better use of synergies after the unification of the programme.

Overall, the responses and proposals put forward point to a strong need to be ‘loud and clear’ about what cross-sectoral cooperation should entail, to promote it explicitly among potential applicants and to develop incentives for those projects that involve cross-sectoral cooperation. The potential is certainly there and, according to the NAs, it can be best achieved through targeted promotion with clear criteria for cross-sectoral projects.

2.3. Streamlining of programme rules across sectors

One of the most heatedly debated novelties under Erasmus+ was the introduction of the streamlined programme architecture. Past programmes had, by and large, been constructed around the different sectors (E&T and Youth) as basic building blocks. This way, all sectors kept their specificities, even if and where action lines had already been partly harmonised across sectors. In Erasmus+, the homogeneity of rules and regulations according to action type was to take priority over consistency inside a particular sector. One of the motives for this move was to create economies of scale for all those involved in the delivery and implementation of the programme. Do the NAs think that economies of scale have been achieved, and if so, for whom? Table 9 gives a first assessment of this.

Table 9: User-friendliness of Erasmus+ for different stakeholders compared to predecessor programmes¹²

Sectors		More to much more	No change/simplification	Less to much less	TOTAL
End users/beneficiaries (students, staff, teachers, youth, etc.)	N	13	12	11	36
	%	36.1	33.3	30.6	100.0
Applicants (NGOs, HEIs, enterprises, etc.)	N	16	5	15	36
	%	44.4	13.9	41.7	100.0
The NAs	N	10	8	18	36
	%	27.8	22.2	50.0	100.0
EACEA	N	6	3	6	15
	%	40.0	20.0	40.0	100.0
The European Commission	N	10	2	6	18
	%	55.6	11.1	33.3	100.0

Source: Q6**Note:** N = Number of respondent NAs; % = Percentage of respondent NAs

In the view of the NAs, the new programme architecture has had much less impact than hoped or feared (depending on school of thought). It appears that the issue of a change in management principle has been overrated – and not for the first time.

The biggest winner of the reform is, according to the NAs, the EC. For 55.6% of responding NAs, the Commission's implementation work has become easier. Only a third (33.3%) of NAs sees the EC's task as more difficult and 11.1% as unchanged. The main 'losers' of the reform are the NAs. Half of them find their work more demanding now, only 27.8% find their work easier and 22.2% judge it as unchanged. For the EACEA, whose role in the delivery of the decentralised actions is anyway marginal or zero, the picture remains virtually unchanged. The NAs see a slight change towards more user-friendliness for the 'end users' of the programme, i.e. mainly the individual students, staff, youth etc.: 36.1% of NAs view their work as having become easier, 30.6% as more difficult and exactly one third as unchanged. The same goes for the "applicants", i.e. institutions involved, such as HEIs, schools, NGOs and the like. 44.4% of all responding NAs find that the streamlined Erasmus+ programme is more user-friendly for these institutions and organisations. 13.9% of NAs see no change compared to the predecessor programmes, and 41.7% believe that the implementation work of those institutions and organisations has become more demanding.

¹² The percentages in the table are calculated against the "valid percent", i.e. against the number of NAs that answered the respective question, and not against the total number of NAs that answered the questionnaire (N=36).

Perceptions differ between countries, but also sectors. The NAs with a responsibility for youth generally find that the harmonisation of rules has gone too far. The following quote is typical in this regard. If perhaps a bit blunter than others, it captures the general judgement: *"in the youth field, it was a big crisis. 40% of applicants were lost in the first year. It looked too complex. For youth, there is definitely too much harmonisation."*

While a majority of NAs expressed support for the principle of streamlining in the interviews, only about one third felt that further harmonisation was needed. Amongst this minority were many NAs of the 'E&T only' type. Among the rest of NAs, there was a consensus that a limit had now been reached and further harmonisation was undesirable. For the majority, pushing harmonisation further would clearly result in a problematic 'one-size-fits-all' approach. This applies to all parts of Erasmus+ and all NAs, regardless of specialisation. Interestingly, one NA remarked that the biggest resistance camp to the consistent application of harmonised rules was the EC, or rather their sector-specific organisation of responsibilities for Erasmus+. However, this NA also states that there has been more inter-sector cooperation lately. In the same vein, a number of NAs point out that the introduction of every new set of rules - harmonised or sector-specific - is bound to result in some 'teething problems', the pain from which will decrease once the teeth are fully out.

2.4. Financial management and funding

2.4.1. Financial management: simplified

The history of European Union support for cooperation in E&T and Youth has been marked by continuous – though not always only successful - attempts at simplifying the financial management of the successive programmes. Next to the harmonisation of rules and regulations applied in the different sectors, one key approach in this respect has been the introduction of the unit cost system. Erasmus+ pushed this development further ahead. Has this made the financial management easier for the NAs and the beneficiaries? The vast majority of NAs strongly welcome this move, regardless of the sector(s) they cover. They state that it has made their lives and those of the programme beneficiaries easier.

As Table 10 shows, a fourth of all NA respondents (25.7%) stated that they found the financial management under Erasmus+ had become more cumbersome for beneficiaries than it had been under the predecessor programmes. 54.3% found that beneficiaries now had it easier, and 20% did not perceive any change. NAs also found that their own work in financial respect had become easier, so the difference is less marked than for beneficiaries. 44.4% found they now had it easier, 38.9% thought it had become more difficult for them, and 16.7% saw no change.

Table 10: Assessment of the financial management of Erasmus+ compared to predecessor programmes for NAs¹³

For whom		Easier than under predecessor programmes	The same as under predecessor programmes	More cumbersome than under predecessor programmes	Total
Beneficiaries	N	19	7	9	35
	%	54.3	20	25.7	100
NAs	N	16	6	14	36
	%	44.4	16.7	38.9	100.0

Source: Q16, NAs, types of NAs

Note: N = Number of respondent NAs; % = Percentage of respondent NAs

So there is widespread support for the use of unit costs, flat rates¹⁴ and comparable instruments. But the support for the instruments does not mean that the actual flat rates used are seen as adequate. They are felt to be too low. There are a few other problems. For example, a number of NAs state that Erasmus+ flat rates are higher than the corresponding maxima in national legislation, making it difficult for them to fully spend what are in principle scarce funds. Similarly, some NAs appear to be under the obligation to report also according to real-cost-based national rules and standards, which introduces cumbersome and legally potentially questionable needs to apply 'double bookkeeping'. The understanding of the flat-rate-rules by different EU institutions does not always seem to be homogeneous. One NA reports about an audit by the European Court of Auditors which challenged the application of flat rates in cases where real costs were below them. It also appears that, in some cases, programme beneficiaries and even NAs stand in their own way: they got so used to the - cumbersome - real cost-based system that they have difficulties with the attempt at simplification. As one NA put it, they need to make a "*mind shift*".

Quite a few NAs stress that the simplification of financial management through unit costs and flat rates is partly 'compensated' by other and less welcome trends, such as the heavy burdens created by an ever-increasing number of financial audits of NAs and beneficiaries alike. Others point out that the simplification brought about by the abandonment of the real cost system was being 'balanced' by problems with IT instruments and unclear guidelines. However these challenges have nothing to do with the unit-cost principle as such.

2.4.2. Funding

NAs are of the opinion that Erasmus+ spends its budget in a way that makes sense. But does this also mean they view this budget as adequate? This question poses itself in at least three ways, i.e. (1) Is the overall budget of Erasmus+ adequate? (2) Are the budgets of the individual key actions, as well as for the different sectors adequate? (3) Are the flat rates, unit costs, distance bands, etc. adequate?

¹³ The percentages in the table are calculated against the "valid percent", i.e. against the number of NAs that answered the respective question, and not against the total number of NAs that answered the questionnaire (N=36).

¹⁴ A fixed amount of payment per e.g. type of activity, participant, travel, etc.

Table 11: Assessment of the funding allocated to different key actions and sectors¹⁵

Key action and sector		Overfunded	Adequately-funded	Underfunded	TOTAL
KA1	N	2	16	17	35
	%	5.7	45.7	48.6	100.0
KA2	N	0	8	27	35
	%	0.0	22.9	77.1	100.0
KA3	N	0	14	8	22
	%	0.0	63.6	36.4	100.0
Higher education	N	4	8	13	25
	%	16.0	32.0	52.0	100.0
School education	N	0	9	15	24
	%	0.0	37.5	62.5	100.0
Adult education	N	0	4	18	22
	%	0.0	18.2	81.8	100.0
VET	N	0	13	10	23
	%	0.0	56.5	43.5	100.0
Youth	N	0	6	14	20
	%	0.0	30.0	70.0	100.0
Overall	N	0	11	10	21
	%	0.0	52.4	47.6	100.0

Source: Q15**Note:** N = Number of respondent NAs; % = Percentage of respondent NAs

¹⁵ The percentages in the table are calculated against the "valid percent", i.e. against the number of NAs that answered the respective question, and not against the total number of NAs that answered the questionnaire (N=36).

As Table 11 shows, 11 of the 21 NAs responding find the programme adequately funded (52.4%) and 10 NAs 47.6% view it as underfunded. None of the NAs finds the budget too big.

The picture differs much more by Key Actions. KA2 is seen by 77.1% of all NAs as underfunded. KA1 is judged as underfunded by nearly half of NAs (48.6%). KA3 is viewed only by slightly more than a third (36.4%) of NAs seen as underfunded. While perceptions of this situation vary across the different types of NAs in different countries, the interviews confirm the assessment that KA2 is the action with the biggest mismatch between demand and supply. NAs report that they could often fund less than 10% of applications, resulting in the rejection of very many high quality proposals. They fear that this will frustrate applicants “and risks to make the whole action meaningless” and that “the impact will be very limited”. At the same time, a fair number of NAs voice the hope that the budget will increase by 2017 and that this could also ease the situation in KA2 as well as in those sectors found to be underfunded.

The picture is also diverse in regard of sectors. VET is the one sector that only a minority of NAs viewed as underfunded (43.5%). 81.8% of NAs view AE as underfunded, followed by Youth (70%) and SE (62.5%). They view the situation as less critical in HE, which only 52% of NAs see as underfunded (and 16% as even overfunded).

We already touched on flat rates and unit cost, which NAs welcome in principle, but in most cases found too low. According to the answers to the open-ended questions in the questionnaire and the interviews conducted, the widespread introduction of flat rates and unit costs mostly coincided with a lowering of relative funding levels compared to the previous programmes. The NAs’ perception is that this development has already had an impact on application numbers. The situation seems to be most critical in the case of organisations with fewer resources, for example in the youth sector. One NA informed us that the flat rate for accommodation and subsistence of a youth worker in their country was about 45 Euro a day, which covers only a fraction of the real costs of the person. This made it especially difficult to keep up cooperation with high-cost countries, for example in the Nordic countries. The distance band system¹⁶ (flat rates for travel cost reimbursement) provides a zero flat rate for missions in a diameter of up to 100 km, which many view as problematic. Apparently, however, this particular rule is already under review.

2.5. Applications, applicants and beneficiaries

The expectations when Erasmus+ was created and launched in 2014 were that the integrated framework would bring about not only more cooperation between sectors but also the involvement on new types of organisations across sectors such as enterprises, more and different social partners and public bodies. Another marked difference in Erasmus+ in comparison to the predecessor programmes is the move to a more institutional approach, which has excluded the possibility for individuals to apply directly for grants without an institutional affiliation. Some obstacles and challenges that the new programme brought about have already been mentioned in the previous sections. Those who have been witnesses to changes and mergers in the previous EU programming periods

¹⁶ Funding for travel is based on the distance between the place of origin and the place of destination, and not on the real cost of an air or train ticket. So distance bands are basically unit costs for travel. There are a number of distance categories on the basis of which the amount of travel grant is calculated. For example, distances between 100km and 499km belong to the same distance band or those between 500km-1999km.

were less worried that the beginnings of Erasmus+ were not perfectly smooth and that the introduced changes were not initially as hoped for.

This section aims to look into whether, and if so, which changes have so far been observed in the implementation of Erasmus+ with regards to the types and numbers of applicants, engagement of new organisation types and the extent to which the new programme can address the needs of special target groups, namely people with special needs and from disadvantaged backgrounds. The section will also indicate some of the suggestions put forward by NAs which aim to better use the opportunities the programme provides for different target groups.

2.5.1. Changes in applications and diversification of applicants

We have asked the respondents whether they have noticed any changes in the applications received, such as those pertaining to the type of applicants, new audiences, different levels of interest or competition. As seen in Table 12.a, more than two-thirds of all participating NAs (68.6%) do report changes in the received applications. Furthermore, the changes have particularly been observed by the NAs responsible for E&T only and by those responsible only for the youth sector. Among the former group, all respondents report a change in the applications whereas in the latter, this is the case for 87.5% of NAs. This change is less perceived among the 'full portfolio NAs', with only 22.2% reporting changes in the applications received in Erasmus+. Looking at the results across regions (Table 12.c in Annex 3), only NAs in Eastern Europe mainly reported no changes in the received applications (71.4%) in the course of the first two and a half years of Erasmus+.

Table 12.a: Changes in the types of applications received in Erasmus+ compared to predecessor programmes by type of NAs¹⁷

Type of NAs		Yes	No	TOTAL
Full portfolio NAs (E&T and Youth)	N	2	7	9
	%	22.2	77.8	100.0
E&T only NAs	N	11	0	11
	%	100.0	0.0	100.0
Youth only NAs	N	7	1	8
	%	87.5	12.5	100.0
Other types of NAs (one sector only or mix of sectors)	N	4	3	7
	%	57.1	42.9	100.0
TOTAL	N	24	11	35
	%	68.6	31.4	100.0

Source: Q14

Note: N = Number of respondent NAs; % = Percentage of respondent NAs

¹⁷ The percentages in the table are calculated against the "valid percent", i.e. against the number of NAs that answered the respective question, and not against the total number of NAs that answered the questionnaire (N=36).

The NAs that answered affirmatively to this question were asked to elaborate further on the nature of changes they had observed in the applications.

The numbers of received applications in comparison to the previous programmes very much vary across sectors and countries. The youth sector in general has reportedly been faced with the second highest number of applications in the first two and a half years of the programme, which creates a 'heavy burden' for the second smallest budget in Erasmus+. The picture is mixed in the school sector, on the other hand. Some NAs, predominantly from the countries of medium and large size, report an alarming decrease in the numbers of applications from schools. They see this decrease as largely caused by heavy bureaucracy, insufficient resources at schools and the move towards a more institutional approach. Other NAs, all being from (very) small countries, are witnessing an increase in interest and applications among schools and point to a number of new opportunities the programme offers for the sector. Judging by the feedback, it seems to be easier for the NAs in smaller countries to provide support and guidance to potential applicants within the available resources than this seems to be the case with NAs in larger countries.

With a view to the importance attached to the involvement of different types of organisations in Erasmus+, the respondents were asked to indicate and comment on the degree of participation of a number of organisation types in the programme. As Table 13 shows, the lowest increase in participation is reported for social partners (22.9%), somewhat higher for enterprises (38.2%) while almost half of the respondents report the increase in the participation of NGOs and public bodies, 47.1% and 45.7% respectively.

The picture changes to some extent when looking at the answers provided by different types of NAs per each of the organisation types. Thus, the increase in the participation of enterprises in the youth sector is reported by 71.4% of Youth NAs, more than double of what the other types of NAs report (Table 13.a in Annex 3). The NAs responsible for E&T see the highest increase of involvement of NGOs and public bodies, 60% and 81.8% respectively (Tables 13.b and 13.c in Annex 3). As for the state of play across countries and regions, the participation of NGOs in the countries of very small size has markedly risen, according to 71.4% of NAs from this country group (Table 13.f in Annex 3). The same increase in the participation of NGOs is reported in the countries of Northern Europe (Table 13.j in Annex 3), equal to the reported increase in the participation of public bodies in Southern Europe (Table 13.k in Annex 3).

Table 13: Degree of participation of different types of organisations in Erasmus+ compared to predecessor programmes¹⁸

Type of organisations		Much lower to lower participation	Neither lower nor higher participation	Higher to much higher participation	TOTAL
Enterprises	N	3	18	13	34
	%	8.8	52.9	38.2	100.0
NGOs	N	2	16	16	34
	%	5.9	47.1	47.1	100.0
Public bodies	N	5	14	16	35
	%	14.3	40.0	45.7	100.0
Social partners	N	3	24	8	35
	%	8.6	68.6	22.9	100.0
Other important groups	N	6	0	3	9
	%	66.7	0.0	33.3	100.0

Source: Q6**Note:** N = Number of respondent NAs; % = Percentage of respondent NAs

2.5.2. Old vs. new, big vs. small-size organisations

As the new programme opened up more opportunities for a wide variety of organisations to participate across sectors, we were interested to learn more about the dynamics between old and new (types of) applicants as well as about potential challenges for applicants in general to understand the new programme logic and cope with the resulting changes in the application process.

The change that has taken place in the types of applicants and applications is at least twofold. In addition to a higher number of applications from new types of applicants, the change is also seen in the growing trend of submitting larger projects that consume much of the budget, particularly in the KA2. The feedback from the NAs clearly indicates that the change has resulted in much higher selectivity of the programme, especially with regards to partnerships, leading to much lower success rates despite the quality of the projects: *"Everyone is now applying for bigger projects, so lots of good projects are rejected because of the lack of funds"*. A number of NAs expressed their worry that smaller projects would soon disappear as smaller-size applicants tend to refrain from applying. As an illustration, some NAs have provided the figures of success rates in KA2, where the competition is the

¹⁸ The percentages in the table are calculated against the "valid percent", i.e. against the number of NAs that answered the respective question, and not against the total number of NAs that answered the questionnaire (N=36).

highest. They range from 8% in VET, 15% in Youth, and 16-20% in Adult education and schools.

One obvious example of this trend, as already suggested, is the youth sector, where the change in the type of applicants is reflected in bigger-sized and more 'professional' organisations outnumbering smaller-size youth organisations and much fewer, if any, informal groups of young people being represented among the applicants. Some respondents explain this change by the elimination of the National Youth Initiatives, which were grassroots initiatives and used to attract informal youth groups. Under Erasmus+, youth initiatives are possible only at transnational level, which does not seem to be working due to the complexity of the programme, as argued by the Youth NAs. Another perceived obstacle for applicants of smaller size is the resource-intensive application process, which poses a big challenge to less experienced and smaller-size youth groups and organisations. As already noted, the NAs covering other sectors report this tendency as well and fear losing smaller organisations in the programme. Therefore, with a view to keeping and supporting smaller-size organisations, some NAs have suggested the introduction of a budget ceiling for projects, the simplification of rules for smaller applicants or the introduction of quotas for new applicants.

A number of NAs indicate that mainly old applicants have applied so far under Erasmus+ and that it may be difficult to attract new applicants in the future. In some cases, even older applicants tend to drop out *"because it is too much work for what they receive or even for the risk of not getting the grant"*. Another off-putting factor, mainly for new and smaller-size applicants, is the comprehensive but massive Programme Guide, which applicants tend to find *"intimidating"*. The NAs report a lot of dissatisfaction and disappointment among applicants and express certain doubts about the possibility of seeing more applications in the future even after the budget increase in 2017. This mainly concerns, as already suggested, smaller-size organisations with few staff and without sufficient capacity to lead big consortia.

2.5.3. Special target audiences

Particular target audiences, such as people with special needs and from disadvantaged backgrounds, have always had high importance in EU programmes in E&T and Youth. This is not different in Erasmus+ either. Therefore, we were interested to know how Erasmus+ compares to the predecessor programmes in catering for the needs of these groups.

As shown in Table 14 below, one third of NAs think that the programme is better able to cater for the needs of people from disadvantaged background compared to the predecessor programmes, while only 13.9% think the new programme can better support people with special needs. At the same time, 61.1% of NAs consider Erasmus+ to be *en par* with the previous programmes with regards to supporting persons with special needs. The share of those who see fewer opportunities in the programme for these target groups are 13.9% (persons with special needs) and 19.4% (persons from disadvantaged backgrounds). Amongst different types of NAs, the highest share - 22.2% - of NAs with a full portfolio think that Erasmus+ can better support people with special needs than its predecessors (Table 14.c in Annex 3). 41.7% of NAs responsible for E&T only deem the programme better suited than its predecessors to meet the needs of the people from disadvantaged backgrounds (Table 14.d in Annex 3). NAs from very small countries do not see changes for the better in the ability of Erasmus+ to cater for the needs of both target groups, whereas those from very big countries do not see changes for the worse with regard to persons with special needs (Tables 14.a and 14.b in Annex 3).

Table 14: Catering for the needs of people with special needs and disadvantaged groups compared to predecessor programmes¹⁹

Types of groups		Better able	Same as predecessor programme	Less able	I don't know/ cannot judge	TOTAL
Persons with special needs	N	5	22	5	4	36
	%	13.9	61.1	13.9	11.1	100.0
Persons from disadvantaged backgrounds	N	12	13	7	4	36
	%	33.3	36.1	19.4	11.1	100.0

Source: Q7

Note: N = Number of respondent NAs; % = Percentage of respondent NAs

Some NAs explicitly stressed the relevance of integrating people with fewer opportunities and the need to customise the support provided to organisations working with these target groups. This, however, is again more viable in smaller countries than in the bigger ones. As reported in the survey and interviews, the target groups from disadvantaged backgrounds are covered only in the youth sector, which is seen as an unnecessary split between sectors. The feedback received pertains to the field of VET specifically. It puts forward the argument that the VET field could and should address the needs of groups from disadvantaged backgrounds by intervening on the issues of socio-economic marginalisation and that *“Erasmus+ VET actions could be extremely useful to support their integration or re-integration into education/vocational training pathways or for supporting their transition to the labour market”*.

2.6. Cooperation between NAs, EC and EACEA

Under Erasmus+ the NAs manage the decentralised actions of the programme in the programme countries, while the EACEA manages the programme's centralised actions. Both the NAs and the EACEA cooperate closely with the EC, specifically with DG EAC, in the programme implementation. The agencies with a mandate over VET also cooperate with DG Employment (in charge of the policy-making in the fields of VET and Adult Education). Although the tasks of NAs and of the EACEA are in principle separated, the NAs are also in charge of promoting the centralised actions of the programme in their countries. As a result, the agencies were asked to rate their satisfaction with the division of tasks and responsibilities, as well as the cooperation, not only with the EC, but also with the EACEA.

As Table 15 below shows, one in two NAs (50.0%) is either “satisfied or very satisfied” with this collaboration, while almost a third of NAs are rather neutral vis-à-vis the cooperation (30.6%). Last but not least, one in five agencies (19.4%) is either “very unsatisfied or unsatisfied”. Least pleased with the collaboration are the “Youth only” and the primarily sectoral type of NAs (the “other type of NAs”) – with only 37.5% and 28.6% of NAs in these categories being “satisfied to very satisfied”. Particularly critical of the collaboration

¹⁹ The percentages in the table are calculated against the “valid percent”, i.e. against the number of NAs that answered the respective question, and not against the total number of NAs that answered the questionnaire

are the agencies from Northern Europe (57.1% are “very unsatisfied to unsatisfied”) and from “small-size countries” (38.5%), as visible in Tables 2.6c and 2.6.b In Annex 3.

Table 15: Satisfaction of NAs with the division of tasks and cooperation with the EC and EACEA by type of NAs²⁰

Type of NAs		Very unsatisfied to unsatisfied	Neither unsatisfied nor satisfied	Satisfied to very satisfied	TOTAL
Full portfolio NAs (E&T and Youth)	N	1	2	6	9
	%	11.1	22.2	66.7	100.0
E&T only NAs	N	4	1	7	12
	%	33.3	8.3	58.3	100.0
Youth only NAs	N	1	4	3	8
	%	12.5	50.0	37.5	100.0
Other types of NAs (one sector only or mix of sectors)	N	1	4	2	7
	%	14.3	57.1	28.6	100.0
TOTAL	N	7	11	18	36
	%	19.4	30.6	50.0	100.0

Source: Q12 by type of NAs

Note: N = Number of respondent NAs; % = Percentage of respondent NAs

It is clear though from the additional information gathered via the survey and the interviews that the degree of satisfaction of NAs with their collaboration with the EC is different from that with the EACEA, and also that the quality of the collaboration has significantly changed over time.

The collaboration of NAs with the EC (DG EAC) has markedly improved since the start of the programme in 2014, when the situation was rather difficult. The large majority of NAs declared they had a very “rough start” into the new programme and an especially “bumpy” collaboration with the EC during the early days of Erasmus+. It needs to be said, though, that this difficult start was, at least to an extent, expected and that it was not truly exceptional. Respondents that have already experienced several programme periods underlined that every beginning of a new programme has been difficult thus far and that an adjustment period is normal before a new programme can get into full gear.

(N=36).

²⁰ The percentages in the table are calculated against the “valid percent”, i.e. against the number of NAs that answered the respective question, and not against the total number of NAs that answered the questionnaire (N=36).

Nevertheless, a combination of reasons seemed to have made the collaboration between the EC and the NAs *particularly* challenging at the beginnings of Erasmus+, according to the majority of agencies, namely:

- the complete overhaul of the programme's design compared to predecessor programmes;
- the late decision about Erasmus+, which left very little time for preparatory work for all parties involved in programme implementation;
- overreliance on too ambitious IT tools that did not work as envisaged and were delivered late, causing big tensions between the EC, NAs and applicants;
- lack of clarity about rules and procedures, and big difficulties of the EC to keep up with the set timeline;
- a big staff turnover in DG EAC, as part of the Commission's overall strategy to reduce personnel, which translated into less continuity, programme "memory" and numerous attempts to "reinvent the wheel"; the EC was put in the difficult position to implement the programme with a smaller team, despite the increased size and complexity of Erasmus+ compared to predecessor programmes;
- the unidirectional style of communication of the EC at the beginning of the programme, the NAs being generally viewed as mere "implementers".

Although the beginning was challenging, the majority of NAs clearly reported major improvements from the EC side in the past year. These changes have already resulted in a much closer and fruitful working relationship between the two parties. The NAs welcomed the much more "open", "consultative" and "transparent" way of working of the EC, and felt that their expertise was finally being valued and their concerns listened to. This was felt to be a prerequisite as both the NAs and DG EAC work for common goals under Erasmus+.

The NAs greatly value the fact that the EC has recently created several working groups of NAs that tackle challenging aspects of programme implementation. Examples of such groups are those on "management of the programme", "dissemination", "strategic partnerships", "OLS", etc. The NAs also welcomed the move past exclusive "email communication" of DG EAC towards utilising online platforms and webinars (which are also much more cost-efficient, several NAs argued). In turn, the agencies seem to have very little contact with DG Employment, and very little information about the policy developments in the fields of VET and adult education. In consequence, they are generally concerned with the transfer of these responsibilities to this DG.

Regarding the collaboration with the EACEA, in a nutshell there is hardly any. Most NAs state that beyond the two meetings organised per year during which they are informed by EACEA staff about the selection results of activities under KA2 and KA3, they have no contact with the executive agency. In cases where they would need further information about the centralised actions of the programme – a situation that arises more and more often due to the limited funding available under KA2 at country level – most NAs do not know whom to contact at EACEA. This is very different from the situation with DG EAC, where every agency has a responsible "desk officer".

The agencies would generally welcome a higher degree of exchange of information with EACEA (while they do understand the implications of the extra workload). They believe this is necessary because the NAs often need much more detailed information in order to properly advise their country nationals about applying under the centralised actions of the

programme. Examples of unfilled data needs are success rates of their nationals as partners in project applications (not only as project coordinators), “tips” for writing successful proposals and the like. NAs also possess information that can be very valuable for the executive agency (e.g. information about “fraudulent” applicants that are banned from applying at country level and are likely to re-orient themselves towards the centralised actions).

2.7. Digitalisation of the programme – IT tools

As commented in section 2.1, the widespread introduction of IT tools in Erasmus+ was one of the most appreciated novelties of the programme, but also the top challenge in programme implementation. It is thus not surprising that four in five NAs are either “very unsatisfied or unsatisfied” with the functionality of the IT tools (Table 16). However, many of the NAs in this category declared that they are very satisfied with the tools “when they work”.

Table 16: Satisfaction with the IT tools by type of NAs²¹

Type of NAs		Very unsatisfied to unsatisfied	Neither unsatisfied nor satisfied	Satisfied to very satisfied	Total
Full portfolio NAs (E&T and Youth)	N	5	3	1	9
	%	55.6	33.3	11.1	100.0
E&T only NAs	N	11	0	1	12
	%	91.7	0.0	8.3	100.0
Youth only NAs	N	7	1	0	8
	%	87.5	12.5	0.0	100.0
Other types of NAs (one sector only or mix of sectors)	N	6	1	0	7
	%	85.7	14.3	0.0	100.0
TOTAL	N	29	5	2	36
	%	80.6	13.9	5.6	100.0

Source: Q17, types of NAs

Note: N = Number of respondent NAs; % = Percentage of respondent NAs

While the NAs mentioned that the tools are much better now than at the beginning of the programme, they suggested several further improvements, namely:

- A reduction of complexity of the tools. Currently, for example, the online application forms ask for excessive information, especially from smaller-size organisations, while they lack some essential parts, like the “project description”.
- Provision of clearer instructions for filling in the forms and how to deal with errors.
- A reduction in the number of tools and communication platforms, as the current number is overwhelming, and the tools are not (well) connected to each other. Ideally, many NAs would welcome one single tool and communication platform.

By and large, all NAs agreed that no more tools should be introduced before the current ones are fully functional.

²¹ The percentages in the table are calculated against the “valid percent”, i.e. against the number of NAs that answered the respective question, and not against the total number of NAs that answered the questionnaire (N=36).

2.8. Promotion of the programme

One of the most criticised changes brought about by Erasmus+ was the decision to use the name Erasmus – previously standing for the EU programmes in the field of higher education – for the new integrated programme, covering all sectors of E&T as well as Youth (and Sport). Particularly the agencies from fields other than higher education were fundamentally worried by the potential loss of visibility of sectoral programmes like Comenius (school education), Leonardo da Vinci (VET), Grundtvig (adult education), as well as of Youth in Action and of widely-known international programmes such as Erasmus Mundus or Tempus. In turn, the agencies covering higher education feared that the brand Erasmus might lose its power, as it was being stretched over the other sectors as well.

Despite original worries and as already presented in section 2.1 (Table 6), 41.7% of the NAs declared that Erasmus+ enjoyed “more visibility”, being a programme that is easier to promote to applicants and to media in general. These NAs also emphasised that the one programme–one name approach has greatly simplified the promotional activities of the programme, providing a quicker overview than the predecessor programmes.

At the same time, four NAs did report difficulties in promoting Erasmus+ to beneficiaries in other sectors than higher education, given the strong association between the name Erasmus and this specific educational field, especially at the beginning of the programme period. NAs expect, however, that as the programme continues, more and more applicants will get used to the name change.

Another aspect related to the promotion of the programme raised by the agencies was the extent to which the programme should be further promoted. These remarks were sparked by the reality that the funding of the programme, especially for the decentralised actions in KA2, was very limited. Consequently, several NAs emphasised that additional promotional activities should be *proportional* to the level of funding in the respective actions in order to avoid over-promoting the programme and creating false expectations. Given that success rates in some countries in KA2, for example, are below 10%, it was felt by some NAs that “too enthusiastic” promotion of these opportunities could be counter-productive, the number of applications being bound to decrease over time due to the very slim chances of being selected for funding. Rather, the NAs advised to focus future promotional efforts on those parts of the programme where wider participation is needed, especially of disadvantaged groups and people with special needs.

2.9. Key issues by key action and sector

The NAs answering to the online survey were also asked to name the administrative requirements with which the applicants “struggle most” by key action and by E&T sector. Most of these aspects have less of a policy relevance as such, as they are often very technical in nature. They are, nevertheless, at the heart of programme’s implementation and often have an impact on the applicants’ perceptions of the programme.

Below is a summary of the most frequently-mentioned difficulties.

KA1 and KA2

A number of remarks, made by NAs and related to the application process in general, are valid for both KA1 and KA2: These technical challenges are:

- The online registration for the Personal Identification Code (the PIC code), which is a prerequisite for any organisation to be able to take part in the programme. The online PIC registration process was often described as being too technical and lengthy, especially as requirements seem to vary by sector. Multiple supporting documents have to be uploaded, proving legal status and financial capacity. This process was felt to be excessive for applicants from the youth sector and school education in particular, as they were not used to this level of administration. On the NAs side, a challenge is to deal with applicants that have multiple PIC codes due to their previous participation in the 7th Framework programme, where this registration system was also used.
- The required contractual work with the beneficiaries, which NAs felt was too burdensome. For example, in KA1, this is understandable for the students' learning agreements, but not so much for AE.
- Too many forms and IT tools used in these actions. As one of the NAs reported: *"different reports and information have to be filled in different IT tools that have very different layouts and functionalities. This is really confusing for people who are not working with these tools every day."*
- Too lengthy forms, asking for an excessive amount of information, especially from smaller-size organisations or groups of young people. While the NAs generally appreciate that more data on applicants is being collected, they wonder if this is justifiable in all cases.
- The information contained in the Programme Guide was often felt not to be specific or clear enough, putting more work on the NAs shoulders to explain the rules to potential applicants. According to many agencies, applicants in several countries struggled with understanding the change from funding individuals to funding organisations, the logic of the unit costs system and how this should be applied in practice, how the costs of "Intellectual Outputs" in KA2 should be calculated and how these are different from the management costs, etc.
- General over-prescription and lack of flexibility, in actions such as the International Credit Mobility (ICM) under KA1 or School-to School projects.

Some of the specific remarks to KA1 referred to the:

- Dramatic change in the calculation of the mobility grant compared to LLP. The unit cost logic shifted from paying the grant of the mobile student per month to payment per day of mobility. This complication was mentioned by several NAs, and the change itself was deemed by one of the NAs as *"irrelevant"*. This is because *"the exact number of days is never known in advance so the grant amounts always have to be adjusted during/after the mobility, causing a lot of additional work, and bearing in mind that big institutions manage hundreds of students per year. The previous system with monthly grants was much more user-friendly"*.
- Essential parts of the Mobility Tool+ that were delivered late, such as the interim and final report forms, causing delays in the first reporting period.
- Lack of clarity on the use of the Online Linguistic Support (OLS) and the strictness of the tool (e.g. access to the tool only during the mobility period abroad, not before and not afterwards, limiting its usefulness; "malfunctioning" of the platform; etc.).

Specific remarks made for KA2 largely revolved around financial issues.

- According to the NAs, in many countries the introduction of unit costs is far from being a simplification for the applicants, although it was intended to be so; rather the opposite is true. Because of national regulations that require the accounting to be based on real costs, applicants from the countries in question have to work with two parallel sets of bookkeeping and reporting – one for the EC and one for the relevant national bodies. To address this challenge, in some countries the NAs are working with the national authorities to change their requirements or to at least allow for some flexibility.
- Another financial issue refers to the appropriateness of the differences in the unit costs between countries for Intellectual Outputs – several NAs stressed that experts should be paid according to their level of expertise and not based on “where they come from”, because the current system discourages experts from “lower fee” countries.
- And last but not least, several NAs stressed that for projects under Strategic Partnerships (KA2) a big focus has to be put on impact. But, in spite of this requirement, the project’s budget cannot be used after the project period to allow for follow-up activities nor to ensure sustainability. This was an often-made criticism also for projects under LLP.

Higher education

Clearly the top challenge for NAs in the field of higher education is the implementation of International Credit Mobility (ICM). Beyond any doubt, the stark majority of NAs greatly appreciate the introduction of this action and the expansion of Erasmus-type mobility to non-European countries. At the same time, most NAs describe the administration of ICM as extremely cumbersome, resource and time-consuming. One NA went as far as calling the implementation of ICM a “nightmare” pure and simple, while another one fears that the action has brought “more added work than added value to date”.

The NAs do understand the reasons behind this complexity: the fact that the budget for this action come from 11 separate envelopes, for different parts of the world, and each with their specific requirements. However, they do believe that the requirements could be streamlined in order to reduce the efforts of all parties concerned – DG EAC (for which this process is extremely cumbersome as well), the NAs, but also the applying HEIs. Currently, each applicant has to fill in a full application for each individual country under ICM, a requirement that translates into tens of application for big universities, and that for only a limited number of mobilities.

In addition to the complexity of the application process, the NAs face another type of difficulty in the implementation of ICM, namely an often-encountered mismatch between offer and demand. For some countries and regions of the world there is more interest than funding available, while for others the offer is much more generous than the demand. As there are currently no possibilities to shift funding between regions based on interest and country priorities, several NAs had to organise two calls for the ‘not-so-popular’ destinations, to use up all the money. The NAs strongly demand to have more flexibility in the use of the funds, to be able to better match the cooperation priorities of the HEIs in their countries.

School education

Applicants in school education experience the same type of challenges deriving from the complexity of the application processes as described above. Specific challenges arise in the implementation of the “school-to-school” projects, which seem to be subject to much stricter rules than cooperation projects in other sectors. Under this action each school participating in a transnational project has to sign an agreement with the NA in its country. As schools are allowed to coordinate projects submitted in other countries than their own, the coordinating school receives guidelines from both NAs – one from the NA in its country and one from the NA in the country of project submission. Beyond the considerable paperwork involved, this situation causes many problems also because the interpretation of the rules varies across NAs, the schools in the partnership receiving at times conflicting information. A typical example relates to the use of unit costs, which is largely supported by some NAs, while others advise their beneficiaries to continue with the real cost system (generally due to regulations in their countries). The process is particularly cumbersome for schools which do not have the same personnel resources as HEIs, as the NAs pointed out.

Adult education

Leaving the complexity and length of applications aside, NAs report that a major problem is the lack of a clear definition of adult education in the Programme Guide, and a clear demarcation from vocational education and training (VET). Because of confusion related to the two fields, applicants often submitted an application in the “wrong” sector, necessitating the intervention and corrective action of the NAs.

VET

A typical challenge for the VET sector according to the agencies is the lack of clarity of the VET-related priorities in the Programme Guide, the NAs being often asked for clarification.

Youth

Probably the biggest criticism of Erasmus+ comes from the agencies managing the field of youth, and it is largely due to the lack of adaptation of application requirements to very small groups of young people. The NAs stress that the strict rules and lengthy applications make the participation of youth organisations in the programme very difficult. For instance, the Youth NAs find it unfair that applications under Transnational Youth Initiatives are assessed according to the same criteria as large-scale Strategic Partnerships, the process being overwhelming for youth applicants. Youth-only NAs are also worried in some countries about the increasing competition from other (and bigger) types of applicants, which due to limited budgets under other parts of the programme are searching for alternative sources of funding and increasingly apply in the youth field.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

Taking into account the findings from the responses and interviews with the NAs, a number of recommendations for improving the implementation of decentralised actions of Erasmus+ in the remaining part of the programme period can be made. As the issues dealt with in this report are the 'bread and butter' of programme implementation, we have asked the NAs to make suggestions in this direction, given that they experience first-hand the challenging parts of this programme's putting into action and already have quite a few ideas on how things could be done better.

The recommendations put forward by NAs cut across a number of interrelated aspects of programme implementation, from the cross-sectoral approach, harmonisation, types of applicants, to the promotion of the programme. We will therefore present the ideas mentioned most often in the form of a list rather than attribute them to different categories as in the analysis part of this report.

Recommendation 1: Making cross-sectoral cooperation "really happen"

As we have seen in sections 2.1 and 2.2, the large majority of NAs agreed that the potential for cross-sectoral cooperation under Erasmus+ is much higher than in the predecessor programmes, but that to date this potential has not yet fully materialised. To have a marked increase in cross-sectoral projects, the NAs suggested to:

- Define very clearly what "cross-sectoral projects" actually mean, to avoid that projects that are mostly uni-sectoral or bi-sectoral are wrongly labelled as cross-sectoral.
- Earmark part of the budget for truly cross-sectoral activities and establish matching award criteria.
- Define one or two horizontal cross-sectoral priorities based on needs that are real – i.e. where there are truly common problems between the sectors that should be addressed, not just for the sake of cooperation.
- Establish a clear 'space' in the programme for such activities, for example by creating a fourth key action – "KA4 – Cross-sectoral initiatives".

Recommendation 2: A halt on further harmonisation, with some fine-tuning

As shown in section 2.3, the opinions of NAs vis-à-vis the harmonisation of rules and regulations under Erasmus+ are quite divided. While some fear that the programme has slipped too far down the 'harmonisation lane', others fear that this has not gone far enough – that there is scope and need for more streamlining. In order not to further increase the divide between the two groups, it seems sensible to safeguard the status quo, and to focus on consolidating the rules. Simultaneously, inconsistencies that seem hard to defend or are perceived as unjust in some sectors could be fine-tuned (like the differences between unit costs in the youth field vis-à-vis the others; the very high flexibility of mobilities in the 'normal Erasmus' vs. the high rigidity in ICM and in other fields, etc.).

Recommendation 3: More flexibility in the use of the budget

As we have seen in section 2.4, NAs experience various types of challenges related to funding. They range from having insufficient budgets in some parts of the programme (especially KA2) where demand is very high, to having money left over (in ICM for

example) that cannot be used in other parts of the programme due to the 'rules of the game'. This clearly speaks in favour of allowing for more flexibility in the use of the budget and trusting the NAs that they know how to best fill the gaps in their respective countries, especially since plenty of monitoring visits and audits seem to be taking place already.

Comments were made by NAs also in the direction of taking into account the past "absorption capacity and rate" of NAs in the different countries when deciding the budget allocation, as competition for the programme is extremely high in some countries, while rather low in others (where other, more generous sources of funding exist as well).

Recommendation 4: Making room for smaller-size applicants

Quite a few words of caution were expressed by the NAs because of the tendency of Erasmus+ to favour large-scale projects and applicants (section 2.5), given the programme's strive for bigger quality and wider impact. This is not only because the smaller, special and disadvantaged groups of applicants have in this way a harder time to get involved in the programme, or because the success rates of projects under Erasmus+ are very low, causing increasing dissatisfaction amongst applicants. It is also because through this "not inclusive enough approach" the programme will fall short of reaching the "critical mass" necessary for wide impact. Thus nearly all NAs perceive the need to fund much more smaller-scale projects and initiatives under the programme (and well beyond current efforts) of utmost urgency.

Recommendation 5: A formalised cooperation framework with EACEA

While the cooperation of NAs with the EC, and especially with DG Education and Culture, seems to be, after a rather "rough start", on a very good path, much more could be done to establish a regular exchange of information between the NAs and EACEA. The NAs perceive this as a clear necessity, given their mandate to promote in their countries the centralised actions that the EACEA manages, while it is clear that such cooperation would be equally fruitful for the executive agency.

Recommendation 6: Not more, but fewer and better IT tools

The NAs largely welcomed the introduction of new IT tools under Erasmus+, despite their many functionality problems at the beginning of the programme (section 2.7): they appreciate the much more valuable data set that is being gathered via these instruments, which will set the basis for more evidence-based policy-making. However, the agencies also feel that the current number of tools is already overwhelming, both for the NAs and for the applicants, so rather than having new tools being developed in the remaining programme period, they would rather welcome more streamlining, more connections between the different tools and platforms, and an overall reduction of their number.

Recommendation 7: Proportional promotion to the funding available

Without undermining the value of promoting the Erasmus+ programme, several NAs underlined that additional promotional activities should be *proportional* to the level of funding in the respective actions, in order not to create false expectations on the side of the applicants, knowing that success rates in some parts of the programme are extremely low (section 2.8). Rather, extra promotional activities should address the parts of the programme where wider participation is needed (e.g. Youth), and be directed towards underrepresented groups, such as people with special needs and disadvantaged groups, many agencies felt.

Recommendation 8: No more change for the sake of change

The NAs also underlined that every new programme is born out of a wish to bring about major changes and innovations. While this is an understandable and necessary attitude for progress, many NAs also felt that more attention should be paid, in parallel, to assessing which aspects of the 'old' programme are working well and should be safeguarded, in order not to constantly "re-invent the wheel". But this is more a recommendation for the next generation of EU programmes, beyond 2020, than it is for the current programme.

Overall, although there is some room for improvement, the majority of NAs describe the Erasmus+ programme as an "important step forward" and have a high level of trust in its capacity to reach its objectives.

ANNEX 1 – QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaire on NAs' experiences with the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme (decentralised actions)

Aim of the survey

The aim of this questionnaire is to collect information on the experiences of NAs (NAs) in the Erasmus+ programme countries in the implementation of decentralised actions during the first almost two and a half years of Erasmus+. The questions have been designed in such a way as to capture opportunities brought about by the programme, as well as challenges encountered thus far and suggestions for improvement. The questionnaire does not aim to be as exhaustive as the mid-term evaluation reports that will be prepared for the European Commission, as its main goal is to help map some common challenges and opportunities encountered thus far, but not so much to do a full-scale assessment.

The survey is implemented by the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA) and was commissioned by the European Parliament. The results of the survey are to feed into a report prepared by the European Parliament's CULT Committee.

Your input on the functioning of Erasmus+ is invaluable and we would very much appreciate if you can fill in the questionnaire and send us the final document by **28 April 2016**. Warm thanks on behalf of ACA.

Programme objectives and target groups

Q1: As it might be too early to reflect on the impact of the Erasmus+ programme, to which *extent* do you *expect that the specific objectives of the programme will be reached* by the end of the programme, based on your experience in the first two and a half years of its implementation? Please state your expectations by marking the cells corresponding to your answers with an 'X'.

Specific objectives in **E&T**

Objective	To a very low extent	To a low extent	To some extent	To a high extent	To a very high extent
<i>Improve the level of key competences and skills.....</i>					
<i>Foster quality improvements</i>					

<i>, innovation, excellence and internationalisation....</i>					
<i>Promote the European lifelong learning area.....</i>					
<i>Enhance the international dimension of E&T....</i>					
<i>Improve the teaching and learning of languages....</i>					

In case you want to make any **specific remarks** related to this question **for the different sectors under E&T**, please do so here:

--

Specific objectives in **Youth**

Objective	To a very low extent	To a low extent	To some extent	To a high extent	To a very high extent
<i>Improve the level of key competences and skills of young people.....</i>					
<i>Foster quality improvements and enhanced cooperation in the youth field.....</i>					

Support evidence-based youth policy and recognition of non-formal and informal learning.....					
Enhance the international dimension of youth activities and the capacity of youth workers....					

In case you want to make any **specific remarks** related to this question **for the field of Youth**, please do so here:

--

Q2: Please *name* here and *comment* on the *three biggest positive effects* (if any) of the new, 'streamlined architecture' of the programme on

reaching the OBJECTIVES of Erasmus+

1.
2.
3.

the IMPLEMENTATION of Erasmus+

1.
2.
3.

Q3: Please *name* here and *comment* on the *three biggest negative effects* (if any) of the new, 'streamlined architecture' of the programme on

reaching the OBJECTIVES of Erasmus+

1.
2.
3.

the IMPLEMENTATION of Erasmus+

1.
2.
3.

Q4: Based on the first two and a half years of the Erasmus+ programme, which of the statements below best describes how the new architecture of the programme has changed (*the possibilities for*) *cross-sectoral cooperation*, compared to predecessor programmes? Please make your choice by marking the cell corresponding to your answer with an 'X'.

The new architecture of Erasmus+ resulted in a <i>significant increase</i> in cross-sectoral cooperation	
The new architecture resulted in a <i>moderate increase</i> in cross-sectoral cooperation	
Cross-sectoral cooperation remained at <i>about the same level</i> under the new programme	
Cross-sectoral cooperation <i>decreased</i> under Erasmus+	
Cross-sectoral cooperation <i>significantly decreased</i> under Erasmus+	

In case you want to make any **specific remarks** related to your answer, please do so here:

--

Q5: Please rate here the *extent of cross-sectoral cooperation* under Erasmus+ by specifying to which extent each of the following sectors has *initiated cooperation* with other sector(s). Please answer by marking the cells corresponding to your answers with an 'X'.

Sector	To a very low extent	To a low extent	To some extent	To a high extent	To a very high extent
<i>Higher Education</i>					
<i>School Education</i>					
<i>Adult Education</i>					
<i>VET</i>					
<i>Youth</i>					

In case you want to make any **specific remarks** related to your answer, please do so here:

--

Q6: Compared to predecessor programmes, to which extent has the streamlined architecture of the Erasmus+ programme *simplified the use of the programme and made it more user-friendly*, if at all, and for whom? Please answer by marking the cells corresponding to your answers with an 'X'.

Types of users	Much more	More	No change (no simplification)	Less	Much less
<i>End users/ beneficiaries (students, staff, teachers, youth, etc.)</i>					
<i>Applicants (NGOs, HEIs, enterprises, etc.)</i>					
<i>The NAs</i>					
<i>EACEA</i>					
<i>The European Commission</i>					

In case you want to make any **specific remarks** related to your answer, please do so here:

--

Q7: Compared to the predecessor programmes, to which extent has the Erasmus+ programme been able so far to *cater for the needs of the following groups*? Please answer by marking the cells corresponding to your answers with an 'X'.

	Better able	Same as predecessor	Less able	I don't know / I cannot judge
<i>Persons with special needs</i>				
<i>Persons from disadvantaged backgrounds</i>				

Q8: Compared to the predecessor programmes, how do you rate the *degree of participation of the different types of organisations* below in Erasmus+? Please answer by marking cells corresponding to your answers with an 'X'.

	Much lower participation	Lower participation	Neither higher nor lower participation	Higher participation	Much higher participation
<i>Enterprises</i>					
<i>NGOs</i>					
<i>Public bodies</i>					
<i>Social partners</i>					
<i>Other important groups (please specify):</i> _____ _____					

Please **comment briefly by type and make suggestions** for improvement, if any.

--

Erasmus+ implementation

Q9: Please name the *three biggest obstacles* that you experienced so far in the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme (decentralised actions).

1.
2.
3.

Please provide **further comments** on the above-mentioned **obstacles** and make **suggestions** for improvement, if any.

--

Q10: Are these obstacles being tackled, and, if so, by whom and via which measures?

--

Q11: Please name the *three biggest advantages (positives)* experienced so far in the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme (decentralised actions).

1.
2.
3.

Please provide **further comments** on the above-mentioned **advantages** and make **suggestions** for further improvement, if any.

--

Q12: To what extent are you *satisfied with the division of tasks and cooperation* between the European Commission, EACEA and the NAs in the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme? Please answer by marking the cell corresponding to your answer with an 'X'.

Very unsatisfied	Unsatisfied	Neither satisfied, nor unsatisfied	Satisfied	Very satisfied

Please **comment briefly and make suggestions** for improvement, if any.

Q13: Please name the administrative requirements with which *applicants struggle most* by key action and by sector.

By Key Actions

Key Action 1

Key Action 2

Key Action 3

By sectors

Higher education

School education

Adult education

VET

Youth

Q14: Compared to the predecessor programmes, have you noticed any *changes in the applications* received (e.g. type of applicants, new audiences, different levels of interest, competition, etc.)? Please right-click on one of the two checkboxes to mark your answer.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

If **yes**, please **comment briefly** on the changes observed.

--

Q15: How do you find the *distribution of the budget* across the key actions and sectors of the Erasmus+ programme? Please answer by marking the cell corresponding to your answer with an 'X'.

	Overfunded	Adequate	Underfunded
<i>Key Action 1</i>			
<i>Key Action 2</i>			
<i>Key Action 3</i>			
<i>Higher education</i>			
<i>School education</i>			
<i>Adult education</i>			
<i>VET</i>			
<i>Youth</i>			
<i>Overall (for the entire programme)</i>			

Please **comment briefly and make suggestions** for improvement, if any.

--

Q16: How do you find the *financial management* of Erasmus+ compared to that of its predecessors? Please answer by marking the cell corresponding to your answer with an 'X'.

	Easier	The same	More cumbersome
<i>For applicants</i>			
<i>For NAs</i>			

Please **comment briefly**.

--

Q17: To what extent are you *satisfied with the functionality of the IT tools* provided by the European Commission for the management and implementation of the Erasmus+ programme? Please state your level of satisfaction by marking the respective cell with an 'X'.

Very unsatisfied	Unsatisfied	Neither satisfied, nor unsatisfied	Satisfied	Very satisfied

Please comment briefly and make suggestions for improvement, if any.

Q18: We have tried to cover the most important general aspects related to the implementation of the Erasmus+ programme (decentralised actions) in this questionnaire. In case you find that we have omitted something important, please let us know below.

We would like to **follow up** with some of the respondents by telephone or email (for further clarification). Please let us know who we should **contact** for such purposes.

Name _____
Telephone _____
Email _____

Thank you for having completed this questionnaire and for returning it to ACA.

ANNEX 2 – INTERVIEW GUIDELINES

Erasmus+: first experiences administering the new programme

A study for the European Parliament

Interview guidelines

The European Parliament has entrusted the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA) with producing a study on the experiences so far with the new Erasmus+ Programme. The focus of the study is mainly on issues of implementation. It looks exclusively at those parts of the programme which are 'decentralised', i.e. managed by the NAs.

ACA is collecting the information needed for the study from the NAs, in two ways. As a first step, it sent a partly-closed and partly-open questionnaire to the 61 NAs, asking for written replies. More than half of all Agencies answered. As a second step, ACA will be conducting telephone or Skype interviews with representatives of 10 NAs, in order to gain a better and deeper understanding of the main findings of the questionnaire-based survey. This document contains the questions to be posed in the interviews.

Question 1

One of the objectives of the Erasmus+ Programme was to facilitate and increase cross-sectoral cooperation. The 'streamlined architecture', which is based on activity lines rather than on education sectors, was to make this possible. The feedback from the questionnaire-based survey does not indicate that this goal has been fully reached. At the same time, it did not become clear if responses were about the *potential* of the programme to create more cross-sectoral cooperation, or about whether or not an increase in applications and selected projects of a cross-sectoral nature *had actually taken place*.

Question 1: In your experience, has the actual extent of cross-sectoral cooperation increased under Erasmus+, in comparison to the predecessor programmes?

Question 2

Question number 2 is linked to the first question, but not identical. Hand-in-glove with the streamlined architecture went a harmonisation of rules and regulations across sectors. We asked NAs if this harmonisation move had been successful. A large number of Agencies stated that harmonisation had gone too far, resulting in a 'one-size-fits-all' approach and not doing justice to the differences between sectors. Others, however, complained that too many sectoral specificities survived, making the reform half-hearted. We also gained the impression that practices were not necessarily identical across NAs in different countries.

Question 2: In your view, has the harmonisation of implementation rules gone too far, resulting in a 'straightjacket' not doing justice to the needs of different sectors and their actors or is there still too much sector specificity? Would you say it is desirable to further streamline the approaches across NAs?

Question 3

One of the promises behind the new programme was 'simplification'. An often-mentioned example of simplification by the respondents is the use of the lump sums/flat rates system. Nevertheless, while most respondents mentioned that the flat rates system has had a very positive impact on the NAs work, by simplifying the financial management of the

programme to a great extent, several respondents also mentioned that the flat rate system is not always fully welcome by the applicants in their country. The main reason quoted for this would be that the funding levels have significantly decreased and would not cover the costs of project implementation.

Question 3: Would you agree with the statement that the flat rate system has produced mixed results – allowing for easier financial management for the NAs, but being a system that is not fully welcomed by or attractive to the applicants? Would you have any examples or counterexamples to give in this specific context, and based on your experience thus far?

Question 4

Much importance has been attached to and much promotion been made for the 'international credit mobility' (ICM). It appears, however, that the funds available result in very small grants and the additional administrative work is high.

Question 4: Do you share the above view? Could the discrepancy between effort and result likely to lead to a decreased interest in ICM, in your view? If so, could you provide some suggestions on how this could be mitigated?

Question 5

There had been the worry that the new programme would favour large projects and that this would disadvantage small organisations, particularly (but not only) in the youth sector. Similarly, a number of answers indicate that it may be difficult to attract new applicants and that mainly old ones have applied so far under Erasmus+.

Question 5: In your view, are the above worries founded? If so, is this going to lead to a reduction of applications from such smaller actors? Is your NA doing anything to encourage the participation of smaller organisations and/or to attract new applicants? Or, do you have any suggestions on how new or smaller organisations could be encouraged to apply?

Question 6

We were also interested to know more about the cooperation between NAs and the European Commission. The impression is that, after some obstacles at the very beginning, the cooperation with the EC has improved.

Question 6: Would you agree with this observation and can you tell us more about your experience when it comes to the cooperation with the EC? Do you have any cooperation with EACEA and if so, of what kind? If not, do you think that cooperation with EACEA could be helpful for your work? If so, how?

Question 7

Several survey respondents reported that the selectivity of the new programme, particularly with regards to partnerships, has increased, leading many NAs to have to turn down many good applications because of a lack of sufficient funding. These NAs seem to fear that this could be counter-productive on the long run, leading to a decreased interest in the programme, given that chances to succeed seem lower.

Question 7: Would you agree that the selectivity of partnerships under Erasmus+ has increased compared to the predecessor programmes? Do you envisage any consequences as a result – positive and/or negative – for the remaining programme period?

ANNEX 3 – ADDITIONAL TABLES

Table 6.a: Main perceived advantages of Erasmus+ by type of NAs

Main advantages		Full portfolio NAs (E&T and Youth)	E&T only NAs	Youth only NAs	Other types of NAs (one sector only or mix of sectors)	TOTAL
More possibilities for cross-sectoral cooperation and mutual learning (applicants and NAs)	N	5	10	5	4	24
	%	55.6	83.3	62.5	57.1	66.7
Streamlined architecture (three Key Actions) and harmonisation	N	6	7	3	5	21
	%	66.7	58.3	37.5	71.4	58.3
Simplified financial management (flat rates system) and increased budget flexibility	N	6	4	5	4	19
	%	66.7	33.3	62.5	57.1	52.8
Increased budget	N	1	1	4	1	7
	%	11.1	8.3	50.0	14.3	19.4
Bigger focus on internationalisation (especially through International Credit Mobility)	N	3	3	0	1	7
	%	33.3	25.0	0.0	14.3	19.4
More visibility - a programme that is easier to promote (to applicants and to media)	N	4	6	2	3	15
	%	44.4	50.0	25.0	42.9	41.7
Potential for wider impact	N	5	7	2	5	19
	%	55.6	58.3	25.0	71.4	52.8
More emphasis on quality	N	3	3	1	2	9
	%	33.3	25.0	12.5	28.6	25.0
Development and use of IT tools (less paper)	N	6	5	3	0	14
	%	66.7	41.7	37.5	0.0	38.9

Source: Q2 and Q11 by type of NAs

Table 6.b: Main perceived advantages of Erasmus+ by size of the country

Main advantages		Very small	Small	Medium	Large to very large	TOTAL
More possibilities for cross-sectoral cooperation and mutual learning (applicants and NAs)	N	3	10	7	4	24
	%	42.9	76.9	87.5	50.0	66.7
Streamlined architecture (three Key Actions) and harmonisation	N	3	7	4	7	21
	%	42.9	53.8	50.0	87.5	58.3
Simplified financial management (flat rates system) and increased budget flexibility	N	3	8	4	4	19
	%	42.9	61.5	50.0	50.0	52.8
Increased budget	N	4	1	2	0	7
	%	57.1	7.7	25.0	0.0	19.4
Bigger focus on internationalisation (especially through International Credit Mobility)	N	3	1	1	2	7
	%	42.9	7.7	12.5	25.0	19.4
More visibility - a programme that is easier to promote (to applicants and to media)	N	1	6	6	2	15
	%	14.3	46.2	75.0	25.0	41.7
Potential for wider impact	N	2	10	5	2	19
	%	28.6	76.9	62.5	25.0	52.8
More emphasis on quality	N	0	6	1	2	9
	%	0.0	46.2	12.5	25.0	25.0
Development and use of IT tools (less paper)	N	4	6	1	3	14
	%	57.1	46.2	12.5	37.5	38.9

Source: Q2 and Q11 by size

Table 6.c: Main perceived advantages of Erasmus+ by region

Main advantages		Northern Europe	Western Europe	Southern Europe	Eastern Europe	TOTAL
More possibilities for cross-sectoral cooperation and mutual learning (applicants and NAs)	N	6	8	5	5	24
	%	85.7	57.1	71.4	62.5	66.7
Streamlined architecture (three Key Actions) and harmonisation	N	4	8	5	4	21
	%	57.1	57.1	71.4	50.0	58.3

Simplified financial management (flat rates system) and increased budget flexibility	N	5	4	5	5	19
	%	71.4	28.6	71.4	62.5	52.8
Increased budget	N	2	2	3	0	7
	%	28.6	14.3	42.9	0.0	19.4
Bigger focus on internationalisation (especially through International Credit Mobility)	N	0	3	0	4	7
	%	0.0	21.4	0.0	50.0	19.4
More visibility - a programme that is easier to promote (to applicants and to media)	N	3	8	2	2	15
	%	42.9	57.1	28.6	25.0	41.7
Potential for wider impact	N	6	7	1	5	19
	%	85.7	50.0	14.3	62.5	52.8
More emphasis on quality	N	2	4	0	3	9
	%	28.6	28.6	0.0	37.5	25.0
Development and use of IT tools (less paper)	N	4	3	3	4	14
	%	57.1	21.4	42.9	50.0	38.9

Source: Q2 and Q11 by size

Table 7.a: Main perceived challenges of Erasmus+ by type of NAs

Main challenges		Full portfolio NAs (E&T and Youth)	E&T only NAs	Youth only NAs	Other types of NAs (one sector only or mix of sectors)	TOTAL
Persistence of sectoral divides/ exceptions	N	2	4	1	2	9
	%	22.2	33.3	12.5	28.6	25.0
Too much harmonisation (sectoral specificities not taken enough into account)	N	3	2	4	4	13
	%	33.3	16.7	50.0	57.1	36.1
Burdensome implementation of International Credit Mobility	N	1	2	0	1	4
	%	11.1	16.7	0.0	14.3	11.1
Difficulties in promoting the non-higher education sectors (because of the name)	N	0	1	2	1	4
	%	0.0	25.0	50.0	25.0	100.0

Slow budget increase (from 2017 only)	N	1	5	0	2	8
	%	11.1	41.7	0.0	28.6	22.2
Delays in communication and administration	N	1	4	2	1	8
	%	11.1	33.3	25.0	14.3	22.2
Too high administrative complexity and red tape (Programme Guide, procedures, etc.)	N	7	7	6	7	27
	%	77.8	58.3	75.0	100.0	75.0
Too many changes and constant updates (of forms, IT tools, rules)	N	4	3	0	1	8
	%	44.4	25.0	0.0	14.3	22.2
Reduced functionality of IT tools and their sheer number	N	8	10	6	5	29
	%	88.9	83.3	75.0	71.4	80.6
Too low unit costs	N	2	1	1	2	6
	%	22.2	8.3	12.5	28.6	16.7
Too much focus on large-scale projects (smaller applicants disadvantaged)	N	4	6	4	1	15
	%	44.4	50.0	50.0	14.3	41.7
High rejection rate of good quality project applications	N	1	4	0	2	7
	%	11.1	33.3	0.0	28.6	19.4

Source: Q3 and Q9 by type of NAs

Table 7.b: Main perceived challenges of Erasmus+ by size of the country

Main challenges		Very small	Small	Medium	Large to very large	TOTAL
Persistence of sectoral divides/ exceptions	N	2	3	3	1	9
	%	28.6	23.1	37.5	12.5	25.0
Too much harmonisation (sectoral specificities not taken enough into account)	N	0	6	4	3	13
	%	0.0	46.2	50.0	37.5	36.1
Burdensome implementation of International Credit Mobility	N	1	2	0	1	4
	%	14.3	15.4	0.0	12.5	11.1
Difficulties in promoting the non-higher education sectors (because of the name)	N	1	1	1	1	4
	%	14.3	7.7	12.5	12.5	11.1

Slow budget increase (from 2017 only)	N	0	4	3	1	8
	%	0.0	30.8	37.5	12.5	22.2
Delays in communication and administration	N	1	4	2	1	8
	%	14.3	30.8	25.0	12.5	22.2
Too high administrative complexity and red tape (Programme Guide, procedures, etc.)	N	6	10	5	6	27
	%	85.7	76.9	62.5	75.0	75.0
Too many changes and constant updates (of forms, IT tools, rules)	N	2	4	1	1	8
	%	28.6	30.8	12.5	12.5	22.2
Reduced functionality of IT tools and their sheer number	N	6	12	6	5	29
	%	85.7	92.3	75.0	62.5	80.6
Too low unit costs	N	2	3	0	1	6
	%	28.6	23.1	0.0	12.5	16.7
Too much focus on large-scale projects (smaller applicants disadvantaged)	N	4	5	5	1	15
	%	57.1	38.5	62.5	12.5	41.7
High rejection rate of good quality project applications	N	0	2	2	3	7
	%	0.0	15.4	25.0	37.5	19.4

Source: Q3 and Q9 by size

Table 7.c: Main perceived challenges of Erasmus+ by region

Main challenges		Full portfolio NAs (E&T and Youth)	E&T only NAs	Youth only NAs	Other types of NAs (one sector only or mix of sectors)	TOTAL
Persistence of sectoral divides/ exceptions	N	2	4	1	2	9
	%	28.6	28.6	14.3	25.0	25.0
Too much harmonisation (sectoral specificities not taken enough into account)	N	4	5	2	2	13
	%	57.1	35.7	28.6	25.0	36.1
Burdensome implementation of International Credit Mobility	N	2	1	0	1	4
	%	28.6	7.1	0.0	12.5	11.1
Difficulties in promoting the non-higher education sectors (because of the name)	N	3	0	0	1	4
	%	42.9	0.0	0.0	12.5	11.1

Slow budget increase (from 2017 only)	N	2	4	1	1	8
	%	28.6	28.6	14.3	12.5	22.2
Delays in communication and administration	N	2	4	0	2	8
	%	28.6	28.6	0.0	25.0	22.2
Too high administrative complexity and red tape (Programme Guide, procedures, etc.)	N	5	11	5	6	27
	%	71.4	78.6	71.4	75.0	75.0
Too many changes and constant updates (of forms, IT tools, rules)	N	4	1	0	3	8
	%	57.1	7.1	0.0	37.5	22.2
Reduced functionality of IT tools and their sheer number	N	6	11	4	8	29
	%	85.7	78.6	57.1	100.0	80.6
Too low unit costs	N	4	1	1	0	6
	%	57.1	7.1	14.3	0.0	16.7
Too much focus on large-scale projects (smaller applicants disadvantaged)	N	3	7	2	3	15
	%	42.9	50.0	28.6	37.5	41.7
High rejection rate of good quality project applications	N	1	2	2	2	7
	%	14.3	14.3	28.6	25.0	19.4

Source: Q3 and Q9 by region

Table 8.a: Cross-sectoral cooperation compared under Erasmus+ to predecessor programmes by type of NA

Type of NAs		Significant increase	Moderate increase	About the same level	TOTAL
Full portfolio NAs (E&T and Youth)	N	0	7	2	9
	%	0.0	77.8	22.2	100.0
E&T only NAs	N	3	7	2	12
	%	25.0	58.3	16.7	100.0
Youth only NAs	N	0	5	2	7
	%	0.0	71.4	28.6	100.0
Other types of NAs (one sector only or mix of sectors)	N	0	4	3	7
	%	0	71.4	28.6	100.0

TOTAL	N	3	23	9	35
	%	8.6	65.7	25.7	100.0

Source: Q4 x type

Table 8.b: Cross-sectoral cooperation compared to predecessor programmes by size of the country

Size of the country		Significant increase	Moderate increase	About the same level	TOTAL
Very small	N	0	6	0	6
	%	0.0	100.0	0.0	100.0
Small	N	3	6	4	13
	%	23.1	46.2	30.8	100.0
Medium	N	0	7	1	8
	%	0.0	87.5	12.5	100.0
Large to very large	N	0	4	4	8
	%	0.0	50.0	50.0	100.0
TOTAL	N	3	23	9	35
	%	8.6	65.7	25.7	100.0

Source: Q4 x size

Table 8.c: Cross-sectoral cooperation compared to predecessor programmes by region of the NAs

Regions		Significant increase	Moderate increase	About the same level	TOTAL
Northern Europe	N	2	4	1	7
	%	28.6	57.1	14.3	100.0
Western Europe	N	1	8	4	13
	%	7.7	61.5	30.8	100.0
Southern Europe	N	0	6	1	7
	%	0.0	85.7	14.3	100.0
Eastern Europe	N	0	5	3	8
	%	0.0	62.5	37.5	100.0
TOTAL	N	3	23	9	35
	%	8.6	65.7	25.7	100.0

Source: Q4 x region

Table 12.b: Changes in the types of applications received in Erasmus+ compared to predecessor programmes by size of the country

Size of the country		Yes	No	TOTAL
Very small	N	5	2	7
	%	71.4	28.6	100.0
Small	N	9	3	12
	%	75.0	25.0	100.0
Medium	N	5	3	8
	%	62.5	37.5	100.0
Large to very large	N	5	3	8
	%	62.5	37.5	100.0
TOTAL	N	24	11	35
	%	68.6	31.4	100.0

Source: Q14 by size

Table 12.c: Changes in the types of applications received in Erasmus+ compared to predecessor programmes by region

Region		Yes	No	TOTAL
Northern Europe	N	6	1	7
	%	85.7	14.3	100.0
Western Europe	N	11	3	14
	%	78.6	21.4	100.0
Southern Europe	N	5	2	7
	%	71.4	28.6	100.0
Eastern Europe	N	2	5	7
	%	28.6	71.4	100.0
TOTAL	N	24	11	35
	%	68.6	31.4	100.0

Source: Q14 by region

Table 13.a: Degree of participation of Enterprises in Erasmus+ compared to predecessor programmes by type of NA

Type of NAs		Much lower to lower participation	Neither lower nor higher participation	Higher to much higher participation	TOTAL
Full portfolio NAs (E&T and Youth)	N	0	6	3	9
	%	0.0	66.7	33.3	100.0
E&T only NAs	N	2	5	4	11
	%	18.2	45.5	36.4	100.0
Youth only NAs	N	1	1	5	7
	%	14.3	14.3	71.4	100.0
Other types of NAs (one sector only or mix of sectors)	N	0	6	1	7
	%	0.0	85.7	14.3	100.0
TOTAL	N	3	18	13	34
	%	8.8	52.9	38.2	100.0

Source: Q8, Enterprises, type of NA

Table 13.b: Degree of participation of NGOs in Erasmus+ compared to predecessor programmes by type of NA

Type of NAs		Much lower to lower participation	Neither lower nor higher participation	Higher to much higher participation	TOTAL
Full portfolio NAs (E&T and Youth)	N	0	5	4	9
	%	0.0	55.6	44.4	100.0
E&T only NAs	N	2	2	6	10
	%	20.0	20.0	60.0	100.0
Youth only NAs	N	0	4	4	8
	%	0.0	50.0	50.0	100.0
Other types of NAs (one sector only or mix of sectors)	N	0	5	2	7
	%	0.0	71.4	28.6	100.0
TOTAL	N	2	16	16	34
	%	5.9	47.1	47.1	100.0

Source: Q8, NGOs, type of NA

Table 13.c: Degree of participation of Public bodies in Erasmus+ compared to predecessor programmes by type of NA

Type of NAs		Much lower to lower participation	Neither lower nor higher participation	Higher to much higher participation	TOTAL
Full portfolio NAs (E&T and Youth)	N	2	3	4	9
	%	22.2	33.3	44.4	100.0
E&T only NAs	N	0	2	9	11
	%	0.0	18.2	81.8	100.0
Youth only NAs	N	2	3	3	8
	%	25.0	37.5	37.5	100.0
Other types of NAs (one sector only or mix of sectors)	N	1	6	0	7
	%	14.3	85.7	0.0	100.0
TOTAL	N	5	14	16	35
	%	14.3	40.0	45.7	100.0

Source: Q8, Public bodies, type of NA

Table 13.f: Degree of participation of NGOs in Erasmus+ compared to predecessor programmes by size of the country

Size of the country		Much lower to lower participation	Neither lower nor higher participation	Higher to much higher participation	TOTAL
Very small	N	1	1	5	7
	%	14.3	14.3	71.4	100.0
Small	N	1	7	5	13
	%	7.7	53.8	38.5	100.0
Medium	N	0	4	3	7
	%	0.0	57.1	42.9	100.0
Large to very large	N	0	4	3	7
	%	0.0	57.1	42.9	100.0
TOTAL	N	2	16	16	34
	%	5.9	47.1	47.1	100.0

Source: Q8, NGOs, size

Table 13.j: Degree of participation of Enterprises in Erasmus+ compared to predecessor programmes by region

Region		Much lower to lower participation	Neither lower nor higher participation	Higher to much higher participation	TOTAL
Northern Europe	N	1	2	4	7
	%	14.3	28.6	57.1	100.0
Western Europe	N	1	8	3	12
	%	8.3	66.7	25.0	100.0
Southern Europe	N	0	4	3	7
	%	0.0	57.1	42.9	100.0
Eastern Europe	N	1	4	3	8
	%	12.5	50.0	37.5	100.0
TOTAL	N	3	18	13	34
	%	8.8	52.9	38.2	100.0

Source: Q8, Enterprises, region

Table 14.a: Catering for the needs of people with special needs compared to predecessor programmes by size of the country

Size of the country		Better able	Same as predecessor programme	Less able	I don't know/ cannot judge	TOTAL
Very small	N	0	3	3	1	7
	%	0.0	42.9	42.9	14.3	100.0
Small	N	2	10	0	1	13
	%	15.4	76.9	0.0	7.7	100.0
Medium	N	1	5	0	2	8
	%	12.5	62.5	0.0	25.0	100.0
Large to very large	N	2	4	2	0	8
	%	25.0	50.0	25.0	0.0	100.0
TOTAL	N	5	22	5	4	36
	%	13.9	61.1	13.9	11.1	100.0

Source: Q7, Special needs by size

Table 14.b: Catering for the needs of people from disadvantaged backgrounds compared to predecessor programmes by size of the country

Size of the country		Better able	Same as predecessor programme	Less able	I don't know/ cannot judge	TOTAL
Very small	N	0	3	3	1	7
	%	0.0	42.9	42.9	14.3	100.0
Small	N	7	3	2	1	13
	%	53.8	23.1	15.4	7.7	100.0
Medium	N	1	5	1	1	8
	%	12.5	62.5	12.5	12.5	100.0
Large to very large	N	4	2	1	1	8
	%	50.0	25.0	12.5	12.5	100.0
TOTAL	N	12	13	7	4	36
	%	33.3	36.1	19.4	11.1	100.0

Source: Q7, Disadvantaged backgrounds by size

Table 14.c: Catering for the needs of people with special needs compared to predecessor programmes by type of NA

Types of NAs		Better able	Same as predecessor programme	Less able	I don't know/ cannot judge	TOTAL
Full portfolio NAs (E&T and Youth)	N	2	6	1	0	9
	%	22.2	66.7	11.1	0.0	100.0
E&T only NAs	N	1	8	2	1	12
	%	8.3	66.7	16.7	8.3	100.0
Youth only NAs	N	1	5	1	1	8
	%	12.5	62.5	12.5	12.5	100.0
Other types of NAs (one sector only or mix of sectors)	N	1	3	1	2	7
	%	14.3	42.9	14.3	28.6	100.0
TOTAL	N	5	22	5	4	36
	%	13.9	61.1	13.9	11.1	100.0

Source: Q7, Special needs by type of NA

Table 14.d: Catering for the needs of people from disadvantaged backgrounds compared to predecessor programmes by type of NA

Types of NAs		Better able	Same as predecessor programme	Less able	I don't know/ cannot judge	TOTAL
Full portfolio NAs (E&T and Youth)	N	3	4	2	0	9
	%	33.3	44.4	22.2	0.0	100.0
E&T only NAs	N	5	3	3	1	12
	%	41.7	25.0	25.0	8.3	100.0
Youth only NAs	N	2	4	2	0	8
	%	25.0	50.0	25.0	0.0	100.0
Other types of NAs (one sector only or mix of sectors)	N	2	2	0	3	7
	%	28.6	28.6	0.0	42.9	100.0
TOTAL	N	12	13	7	4	36
	%	33.3	36.1	19.4	11.1	100.0

Source: Q7, Disadvantaged backgrounds by type of NA

Table 15.a: Satisfaction of NAs with the division of tasks and cooperation with the EC and EACEA by region

Region		Very unsatisfied to unsatisfied	Neither unsatisfied nor satisfied	Satisfied to very satisfied	TOTAL
Northern Europe	N	4	2	1	7
	%	57.1	28.6	14.3	100.0
Western Europe	N	1	5	8	14
	%	7.1	35.7	57.1	100.0
Southern Europe	N	1	2	4	7
	%	14.3	28.6	57.1	100.0
Eastern Europe	N	1	2	5	8
	%	12.5	25.0	62.5	100.0
TOTAL	N	7	11	18	36
	%	19.4	30.6	50.0	100.0

Source: Q12 by region

Table 15.b: Satisfaction of NAs with the division of tasks and cooperation with the EC and EACEA by size of country

Size of the country		Very unsatisfied to unsatisfied	Neither unsatisfied nor satisfied	Satisfied to very satisfied	TOTAL
Very small	N	0	4	3	7
	%	0.0	57.1	42.9	100.0
Small	N	5	4	4	13
	%	38.5	30.8	30.8	100.0
Medium	N	1	1	6	8
	%	12.5	12.5	75.0	100.0
Large to very large	N	1	2	5	8
	%	12.5	25.0	62.5	100.0
TOTAL	N	7	11	18	36
	%	19.4	30.6	50.0	100.0

Source: Q12 by size of country

Table 16.a: Satisfaction with the IT tools by region

Region		Very unsatisfied to unsatisfied	Neither unsatisfied nor satisfied	Satisfied to very satisfied	Total
Northern Europe	N	5	2	0	7
	%	71.4	28.6	0.0	100.0
Western Europe	N	12	1	1	14
	%	85.7	7.1	7.1	100.0
Southern Europe	N	5	1	1	7
	%	71.4	14.3	14.3	100.0
Eastern Europe	N	7	1	0	8
	%	87.5	12.5	0.0	100.0
TOTAL	N	29	5	2	36
	%	80.6	13.9	5.6	100.0

Source: Q17, region

Table 16.b: Satisfaction with the IT tools by size of the country

Size of the country		Very unsatisfied to unsatisfied	Neither unsatisfied nor satisfied	Satisfied to very satisfied	Total
Very small	N	4	3	0	7
	%	57.1	42.9	0.0	100.0
Small	N	12	1	0	13
	%	92.3	7.7	0.0	100.0
Medium	N	7	1	0	8
	%	87.5	12.5	0.0	100.0
Large to very large	N	6	0	2	8
	%	75.0	0.0	25.0	100.0
TOTAL	N	29	5	2	36
	%	80.6	13.9	5.6	100.0

Source: Q17, size

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