

Research for CULT Committee - Effective measures to 'green' Erasmus+, Creative Europe and European Solidarity Corps programmes

Concomitant expertise for INI report

KEY FINDINGS

This introductory briefing paper introduces five key messages on how the Erasmus+, European Solidarity Corps (ESC) and Creative Europe (CE) programmes (and the proposals for successor programmes) address environmental challenges:

- 1. The programmes (Erasmus+, European Solidarity Corps, and Creative Europe) lack a baseline describing their contribution to environmental goals:** for the major part of the programme period 2014-2020, no specific reference is made to environmental goals and climate action. In the annual programme for 2020, the environmental and climate goals are defined as horizontal priority for Erasmus+ for the first time. As a consequence, no formal (steering) mechanisms are in place to assure that these programmes sufficiently contribute to environmental and climate goals. Furthermore, there is a lack of monitoring data regarding programmes contribution to environmental goals.
- 2. There is a significant and increasing share of projects that are already addressing environmental issues:** secondary analyses of Commission data show that a substantial share of climate-related projects have been implemented over the period 2014-2019, corresponding to 14.2% of the (combined) awarded budget for the Erasmus+, ESC and Creative Europe programmes.
- 3. There is a need for further building on existing good practices / incentives developed by the implementing institutions:** there are no coordinated instruments and activities in place to steer or support the institutions responsible for implementing the programmes. Nevertheless, some good practices are identified but these are scattered across NA and beneficiaries.
- 4. There are several options to steer environmental forms of travel, with different trade-offs:** Currently, the Commission is not steering the means of transport, meaning that the applicant / participant is free to decide how to travel. Different options are identified to reduce CO2 emission (this includes financial and non-financial incentives; better integrating online forms of learning and cooperation in the programme; compensation for mobility; as well as lobbying efforts to establish a good accessible public transport infrastructure).
- 5. There is a need to improve indicators and tools for measuring the environmental impact of programme activities.**



Introduction

Over the years, the EU has set some **ambitious targets with the aim to shift to a low carbon, resource-efficient and climate-resilient economy**. This started with the EUR2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, followed by the post-2020 Climate and Energy Framework 2014 and the 2030 Climate and Energy Policy Framework¹. In 2018, the revised Renewable Energy Directive (European Union, 2018a) and the amending Directive on Energy Efficiency (European Union, 2018b) further increased the ambition for renewable energy and energy efficiency. In 2018 and 2019, the EU adopted comprehensive legislation to ensure its 2030 targets will be reached, including a revised Emission Trading Directive (European Union, 2018c) and Effort Sharing Regulation (European Union, 2018d), which governs the Green House Gas (GHG) reduction targets for sectors outside the EU Emissions Trading System (EU ETS). By implementing the Clean Energy for All Europeans package², EU legislators continued their push for a more integrated, efficient and sustainable EU energy market. A key element of the package is the new Governance Regulation (European Union, 2018e), which obliges Member States (MS) to develop comprehensive National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs) for 2030. For 2050, the EU aims to reduce emissions by 80–95%, compared with 1990's emission levels. As a response to the Paris Agreement³, the EU is currently in discussions to strengthen this target and to establish the goal of net-zero emission levels in 2050. The European Commission's commitment to tackling climate and environmental challenges is strengthened further by the Commission communication that sets out a European Green Deal for the European Union (EU) and its citizens (European Commission, 2019). Also, according to the Eurobarometer of Autumn 2019, EU citizens consider climate change and environment as one of the most important issues facing the world (European Commission, 2019).

In its February 2013 Conclusions, the European Council stated that **climate action objectives would represent at least 20% of EU spending in the 2014-2020 period**. Furthermore, a new overall target has already been proposed of 25% of EU spending for the 2021-2027 period (covered by the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework) (European Parliament, 2019). The Erasmus+, European solidarity corps and Creative Europe programmes - with a total budget of around 18.2 billion euro⁴ in the current programme period - represent a small share of the total EU 2014-2020 budget, but this is sufficient to warrant action due to their strong mobility focus. These programmes are therefore a key contributor to achieving the political target of 20% of EU spending on climate action objectives. For some investment programmes, such as those funded through the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF)⁵, these political commitments are translated into their regulatory framework by introducing two Thematic Objectives related to climate action, as well as introducing a common methodology to track support to climate action ('climate markers'). This allows for a comparable calculation of the climate-related budget allocation to each programme. However, no reference is made to these political commitments in the regulatory frameworks of the Erasmus+, Creative Europe, and European Solidarity Corps programmes for the 2014-2020 period. The European Parliament would like to see a clear statement in the new Erasmus+ programme for 2021-2027 that the programme will contribute to the achievement of the overall target of 25% of the budget expenditure supporting climate objectives and introduce an annual target of 30% as soon as possible (in 2027, at the latest) (European Parliament, 2019, recital 32).

¹ As agreed upon in the Conclusions, adopted by the European Council on 24 October 2014 (EUCO 169/14).

² Presented in the European Commission's 2016 Communication on Clean energy for all Europeans.

³ The Paris Agreement - which was signed at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) 21st Conference of the Parties (COP) in 2015 - commits the international community to limiting the rise in mean global temperature, to well below 2 °C (above pre-industrial levels); and seeks to further limit the increase to 1.5 °C. In this context, carbon dioxide (CO₂) is considered the most prevalent greenhouse gas, accounting for about 81% of the EU's GHG emissions in 2017 (not including land use, land use change and forestry, nor international aviation).

⁴ Calculation, based on publications on the proposed budgets for each separate programme, which were: 16.4 billion euros for Erasmus+ for 2014-2020; 1.4 billion euros for Creative Europe for 2014-2020; and 376.5 million euros for the European Solidarity Corps for 2018-2020 (as it was funded under Erasmus+ up until 2017).

⁵ Including the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and European Social Fund (ESF)

The objective of this introductory briefing paper is to **examine the ongoing Erasmus+, European Solidarity Corps and Creative Europe programmes** (and the proposals for successor programmes) **from the perspective of environmental challenges**, with a view to improving successor programmes. This introductory paper provides an input for the members of the CULT Committee for their own-initiative report ("INI report") on effective measures to "green" the CULT programmes. The methodology used for the note principally consists of desk research of relevant programme documentation, monitoring data, literature on greening policies, as well as a limited number of interviews with stakeholders - such as the European Commission, National Agencies (NA), and beneficiaries of the programmes (attending the Shadows' meeting with stakeholders taking place in Brussels on 6th February 2020). The sections below present five key messages identified during the research.

Key message 1: Programmes (Erasmus+, European Solidarity Corps, and Creative Europe) lack a baseline on environmental goals

It is important to emphasise that **for the major part of the programme period of 2014-2020, no specific reference is made to environmental goals and climate action** in the regulation establishing Erasmus+, the annual work programmes, programme guides (2015, 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019), or annual reports. In 2014 specific reference is made to the environment as one of the subject areas for Jean Monnet and as one of the criteria (namely Eco-innovation) for selecting Jean Monnet projects and the Sector Skills Alliance (European Commission, 2014). Another example is in the guide for 2017, which indicates that in order to reinforce the volunteering dimension of the European Solidarity Corps a partnership between Erasmus+ and the LIFE Programme has been established that has the aim of making long term European Voluntary Service opportunities available in the areas of environment, nature conservation, and climate action (European Commission, 2017).

On the other hand, the annual work programme and programme guide of Erasmus+ for 2020 is a breakthrough. The work programme specifies 'environmental and climate goals' as a horizontal priority (European Commission, 2020), while indicating that the programme aims to provide support across all sectors in raising awareness on challenges related to the environment and climate-change⁶. However, apart from prioritising the topic the Commission is neither directly steering the processes to reach this objective nor monitoring outputs. Moreover, as indicated in the introduction section, the political commitments of 20% of EU spending on climate objectives is not translated into the regulatory framework of Erasmus+, as is the case for ESIF, and therefore does not allow for a comparable calculation of the climate-related budget allocation to each programme (using 'climate markers'). The same can be said for the other programmes (European Solidarity Corps and Creative Europe programmes).

As a consequence, **no formal steering mechanisms** are in place to assure that Erasmus+ (as well as other programmes) sufficiently contributes to environmental and climate goals in terms of: objectives; (annual) priorities; financial and physical targets; guidance documents; communication; selection processes; forms of travel supported, and; monitoring and results. Moreover, as a result, no specific reference is made to the programmes' contribution to these areas either in the mid-term evaluation, or the impact assessment of the current and new programme (European Commission, 2018). Generally, there is insufficient **information to feed a baseline assessment** on the current situation, which would provide a critical reference point for assessing the changes and (environmental) impact of a new

⁶ Priority will be given to projects aimed at developing competences in various sustainability-relevant sectors, developing green sectorial skills strategies and methodologies, as well as future-oriented curricula that better meet the needs of individuals. The programme will also support the testing of innovative practices to prepare learners, staff and youth workers to become true factors of change. Priority will also be given to projects that - through education, training, youth and sport activities - enable behavioural changes for individual preferences, consumption habits, and lifestyles.

programme. Furthermore, the NAs have not made analyses on the environmental impact of the programmes (and more specifically the mobility aspects; with the exception of the NA in France and the Netherlands, which have been measuring their carbon footprints as a process of identification, determining how the programme is polluting the environment).

This does not mean that the ongoing programmes do not contribute to environmental and climate goals. In the current programming period, NAs do have the autonomy to address the environmental and climate goals, with or without setting them as national priorities. In 2017, for example, the concept **European priorities in the national context** allowed NAs to give more consideration to the priorities deemed particularly relevant in their national context - and from the interviews with NAs, it was found that several NAs started cooperating in a working group to rethink how Erasmus+ could better address environmental and climate challenges. Furthermore, as discussed in key message 2, beneficiaries can also come up with (bottom up) project ideas that contribute to environmental and climate goals or integrate principles to reduce their ecological footprint in their project design and implementation. Finally, several beneficiaries of the programmes already have their own policies in place, such as the International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts (IETM), which has been measuring its carbon footprint for several years. IETM is now developing a policy for all organisations and staff on venue design and holistic issues. In other cases, beneficiaries set requirements for their own policies. Examples include making traveling by train mandatory (below a certain threshold of travel distance in kilometers), raising awareness on environmental impact, adjusting programme activities so participants can travel by public transport, or promoting compensation measures.

Conclusions for key message 1:

- 1 There is a need for a baseline assessment of programmes' contribution to environmental and climate goals that informs the design of the future programmes, including: objectives and targets set; indicators for measuring performance; result chain (from objectives, outputs, results and impact); and a monitoring framework.
- 2 Consider developing a common methodology to track support to climate action ('climate markers') that allows for a comparable calculation of the climate allocation to each programme (see for example the European Structural Investment Funds in the current programme period 2014-2020).

Key message 2: There is a significant (increasing) share of projects that are already addressing environmental issues

As discussed above, the **Commission is not systematically monitoring the number and type of projects, nor the share of budget allocated to environmental issues** (as is the case of the horizontal priority 'Inclusive Education' within the Erasmus+ programme, which requires project promoters 'flag' inclusive projects). However, this does not mean that there have not been any projects implemented that are related to environmental issues. To provide insights into how much is being done within this context a preliminary exercise was performed to determine the share of Erasmus+, Creative Europe (CE) and European Solidarity Corps (ESC) projects related to environmental issues that have been implemented so far (between 2014 and 2019). For this exercise, an analysis was performed on the full project overviews (published on their respective project results platforms⁷) for the period 2014 to 2019. This database represents a combined total of 129 263 projects, of which 3 333 (2.6%) were Creative

⁷ Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects/eplu-projects-compendium_en and <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/projects/ce-projects-compendium/>

Europe projects and 7 469 (5.8%) were Erasmus+ projects referring to EVS or 'solidarity corps' in their project summary. The total budget awarded to these projects, between 2014 and 2019, amounted to slightly over 13.2 billion Euros. After performing an estimation of *which* projects can be considered climate-related (i.e. related to environmental issues)⁸, **a total of 19 377 climate-related projects were identified (15% of the total number of projects). This corresponded to an awarded budget of slightly over 1.88 billion Euros (14.2% of the total budget awarded).** Therefore, overall these programmes have not (yet) reached a 20% share of their (combined) budget being awarded to climate-related projects.

When observing the results for the separate programmes, some additional insights can be drawn. The following table presents the number of climate-related projects and respective budgets for the Erasmus+ key areas and Creative Europe programme separately, as well as the number of European solidarity corps projects identified among them.

Table 1: Overview of number of projects and budget awarded to climate-related projects, by programme (area)

Programme area	Number of climate-related projects	(Number of which are ESC projects)	Sum of EU grant awarded (euros)	Share of budget (of respective programme area's budget)
Erasmus KA1	15 458	1 441	1 098 606 681	12.8%
Erasmus KA2	3 391	15	694 773 072	18.4%
Erasmus KA3	251	2	18 515 720	8.6%
Creative Europe	277	0	68 168 134	10.5%
Total	19 377	1 458	1 880 063 607	14,2%

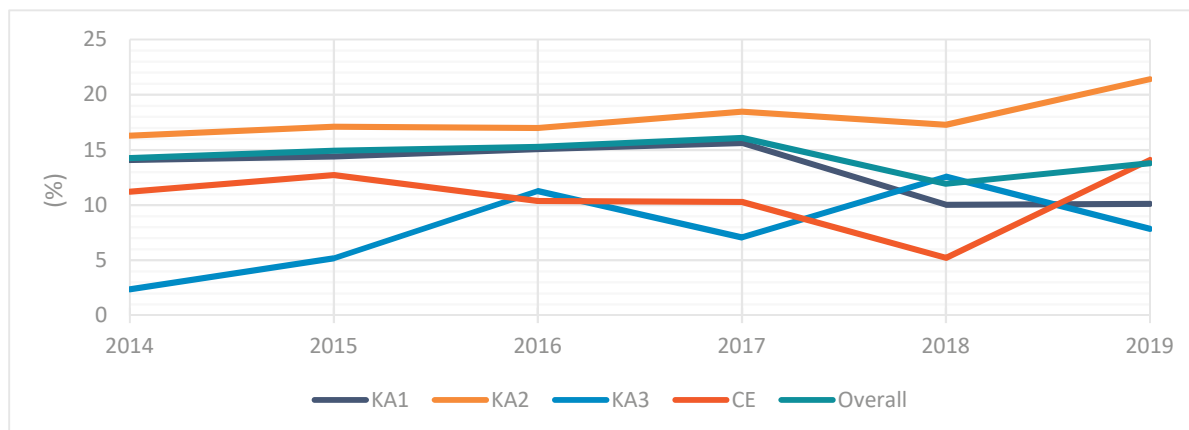
Source: based on data from the annual project overviews for Erasmus+ (KA1), and the full project overviews for Erasmus+ (KA2 and KA3) and Creative Europe⁹.

As shown in the table, as it stands the highest share of respective budget awarded to climate-related projects is through KA2 (Cooperation) of Erasmus+ (18.4%). The lowest share was funded through KA3 (Policy Reform). Apart from these results, when observing the relative shares for each call year (to gain insights into the development of these shares over time), it is interesting to note that **there was an overall rise between 2014 and 2017** in the share of the budget awarded to these projects (which rose from 14.2% to 16.1%). **In 2018, however, the share of climate-related projects fell to 13.5% (and the budget to 11.9%),** even though the total budget awarded had continued to increase, as shown in Figure 1.

⁸ To determine which projects can be considered 'related to environmental issues', six terms / keywords ('green topics') were selected - to allow mapping of the projects through rule-based filtering and manual post-coding ('tagging / matching'). More specifically, a project was tagged as 'related to environmental issues' if the project summary contained: (1) 'environment', but not 'learning'; (2) 'climate'; (3) 'healthy' and 'lifestyle'; (4) 'green' or 'greening'; (5) 'carbon', but not 'steel'; (6) 'renewable'; and (7) 'recycle' or 'recycling'. Finally, a project was considered climate-related in case at least one of these topics was detected in their project summaries.

⁹ Retrieved from: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects/eplus-projects-compendium_en and <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/projects/ce-projects-compendium/>

Figure 1: Development over time in share of programme budget awarded to climate-related projects.



Source: based on data from the annual project overviews for Erasmus+ (KA1), and the full project overviews for Erasmus+ (KA2 and KA3) and Creative Europe¹⁰.

Based on the results of the analysis, this decline in share of budget seems mostly due to a reduction in the number of climate-related projects funded under Key Action 1, given that the number of projects identified under Key Actions 2 and 3 increased. This raises the question of whether this was due to policy changes or a result of bottom-up changes in trends (e.g. other topics being of more interest at the time). Nevertheless, since then the overall share of budget awarded to climate-related projects increased between 2018 and 2019.

Lastly, some insights were gathered on the range of activities performed within the Erasmus+, ESC and Creative Europe programmes, related to environmental issues¹¹. Overall, the activities implemented through climate-related projects generally include the following: exchanges (of both students and staff); study projects; training courses; workshops; seminars; activities for raising awareness; research and development of knowledge; capacity building; knowledge and/or experience sharing; discussion groups. Furthermore, in terms of their main goals and objectives, several overarching types of projects can be distinguished:

- 1 **Projects aimed at raising climate awareness, responsibility and respect for the environment:** For example, through sharing relevant knowledge and experiences with participants, stimulating a healthy lifestyle and pro-environmental behaviour, and stimulating dematerialization (e.g. zero paper use). These projects can be targeted towards participants themselves as well as towards others (e.g. participants acting as agents of change).
- 2 **Projects focused on capacity building within a context of climate change:** These projects are generally aimed at either: i) increasing the employability of students in a set of sectors related to environmental issues; ii) at stimulating educators (at various levels) to use innovative methods to address the topic in their respective fields, or; iii) at enhancing more specific skills for participants (such as advocacy, policy building and entrepreneurial skills).
- 3 **Projects aimed at the development of existing or new teaching methods, equipment, training courses, workshops and / or curricula that address climate topics:** These projects can be used both for raising climate awareness and relevant capacity building. This includes the

¹⁰ Retrieved from: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects/eplus-projects-compendium_en and <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/projects/ce-projects-compendium/>

¹¹ The range of activities was assessed through qualitative interpretation of the project summaries (quick scan), after identifying and flagging climate-related projects (filtering out the unrelated projects).

development of multimedia (movies, presentations, science shows, etc) on environmental challenges.

Overall, the results of this exercise show that **a substantial share of climate-related projects have been implemented over the period 2014-2019**, despite limited steering of the environmental priorities (see key message 1), corresponding to 14.2% of the combined awarded budget for the Erasmus+, ESC and Creative Europe programmes. Furthermore, the results for each respective programme showed that the highest shares of budget awarded to climate-related projects were seen for Erasmus+ KA1 and KA2 (12.8% and 18.4% of their respective total budgets) and the lowest shares were seen for Erasmus+ KA3 and Creative Europe (8.6% and 10.5%, respectively). Interviews with responsible stakeholders and beneficiaries point out the importance that the programmes' main contribution to environment and climate action is to raise awareness on environmental issues amongst participants. As a programme facilitating learning and development of students and staff this will have a long-tail impact on environment. As a result, stakeholders argue that increasing the number of projects in the field of environment and climate (by setting targets or thresholds) should not be the primary goal in these programmes.

Conclusions for key message 2:

- 1 This study shows that a relevant share of projects and budget of the programmes is already addressing environmental topics. Nevertheless, budget share is still under the proposed target of 25% of EU budget, providing an argument for better steering on the volume of related environment projects, respecting the nature of programme objectives.
- 2 The Commission and projects could do more to raise awareness amongst projects staff and participants on environmental issues (raising awareness and knowledge about environmental impact, lifestyle, and their role as agent of change).

Key message 3: There is a need for further building on existing good practices / incentives developed by the implementing institutions

As described above, the Commission is not directly steering programmes in their contribution to environmental and climate goals and strategies and actions of implementing institutions are not systematically recorded. As a result, there are **no coordinated instruments and activities in place to steer or support the institutions responsible for implementing the programmes** (Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), National Agencies (NAs)).

The interviews with NAs pointed out that **some NAs play an active role** through starting up a dialogue with the European Commission on how the programmes could best address environmental issues (as part of a working group providing specific input for the next programming period). Some references were made to initiatives, such as the NA in France that has measured all CO₂ emissions for all *persons* participating in Erasmus + mobility actions, in order to increase awareness on the ecological footprint of mobility that is supported by the programme. Other examples are initiatives aimed at making the *institutions* that implement the programme greener. An example is the KA3 project of Erasmus+ 'Erasmus without paper'; a pilot project that should feed the post-2020 programme period. This project aims to: replace a paper-based workflow with a digital one; tackle the administrative workload for students and staff; create a free public infrastructure; and streamline technical solutions for student mobility. The NA of the Netherlands also serves as good example of an organisation that decided to measure their CO₂ emissions - in their case for the NA agency itself and its staff - and then decided to compensate for the CO₂ emissions produced over the last years. This simultaneously resulted in

increased awareness amongst Erasmus+ staff on the need to reduce CO2 emissions, and stimulated them to work in a more environmentally friendly way.

A good example of how beneficiaries are steered to become more environmentally friendly, addressed by stakeholders interviewed, is the development of **new mobility charters for the future Erasmus+ programme** (post-2020). These are the general quality frameworks for European and international cooperation which Higher Education (HE) and Vocational Education and Training (VET) institutes can apply for. The current charters¹² aim to encourage organisations that have proven to organise high-quality mobility for learners and staff to build their European internationalisation strategies. The new charters will request a description of *how* institutes deal with environmental and climate issues, although no judgement criteria on how to assess the quality of their proposals are currently included.

Member states (MS) can steer with national priorities through better addressing environmental challenges and by favouring projects that address this priority with extra points in the assessment. No concrete examples of MS that defined a national priority on environment and climate change within the programmes have been identified yet. Nevertheless, as pointed out in key message 2, the programmes have managed to attract a relevant number of projects that address climate-related aspects or that propose green measures in their project (such as through setting up e-learning/e-twinning platforms; creating and raising awareness amongst participants; reducing non friendly forms of travel; measuring their own emissions; and proposing compensation measures).

Overall, however, **few concrete practices have been identified so far, and the few practices that were identified are spread across NAs and beneficiaries.** What *has* been confirmed by stakeholders interviewed is that relevant measures will be proposed for the new Erasmus programme. The Commission is currently preparing a draft strategy in cooperation with NAs. This will include a set of concrete measures on how the programme could improve its contribution to environmental and climate goals.

Conclusions for key message 3:

- 1 The few good practices identified are spread across NAs and beneficiaries and a coherent framework and approach is missing from the programmes.

Key message 4: There are several options to steer environmentally friendly forms of travel, with different trade-offs

Programmes support different type of mobility actions, ranging from short versus long term mobility actions and physical versus virtual mobility. On the duration of mobilities, the 2018 evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme (and its predecessor) provides some general insights into learner mobilities financed under KA1 (European Commission, 2018e). Firstly, it was found that for learner mobility in the VET sector, the majority of mobilities (90%) are less than one month in duration, especially for VET traineeships that take place in vocational institutes abroad. On the other hand, the duration of mobilities is generally longer for the HE sector, with mobilities generally between three and six months. In particular this applied to international mobilities (studies in partner countries). An exception here is the duration for HE traineeships, in which more than half of mobilities (53%) last less than three months. This indicates that, at least for learner mobilities under KA1, there is a tendency towards short mobilities.

¹² See for example: (1) the HE charter for 2014-2020, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents/applicants/higher-education-charter_en ; and the call for the 2019 VET charter, available at: <https://www.erasmusplus.org.uk/news/vet-mobility-charter-2019-call>

Currently, the Commission is not steering the means of transport, meaning that the applicant/participant is free to decide how to travel and gets compensated based on distance travelled (using the distance calculator). The only environment-related incentive in place (introduced in the 2020 programme guide), is that the beneficiary can obtain a higher travel budget in case they opt for cleaner, lower carbon emission means of transport in case it costs more (up to a maximum of 80% of total eligible costs). Although no data exists on how many participants made use of this opportunity, stakeholders interviewed indicate that this option could be better specified for applicants (such as the costs and duration of traveling) and better promoted. Given that the Commission is not monitoring forms of travel, no data is available on which mode of transport is most often used or on the related environmental impact (which would set a baseline for the new programme). The example of the French NA discussed above is an exception, as they measured all CO₂ emissions of all persons participating in Erasmus + mobility actions.

In relation to this key message, all stakeholders interviewed agreed that different options should be explored in order to reduce emission caused by mobility action. At the same time, there is agreement that geographical mobility is at the heart of the programmes and that participants cannot have an experience abroad without travelling. Overall, stakeholders interviewed indicated different options for CO₂ reduction, which can be grouped into 5 overarching approaches:

- 1 Providing incentives for taking alternative, more environmentally friendly forms of transport.** Suggestions were made to prohibit flying below a certain distance (or duration) of travelling, to only finance travelling by train, as well as to provide financial incentives if a beneficiary uses a greener mode of travel. One trade-off could be that this has repercussions for schools, staff and students, for example when public transport is not accessible for participants (e.g. for persons with disabilities) and therefore negatively impacts the horizontal priority on inclusive education. Overall, the stakeholders interviewed prefer not to 'punish' less green options but to provide financial and non-financial incentives that encourage participants to choose more environmental friendly forms of transport. Financial incentives could compensate additional costs for environmentally forms of travelling and additional days for traveling and non-financial incentives could support creating awareness about the environmental impact of mobility. This also includes rules and incentives for organisations to schedule their activities in a way that allows participants to travel back with public transport on time. The performance sector serves as good example here through providing evidence that public transport to visit events has risen significantly after introducing new rules and coordinating with public transport services.
- 2 Stimulating online forms of learning, cooperation and mobility.** Within Erasmus+, as well as in scientific literature, there are examples and pilots that have shown a range of technologies and tools that can be used in order to virtually *support* the exchange process (Vriens et al., 2010a) and reach new and larger audiences¹³. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that the Erasmus+, ESC and Creative Europe programmes are primarily learning programmes focussed on capacity building through mobility activities and that greening measures should not effectively hamper physical mobility. Not all learning can take place virtually, and combinations of learning online and physical contact hours, also referred to as 'blended learning', are considered the most cost-effective. Projects could also build on the good experiences with e-twinning projects and working with TwinSpace. Furthermore, online collaboration could also be an incentive, of particular interest to participants that face difficulties in taking time off work (such as teachers). However, one should consider here that there are some trade-offs due to the advantages to physically working together, such as it having a positive influence on project outputs. Moreover, physical

¹³ An example of this is the VENUS seminar series, where presentations were virtually distributed to 8 different locations in Europe (through videoconferencing and live streaming), and backed up with interaction possibilities (chat) (Vriens et al., 2010b). At each location, participants would discuss after presentations and provide reflections, which were then shared with all locations.

mobility within Erasmus+, European Solidary Corps, and Creative Europe programmes are also relevant and effective in a context of developing emotional attachment to Europe and for cultivating the cultural component of European identity, as well as for developing additional skills and attitudes relevant to both the professional and private life¹⁴. Stakeholders interviewed argued that there should be incentives in place for applying online collaboration and e-learning, given that projects are currently penalised for finding environment-friendly solutions, in particular when applying online solutions. This results in not receiving funding on account of a lack of physical mobility in projects.

- 3 Stimulating the organisation of meetings in places that are easily accessible by public transport and centrally located in Europe, when possible and available. A possible trade off here, however, is that this penalises remote areas of Europe and negatively impacts the horizontal 'inclusion' priority.
- 4 **Compensate for mobility:** 'Compensating' for mobilities for the mobilities through investing a share of the budget in initiatives that are specifically aimed at carbon emission compensation can also be considered. For example, initiatives for setting up wind and / or solar farms, or for reforestation efforts and treeplanting could be identified.
- 5 **Establish a good and accessible public transport infrastructure in Europe:** stimulating beneficiaries to travel by train also means that there should be good railway infrastructure and services that allow people to access different destinations in Europe in a time-efficient manner. Therefore, there should be a lobby for establishing a sophisticated European infrastructure for public transport. This also requires good coordination with public transport services regarding the accessibility and availability of transport services, including in terms of service times. For example, the timing of project activities and events (such as movie festivals in the case of the creative sector) can be considered and coordinated with public services so that public transport is still available to participants and / or audiences afterwards.

Conclusions for key message 4:

- 1 The Commission is not steering the means of transport and applicants/participants are free to decide how to travel and receives compensation based on distance travelled (using the distance calculator).
- 2 Further incentives should be considered to stimulate environmentally friendly ways of travelling. This includes both financial and non-financial incentives, as well as better integrating online forms of learning (blended learning) and cooperation in the programme; compensation for mobility, and lobbying efforts to establish a good accessible public transport infrastructure across Europe.
- 3 Stakeholders generally agree that incentives should be in place to encourage more environmentally friendly forms of travel - which would make projects and participants more aware of the environmental impact of their activities - but measures should not be too binding. Programmes should also promote environmentally friendly habits.
- 4 Start monitoring the forms of travel used by participants in the programme, in order to set a baseline for the use of environmentally friendly traveling methods and monitor progress over time (see key message 5).

¹⁴ There is an abundance of evidence in the literature, indicating that through their mobilities, Erasmus+ participants tend to identify more as European (Mitchell, 2012), as well as achieve other learning outcomes that are important for their professional and private life (transversal and international skills) (European Commission, 2014; 2019).

Key message 5: There is a need to improve indicators and tools for measuring the environmental impact of programme activities

Considering the lack of monitoring on climate-related aspects of the programmes discussed above, there is little information available on the environmental impact of programme activities. Furthermore, in order to determine the impact over time, there is a need to determine the baseline situation. This section aims to provide insight into potential indicators and tools that could be adopted or adapted to measure the environmental impact of programme activities. Considering the range and diversity of activities implemented through the Erasmus+, CE and ESC programmes, it is important to consider that **a project's environmental impact can be achieved, and measured, through multiple approaches depending on their main objectives**. Based on the topics identified in the previous section and further desk research, six overarching approaches were identified, within a context of measuring environmental impact:

- 1 Measuring financial support to climate action that allows for a comparable calculation of the climate allocation to each programme: such as the example of the ESIF in the current programme period that 'mark' projects addressing environment and climate objectives.
- 2 Measuring the impact of a project on facilitating policies related to the transition to a low-carbon economy (e.g. participants acting as agents of change): for example, through specifying in which areas improvement is to be achieved, as well as the policies or actions that are considered necessary to achieve this improvement. An example that may serve as inspiration here is the 'greening mobility framework' (Bekiaris et al., 2017), which provides insights into the areas, necessities, gains and recommendations within a context of stimulating a transition to electric vehicles through a range of policy measures (such as raising gas prices, lowering electricity prices, developing the infrastructure (charging stations), offering incentives/privileges for users, etc.).
- 3 **Measuring the impact of a project on specific environmental indicators at local, regional and/or national level:** for example, by using adaptations of the 'Copenhagen's green growth indicators' (Martinez-Fernandez et al., 2013), which distinguishes between indicators across five overarching areas of 'green growth', and providing insight into how relevant these are to achieve an environmentally sustainable transition to economic growth¹⁵. Further inspiration can be found in indicators that are commonly used in carbon footprint calculators (for individuals and / or households)¹⁶, as well as those commonly used in environmental impact assessments¹⁷.
- 4 Measuring the extent to which awareness on environmental topics has been raised under participants and/or under others when participants act as agents of change: Through surveying participants with questions on, for example: their knowledge of climate change and environmental issues; their spatial/temporal awareness of climate change (changing weather patterns over time, increasing rate of extreme events); their opinions on what is being done / needs to be done (and by whom); et cetera. Inspiration for specific questions can be drawn from existing climate change perception surveys¹⁸.
- 5 **Measuring the extent to which participants adopt more pro-environmental behaviour, due to their participation in the project:** For example, through a short survey (at the start and after the project) where participants can indicate how often they perform certain pro-environmental

¹⁵ More specifically the following areas: (1) environmental and resource productivity; (2) natural asset base; (3) environment quality of life; (4) economic opportunities and policy responses; and (5) the socio-economic context and characteristics of growth.

¹⁶ For example, see: <https://www.carbonfootprint.com/calculator.aspx> and <https://www.nature.org/en-us/get-involved/how-to-help/carbon-footprint-calculator/>

¹⁷ For example, see the section on environmental impact (7.2) from: World Wildlife Fund, Inc. & American Red Cross (2017).

¹⁸ For example, see the surveys from: (1) The Asia Foundation (2012); and (2) UNDP & the (Macedonian) Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning (2014).

behaviours, such as: (1) buying used instead of new products; (2) avoiding using disposable, single-use items; (3) cycling or walking instead of using a car (or public transportation); (4) recycling household waste; (5) using public transportation (bus or train) (Jagers et al., 2014). Additionally, further insights can be gained by surveying the extent to which individuals encounter existing or perceived barriers to pro-environmental behaviour (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002) and to what extent these still apply to them and to others around them. An alternative approach could be to gather thoughts from participants on how they *intend* to help the environment and compile a guide of examples that can serve as a tool/resource for others.

- 6 **Measuring the extent to which programmes themselves are managed in an environment-friendly way:** For example through monitoring aspects such as: (1) opting for more environmentally friendly forms of mobility; (2) opting for conferencing through visual or audio methods instead of a physical meetings; (3) dematerialising efforts for events (paper reduction, etc.); (4) considering venue and accommodation options and prioritizing locations that reduce the need to travel, provide good access to public transportation, etc.; (5) considering catering options and prioritizing the use locally sourced products, reusable and/or recyclable items (dishes, cutlery, linens, etc.) and/or products with quality labels (such as Fair Trade) (Inttereg Alpine Space, 2015). An alternative approach, as seen for the European music council, is to have a third party doing an evaluation of processes that are commonly implemented through the programme (such as the film-making process), to see where strengths / weaknesses are in terms of CO2 emissions and using this to identify areas of improvement.

These approaches can, be considered as separate methodologies or as part of an overarching framework designed to address each approach as an area of interest. Such a framework could then be used to assess a selection of areas, depending on the main objectives of the respective project / programme. Although these approaches would logically be paired with an increase of administrative burden, adopting a strong focus on the initial development of the desired monitoring tools (surveys, etc.) and some consideration of the timing and rate of implementation (e.g. before and/or after participation, annually, bi-annually, etc.) could reduce the administrative burden once the tool is implemented and allow for gathering insights into the developments over time.

Conclusions for key message 5:

- 1 Consider whether it would be preferred to develop an overarching assessment framework to use in monitoring on climate-related activities or several methodologies that can be used 'when applicable' to a project or activity.
- 2 When considering which monitoring approaches and tools to develop, also consider the timing and rate at which they can be implemented (e.g. before and/or after participation; annually; bi-annually; etc.). Set a baseline after a monitoring system is in place.

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