



Erasmus+ programme final evaluation for 2014–2020 and interim evaluation for 2021–2027

FINAL REPORT

Kirill Jurkov, Kats Kivistik, Maarja Käger, Mark Herman
Ilumets, Kristiina Toomik

Survey: Erasmus+ programme final evaluation for 2014–2020 and interim evaluation for 2021–2027

Authors: Kirill Jurkov, Kats Kivistik, Maarja Käger, Mark Herman Ilumets, Kristiina Toomik

Surveyor: Institute of Baltic Studies

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REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
AND RESEARCH



REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA
EDUCATION AND YOUTH BOARD

Institute of Baltic Studies
Lai 30 Tartu
51005 Estonia
phone +372 699 9480
ibs.ee

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Abbreviations

Action – any one of the Erasmus+ programme key actions (KA1, KA2, KA3)

Agency – the Estonian Agency for Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps, operating under the Estonian Education and Youth Board

EACEA – European Education and Culture Executive Agency

Education sectors – the various sectors within the education and training field: school education, higher education, vocational education and training, and adult education

E+ / Programme – Erasmus+ programme

Field – youth, sport, education and training

Horizontal priorities – priorities to which all implemented projects must contribute: inclusion and diversity, digital transformation, environment and fight against climate change, and participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement

KA1 – Key Action 1: Learning mobility of individuals. In the **youth field**, this includes the following activities: youth learning mobility (youth exchange), the learning mobility of youth workers, youth participation project activity and DiscoverEU. In **education and training**, it includes the learning mobility of students and staff in higher education, students and staff in vocational education, pupils and staff in school education, and learners and staff in adult education. In the **sport field**, it includes the learning mobility of sport staff.

KA2 – Key Action 2: Cooperation among organisations and institutions

KA3 – Key Action 3: Support to policy development and cooperation

NEET youth – young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET)

TCA – training and cooperation activities

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Erasmus+ programme (E+) is an initiative of the European Union launched in 1987. The general objective of this programming period is to support, through lifelong learning, the educational, professional and personal development of people in education, training, youth and sport, in Europe and beyond, thereby contributing to sustainable growth, quality jobs and social cohesion, to driving innovation, and to strengthening European identity and active citizenship. Support can be sought for the learning mobility of individuals and groups (KA1), cooperation among organisations and institutions (KA2), policy development and cooperation (KA3), and enhancement of knowledge about the EU in the education and training field through Jean Monnet actions.

The purpose of the evaluation underlying this report was to provide a final evaluation for the 2014–2020 period and an interim evaluation for the 2021–2027 period of the E+ programme. The focus of the assessment was on decentralised (i.e. nationally implemented) actions, where funding decisions are made at the national level: KA1 or learning mobility and KA2 or cooperation. In Estonia, the programme is implemented by the Estonian Agency for Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps (the agency), operating under the Estonian Education and Youth Board. The agency's Education Programmes Centre is responsible for education actions and its Youth Programmes Centre oversees youth and sport actions.

The evaluation sought answers to specific questions concerning the programme's effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence and added value (see Annex 1). The evaluation provides input for enhancing the current programme and shaping the subsequent programming period beyond 2028.

In providing the final and interim evaluations and addressing the evaluation questions, we primarily relied on existing data: previous related study reports, strategies and development plans related to the programme, and programme documents and reports. In addition, ongoing data collected by the programme database (Dashboard) was reviewed, and group interviews were conducted with representatives of the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research, the agency, and target groups. The evaluation results were validated with sectoral experts and representatives of target groups, the agency, and the Ministry of Education and Research. The evaluation results should be interpreted with caution: data quality issues do not allow for a complete overview of programme implementation and effectiveness.

According to the evaluation, the programme is relevant, effective and necessary for all supported actions, fields and sectors. It promotes people's development through lifelong learning in education, training, youth and sport, and contributes to promoting inclusion and diversity, digital transformation, environmental awareness and internationalisation. The programme contributes to achieving both EU and national-level strategic objectives in the respective fields. Without the programme, the scope for extensive mobility and opportunities for international partnerships, cooperation initiation and promotion across various education sectors and youth and sport fields would be significantly limited.

Compared with the previous period, a significant step has been taken to enhance the efficiency of programme implementation and simplify it. However, increasing the programme's impact requires even more outreach to new participants (including those with fewer opportunities) and their engagement. Depending on the field and action, competition is quite high, meaning

that less experienced applicants have fewer chances of receiving funding. Problems were also identified with IT systems, low unit costs and inappropriate feedback solicitation at the programme level.

Mobility (KA1) is the most accessible action for target groups. Compared with the youth and sport field, financial support is easier to access in the education field due to the larger budget. Given the limited alternative funding sources for mobility, equally extensive mobility initiatives would not be feasible without the programme in any of the programme fields.

There is a significantly greater demand for cooperation (KA2) than the allocated budget permits. Funded projects are relevant, innovative and effective, allowing participants to develop competence and gain experience in strategic cooperation.

Of the three fields of Erasmus+, education and training currently has the largest budget, accounting for 83% of the total programme budget. The youth field budget accounts for 10.3% and the sport field budget accounts for 1.9% of the total programme budget. In addition, 3.3% is designated for the operating costs of the agencies and 1.5% for implementation support measures. Within the education and training field, higher education and vocational education have the largest budgets, which improves access to funding. Due to fewer resources, accessibility is lower in the school education and adult education sectors, but measures such as offering accreditations for mobility and the overall budget increase in the current period have improved the situation. The same cannot be said for the cooperation action, where many high-quality project proposals remain unfunded. Projects above the quality threshold that did not receive funding accounted for 30% of applications in higher education, 6% in vocational education, 4% in school education and 6% in adult education. However, a significantly higher proportion of projects did not exceed the quality threshold (except in the higher education sector).

In the youth and sport fields, demand exceeds supply even more, both in Key Action 1 (learning mobility) and in Key Action 2 (cooperation between organisations and institutions), where due to a limited budget, many high-quality project proposals remain unfunded. In the youth field, 39% of projects above the quality thresholds in KA1 and 50% in KA2 are currently not funded. In the sport field, where the number of applications is already low compared with other fields, only one-third of projects above the quality threshold receive funding.

The following recommendations for enhancing the current programme and designing a successor programme were formulated in the course of the evaluation:

1. Continue funding E+, implementing current actions and developing the programme.
2. Improve existing indicators to enhance the monitoring of key objectives.
3. Further reduce the administrative burden to make participation more accessible.
4. Streamline the application and reporting process and IT systems for associated monitoring.
5. Improve the feedback system to collect more accurate and reliable information on the programme's impact.
6. Review the conditions of flexibility and simplification measures to encourage their increased use.
7. Review the proportionality of the budgets of different fields and provide countries with greater flexibility to allocate budgets between programme fields and actions.

8. Conduct additional research among target groups to assess the purposefulness and effectiveness of blended mobility.
9. Find ways to develop the language learning support scheme to ensure that limited language skills do not hinder participation.

1. ERASMUS+ 2014–2020 AND 2021–2027

During the 2014–2020 period, the agency focused on two main fields in implementing the programme: education/training and youth. The offered measures included mobility, cooperation, and exchange of best practices for institutions and organisations, as well as support for policy cooperation and initiatives related to sport. The aim of all these activities was to contribute to achieving strategic objectives: reducing unemployment, promoting lifelong learning and engaging youth in European democracy. The budget for this period was 14.7 billion euros, of which Estonia was allocated 147.5 million euros.

For the period 2021–2027, the Erasmus+ budget was almost doubled, with the programme's budget set at over 26 billion euros. There were no major changes in the programme's structure. However, several significant changes in programme activities can be highlighted. Starting in 2023, Erasmus+ allows funding for the mobility of sport staff. In the mobility action, new additions include mobility for pupils and adult learners, group mobility, various flexibility measures, expansion of youth participation activities, and DiscoverEU travel opportunities. In the cooperation action, small-scale partnerships, partnerships for innovation and partnerships for excellence were added. Opportunities in the Jean Monnet actions have expanded beyond the higher education sector to also include school and vocational education. Additionally, financial simplification measures have been introduced, such as fixed unit costs and accreditation expansion in mobility, as well as lump-sum grants in the cooperation action.

During the current period, efforts continue to promote the involvement of programme participants in democratic life. In addition, emphasis has been placed on the green and digital transition and social inclusion. All four themes listed above are set as horizontal priorities for this period, serving as guiding principles across all fields and activities. The programme also emphasises supporting innovation, cooperation and reforms. Mobility projects of accredited organisations are available not only in higher education but also in other sectors of education and training. Overall, the programme offers more opportunities in education and training, youth, and the new sport field than before.

Approximately 80% of the programme's budget is distributed through national agencies. Activities funded through national agencies are referred to as decentralised actions. The remaining 20% of the budget is centrally funded directly by the EACEA (European Education and Culture Executive Agency). The national agency's programme-related activities are co-financed by the government. The evaluation focused on decentralised activities.

Of the three fields of Erasmus+, education and training currently has the largest budget, accounting for 83% of the total programme budget. The youth field budget accounts for 10.3% and the sport field budget accounts for 1.9% of the total programme budget. In addition, 3.3% is designated for the operating costs of the agencies and 1.5% for implementation support measures. Within the education and training field, higher education and vocational education have the largest budgets.

2. METHODOLOGY

The evaluation methodology was chosen based on the availability of quantitative data collected over time on the E+ programme, along with several studies that reflect its activities. In order to avoid excessive burden on the target groups, the evaluation focused on the analysis of available data. Target groups were contacted primarily for data refinement and validation purposes. Therefore, the following methods were used for the final evaluation of the E+ programme for 2014–2020 and the interim evaluation for 2021–2023 (for details, see Annex 2):

- document analysis;
- quantitative project data:
 - Dashboard;
 - quantitative data provided by the agency;
 - infographics provided by the agency;
- personal and group interviews (10 interviews with 41 participants), referred to collectively as “interviews” in the report;
- focus group interviews and a validation seminar;
- working meetings, questions and discussions with representatives of the commissioning bodies (ministry, agency) by phone and email.

Limitations in evaluation:

- The statistics system (European Commission Dashboard) is deemed inadequate and subject to change, making it unreliable for dependable use. Therefore, more emphasis was placed on previous infographics and reports, and additional data queries were made to the agency.
- Due to issues with data quality, the quantitative overviews provided in various sections of this report (e.g. in the annexed tables) may not be entirely consistent and should be considered indicative rather than definitive.
- Programme guidance notes and work programmes outline expectations for programme and project outputs and results, but these are not numerical. Output assessment is based on compliance with established national plans and on changes over time, while results and impact assessment rely on feedback from the beneficiaries of the programme.
- Statistics on the inclusion of participants with fewer opportunities only reflect projects where additional funding was used for their inclusion. Inclusion without additional financial support for participants with fewer opportunities – that is, inclusion through other actions such as blended mobility, short-term blended intensive courses and inclusion support – is not reflected in the statistics.
- Direct beneficiaries, except for organisational representatives, were not included in the primary data collection for the study.

3. EFFECTIVENESS

3.1. Overall indicators and achievement of objectives across fields

During the 2014–2020 period, a total of 3,116 projects were submitted in Estonia across all fields and actions, of which 1,702, or 55%, were successful (see Annex 3). Funding amounted to a total of 147.5 million euros. Projects in KA1 (mobility) received nearly five times more funding than KA2 (cooperation projects). During the current period, a total of 1,382 projects have been submitted, of which 760, also 55%, have received funding.

As of the end of 2023, the success rate of applications for the current period has remained the same, but the average number of applications per year has decreased. At first glance, this may indicate reduced effectiveness, considering the increased budget. However, the periods are not directly comparable due to changes in the programme structure. For example, certain new activities have been introduced, such as guaranteed funding for accredited institution projects, which reduces the budget available to other organisations. Additionally, some activities have been relocated within the programme, such as youth participation projects moving from KA3 to KA1, leading to increased competition due to the consolidation of activities.

Information on application quality is available only for the current period. Nearly 15% of project applications fell below the quality threshold,¹ indicating that **most of the unsuccessful applications fail to receive funding due to competition**. Overall, the quality of applications for KA1 projects has been good: only 4% of all applications did not meet the quality threshold,² and less than 4% of applications were deemed ineligible due to technical errors. The quality of the applications for KA2 projects was lower: 40% of the applications did not exceed the quality threshold, and another 8% of the applications were deemed ineligible, meaning that only half of the applications were well-prepared. However, there is intense competition for KA2 funding: nearly half of the projects that exceeded the quality threshold remained unfunded. The quality of field- and sector-specific applications is discussed in the respective sections below.

To improve the quality of applications, attention is paid to problem areas in information seminars held by the agency. In addition, the agency offers targeted training. For example, the Hüppelaud (Springboard) programme in the field of education and training, where applicants can participate in project writing training and seminars and receive individual guidance. The success of the Hüppelaud programme can be assessed in the second half of the current period. In the youth field, similar project writing training has been provided since the previous period and has been successful, according to the agency.

The overall effectiveness of the programme can be assessed through feedback from participants in the activities.³ Participants' feedback has been sought on how participation in the programme has affected their awareness of digital, climate and engagement topics. While feedback from the previous period shows positive ratings in the youth field and in all education

¹ The interviewed programme target group representatives cited problems in submitting applications in the online environment as the reason for the low quality. However, programme implementers noted that applicants often relied on familiar or convenient tracks, submitting applications based on conditions from the previous period. Many applications were submitted to the wrong action, especially the cooperation action. Another issue arises from applications submitted by e-residents or from other European countries, which may not align with Estonia's actual needs. Their applications often lack quality, and currently, the programme implementer has no means to exclude them other than assigning low quality scores.

² To pass the quality threshold, an application must score at least 60 points and no less than half of the points in each evaluation aspect.

³ Dashboard data.

sectors in the range of 70%–90%, the number of positive responses in the new period has been significantly lower (see Annex 4). This change is likely due to a change in methodology, making the results of the two periods incomparable. However, based on existing results, it can be said that **the objective of developing key competencies was largely achieved in the previous period**, as indicated by a consistently high level of positive responses. In the current period, signs of improvement are evident: compared with 2021, ratings have improved by nearly 10 percentage points in all education sectors. While a similar change in youth field ratings is not reflected in Dashboard data, this does not imply that the objective has not been achieved. Although the Dashboard information shows a modest impact on the development of key competencies among youth project participants (with only 35% of responses rating the impact as positive), analysing the information from the project beneficiaries interviewed does not suggest that youth projects are underperforming. However, there may be concerns regarding the methodology used to collect feedback.

Participants' assessments of the impact of their participation in the programme on their awareness of tolerance (see Annex 5) also indicate the effectiveness of the previous period. Although the impact is significant in both higher and vocational education sectors, it is greatest among participants in the youth field. This is an important indicator in terms of achieving programme objectives because the interviewed programme implementers see Erasmus+ as **a peace programme that gives Estonian people a sense of solidarity and promotes greater tolerance within society**. This indicator shows a greater impact, particularly among participants in the youth field.

3.2. Impact of the programme on the Estonian education and training field, youth and sport field, and values in society

According to the evaluation, Erasmus+ is indispensable for achieving national and EU-level objectives in the fields of education, youth and sport (see Section 5.3). Erasmus+ contributes to international cooperation, including opportunities for teaching and learning abroad, making a significant contribution to funding in the education and youth fields. Interviews revealed that the programme also provides participating organisations with a significant portion of their staff training funds. According to programme implementers and policymakers, it would not be feasible to support activities at a similar scale solely with national funds. Therefore, if the Erasmus+ budget were reduced, **there would be fewer activities in the education, youth and sport fields, which would negatively affect Estonian international cooperation**.

Programme actions enable participants to explore the world, develop professionally and learn to respect others (including other cultures). The most significant aspects are the European dimension and the integration aspect of projects. The evaluation revealed that the experiences gained in all projects may not immediately manifest in behaviour. This is especially true for mobility projects, regardless of the field. However, representatives of participating organisations in mobility projects found that over time, participation in the programme fosters inclusivity, resourcefulness and entrepreneurship among individuals. It should be noted that the manifestation of impact takes time and is not always easily measurable. **Nevertheless, according to the interviewed organisational representatives, the impact on the internationalisation of educational institutions and youth organisations, as well as on improvements in educational quality and the quality of youth activities, has been strong.**

Secondary sources and interviews with organisations' representatives indicate that the contribution of projects to the fulfilment of horizontal priorities is currently uneven in all fields.

This means that some projects are specifically aimed at developing a single theme, such as the environment or participation in democratic life. The map application of Estonian-supported projects⁴ shows that inclusion and climate are the most frequently addressed horizontal priorities in KA2 projects. However, many KA2 projects lack a priority. Interviews with institutional representatives conducting KA2 projects also indicate that applicants typically select a theme first and then seek to align it with a priority. While there is a degree of attention to horizontal priorities, the contribution of some projects is minimal, such as those limited to preferring digitally signed documents over paper-based ones as a means of contributing to horizontal priorities. However, the Erasmus+ programme guide states that projects focusing on competence development across horizontal priorities are preferred.⁵ **Consequently, a method for assessing project priorities should be developed, and efforts should be made to ensure that all priorities receive equal attention and coverage.** One option is to introduce quotas for each priority in each field while allowing sufficient flexibility for national agencies to consider the actual needs of fields and organisations.

Although horizontal priorities are listed in the programme guide, addressing them or assessing their impact is not possible for the current period. The use of programme feedback surveys does not serve its purpose because the collected data cannot be used to accurately assess the impact (see Section 6).

The evaluation showed that the programme significantly influences values. Throughout the interviews with beneficiaries of the actions, it was evident how inclusion has become a pervasive principle in their mindset. On the other hand, it is difficult to assess whether participation in the programme influences individuals or whether individuals participating in the programme are more open-minded to begin with. However, **the programme's most significant impact is estimated to be on first-time participants in particular**, as affirmed by all those interviewed during the evaluation.

The impact of the previous period on the priority aspects has been previously assessed. A study by the Austrian Agency for Education and Internationalisation⁶ evaluated the programme's impact comparatively in several countries, including Estonia. The impact was measured in the following areas: active European citizenship and internationalisation, professional development (competence, employability and general professional development), system improvement (including institutional development and cooperation), and innovation. The results of the study show that in adult education, the programme had the strongest impact on competencies, overall professional development and innovation across the EU. Results have generally shifted over time towards greater impact. In vocational education, the strongest impact is on competencies, employability and professional development. In school education, the programme had the strongest impact on EU citizenship and internationalisation, as well as professional development and competencies across the EU. Estonia's results were above average compared with other countries in all sectors, indicating the effectiveness of the projects from the previous programme in Estonia.

⁴ Map application of the Estonian Agency for Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps. <https://kaart.noored.ee/projektid/>

⁵ European Commission. (2022). Erasmus+ Programme Guide 2022. <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/et/document/erasmus-programme-guide-2022-version-2>

⁶ Löffler, R., Pedersen, S. H., Korkala, S., Ryssevik, J. (2019). Applied Methods of Impact Assessment: Final report TCA showing and identifying impact of Erasmus+ on EU and national level.

3.3. Participants with fewer opportunities

Compared with the previous programming period, mobility for participants with fewer opportunities is better supported in this period. Erasmus+ places great emphasis on the inclusion of participants with fewer opportunities and supports it in various ways,⁷ from smaller-scale and simpler activities (e.g. small projects, short-term mobility and blended mobility) to preparation assistance and guidance in the process, language support and additional funding. Some changes are working better than others. **Overall, short-term mobility offerings have had the most impact on the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities**, allowing mobility for many target groups for whom long-term mobility is not an option: working individuals, those with limited means and parents. Short-term mobility is also economically and emotionally more acceptable to many who would not consider long absences from home.

At the institutional level, the first step towards including participants with fewer opportunities is to establish the relevant objectives, enabling the assessment of the effectiveness and impact of the assistance measures and support provided. However, according to a 2023 survey,⁸ **objectives related to learners with fewer opportunities had not been formulated in all educational institutions** from which members of the target group embark on mobility. Specifically, this had not been done in 71% of general education schools, 30% of vocational schools, and 64% of higher education institutions participating in the survey.

According to the 2023 survey targeting educational institutions,⁹ both general education schools and vocational education institutions have used Erasmus+ opportunities for including participants with fewer opportunities relatively sparingly. In higher education mobility, short-term blended intensive programmes, short-term blended mobility, additional funding for participants with fewer opportunities,¹⁰ and suitable information methods (such as videos)¹¹ are often used. Given that logistical factors are predominant in higher education, the current measures prioritising flexibility are appropriate. In higher education, although identifying participants with fewer opportunities has been challenging in the past, **the use of an application form where mobility applicants confirm their need for additional support is good practice**. The form mainly lists economic reasons but also factors like underaged dependents and adverse conditions such as a background in foster care. Support for participants with special needs and inclusion support are also available.

In school and vocational education, participants with fewer opportunities are targeted in a suitable format, and additional support is offered during the application process, along with the involvement of support specialists to alleviate emotional and psychosocial barriers as well as logistical obstacles. In nearly a third of school and vocational education institutions, the selection criteria specifically include considerations for participants with fewer opportunities. In school and vocational education, inclusion support for organisations and language learning support is used more than in higher education (language learning support is not available in the Erasmus+ programme for the higher education sector). Lack of language proficiency and motivation/need, which hinders mobility in vocational education, can be better alleviated at the institutional level by providing more (English) language instruction, among other measures. To date, **the system of supporting participants with fewer opportunities has been more**

⁷ Jurkov, K. & Kivistik, K. (2023). Erasmus+ kaasava õpirände uuring [study of Erasmus+ inclusive learning mobility], 12-14. <https://eeagentuur.ee/materjalid/erasmus-kaasava-opirande-uuring/>

⁸ Ibid., 18.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

effective in supporting the inclusion of participants with fewer economic opportunities compared with those facing other challenges, such as health, psychosocial or motivational factors.

Regarding the factors impacting the youth mobility on participants with fewer opportunities, the most significant input comes from the Erasmus+ Youth Programme results and impact study.¹² Regardless of the type of activity, the biggest problem is insufficient financial resources, with the issue being most acute for youth worker mobility projects. Another significant obstacle in youth projects is living in a remote area away from urban centres. On the other hand, youth mobility reaches participants with fewer opportunities well, and a large portion of youth mobility participants (both young people and youth workers) are those with fewer opportunities.

Interviews with implementers of KA2 projects suggest that cooperation projects in both the education and youth fields naturally reach participants with fewer opportunities since they are frequently designed specifically to promote their inclusion. In the youth field, the engagement of participants with fewer opportunities is significantly facilitated by participation projects. Many Ukrainian youths, who are automatically considered participants with fewer opportunities in the programme, have participated in educational cooperation projects during this period.

The inclusion of participants with fewer opportunities is also supported by the addition of a relevant assessment criterion for the new period. Promotional activities are also carried out to improve their inclusion, primarily by the national agency, which directly communicates programme information to institutions applying for funding through direct contact and various promotional events.

3.4. Promotion of project results

Project results are mainly disseminated at the local level. Both the agency and the project implementers do this. The agency acknowledges good projects and shares their materials nationwide to reach the widest possible audience. Experience stories are also created from recognised projects, which are made available on a YouTube channel and can be found in the programme's mapping application.¹³ Both videos and podcasts are available. However, project implementers focus on local-level promotional activities, such as in schools, school social media channels and local newspapers. Many projects focus on raising awareness on specific topics, accompanied by promotional activities. Nevertheless, implementers consistently observed that direct contacts with interested parties work best for disseminating results, meaning that results spread most effectively through word-of-mouth. The active dissemination of results has also been recognised by the European Court of Auditors.¹⁴

3.5. Mobility in the education field

The statistics on mobility in the education field from 2014 to 2020 show that out of 1,002 applications, 739 were granted support, accounting for 74%. Of the total financial amount requested in applications, 72% was allocated, meaning almost all applicants received funding

¹² Kendrali, E., & Raihnelgauz, M. (2023). Erasmus+ noorteprogrammi 2021/2022 tulemuste ja mõju uuring (RAY MON) Eestis. [Study of the results and impact of the Erasmus+ Youth Programme 2021/2022 (RAY MON) in Estonia.] Tallinn: Praxis. https://euroopanooored.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/RAY-MON_21_22_Eesti_lopparuanne.pdf

¹³ Map application of the Estonian Agency for Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps. <https://kaart.noored.ee/projektid/>

¹⁴ European Court of Auditors. (2018). Special Report No 22/2018: Mobility under Erasmus+: Millions of participants and multi-faceted European Added Value, however performance measurement needs to be further improved. <https://eca.europa.eu/en/publications?did=46686>

to the desired extent. Over the years, the success rate of applications has improved across all education sectors, suggesting that applicants are becoming more familiar with the new conditions and receiving necessary assistance from the agency. The majority of projects were submitted in school education, followed by vocational, higher and adult education.

The number of mobility participants exhibited a growing trend in all sectors of the education field over the previous period, except for adult education, where the number of participants fluctuated annually. Over the period, a total of 24,536 participants were accumulated across sectors, with 1,980 in school education, 6,790 in vocational education, 598 in adult education and 15,168 in higher education (EU and global participants combined). The growth trend is particularly significant considering the restrictions resulting from the pandemic in 2019 and 2020. This shows that the obstacles caused by the pandemic were well adapted to. While the statistics indicate a lower number of participants in school and adult education mobilities, this can be attributed to the budget allocated to the field and the activities offered.¹⁵ Previous research has examined the obstacles to international cooperation for mobility in adult education.¹⁶ A survey revealed that the most common obstacles in preparing applications were the lack of financial resources, leadership in international cooperation and time.

In the first three years of the 2021–2027 budgeting period, the success rate of mobility applications in the education field has also been above average, with 390 out of 453 applications receiving support, resulting in a success rate of 86%. The success rate has consistently been above 80% each year, indicating excellent access to funding. Accessibility has been good across all sectors: the success rate of applications was 81% in school education, 99% in vocational education, 100% in higher education,¹⁷ and 84% in adult education. Only 9% of all mobility applications in education have fallen below the quality threshold, mainly in the school and adult education sectors. If we exclude project applications from accredited educational institutions, then 15% of applications in the school education sector and 21% in adult education fall below the quality threshold. In vocational education, one short-term mobility project remained unfunded, accounting for 4% of all short-term mobility applications. All short-term mobility applications in higher education are successful: no project has been left unfunded due to a failure to meet technical requirements. Applications that exceed the quality threshold but are not funded account for 7% of all applications in school education and 2% in adult education. It is important to note that comparing sectors with each other is not feasible due to the differences between the Charter and accreditations.

Compared with the previous period, especially the first half, the overall results to date have been outstanding. On the other hand, the results have primarily stemmed from a budget increase compared with the previous period. The budget was not fully allocated in 2022, mainly due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During this period, projects could be extended and financed from all contracts signed during the four-year period. Overall, this indicates that funding for educational mobility is allocated efficiently, and demand exceeds supply under normal circumstances. **For all additional funding allocated to any field, a high-quality provider is also available.**

The number of mobility participants has shown an upward trend over the years in all sectors. A total of 11,053 participants were involved in learning mobility during the first three years of

¹⁵ During the previous period, the learning mobility action for these sectors only covered the mobility of education staff.

¹⁶ Estonian Education and Youth Board. (n.d.). The results of a survey conducted among adult education institutions on the capacity and obstacles faced by various stakeholders in participating in the programme. Accessed 9 November 2023.

<https://infogram.com/lp7v9v627ygdr5fzvpj1n0ydrjfn27rxdj?live>

¹⁷ The success rate in higher and vocational education is influenced by the Charter for Higher Education and accreditations, which guarantee receiving funding but not necessarily to the desired extent.

the current period, including 2,827 in school education, 2,373 in vocational education, 629 in adult education and 5,224 in higher education. Compared with the previous period, the numbers of mobility participants are moving towards exceeding the results of the previous period. The numbers of participants in school and adult education mobilities have increased significantly, already surpassing the number of participants in the previous period. This has been largely facilitated by the multiplication of the budget and the addition of new activities.¹⁸ The success rates of applications, the number of participants and the funding opportunities for various activities together indicate that **the accessibility of funding within the educational field has become more equal across sectors.**

Overall, **learning mobility in education can be deemed effective.** At the same time, the action serves somewhat different purposes, and the magnitude of its impact varies from sector to sector. In school education, staff mobilities often lead to the realisation that living in Estonia is good, and life in other countries is not always better. For students, however, it is usually a first-time experience. Inclusion in international activities is enriching and many of the interviewees thought it should begin before the higher education level. In terms of enriching experiences, it is positive to see the development of adult education mobilities, which allows for raising the qualifications of learners and staff in the sector. As participation in this action is not as common in this sector as in other education sectors, the increase in participant motivation is more noticeable.

The opportunity to bring foreign specialists to teach in Estonian institutions is also important, as expertise from Estonia is often lacking in adult education. In the vocational education sector, mobilities contribute to achieving the objectives of the Education Strategy 2021–2035. One of the objectives of the development plan stipulates that more vocational learning should take place in enterprises. Vocational education mobilities support this objective. Practice in learning and teaching is also a stimulus for participants, motivating staff and learners to teach and study in vocational education institutions. The action also provides the opportunity to participate in VET skills competitions, which would not be possible otherwise. Short-term mobilities for both staff and learners are typical in the school, vocational and adult education sectors, but there seems to be increasing interest in short-term mobilities in the higher education sector as well. Finally, mobility is used in the higher education sector more frequently than in other sectors, and its impact is less often highlighted, possibly because internationalisation is inherent in this sector. The effectiveness in higher education has been enhanced by the opportunity for short-term blended mobilities.

3.6. Cooperation projects in the education fields

The statistics on strategic cooperation project applications for the previous period show that out of 463 applications, support was granted to 215, accounting for 46%. Financially, 35% of the applied-for funding was received. Similar to mobility applications, the funding rate for strategic cooperation projects increased over time, except for 2019 and 2020, when there was a sudden surge in the number of applications. Although the number of successful applications also increased, the success rate decreased due to increased competition. **Compared with mobility projects, the balance between demand and supply for cooperation projects in the education field was significantly more skewed towards demand,** indicating a scarcity of supply.

¹⁸ Compared with the previous period, activities for the mobility of learners in school and adult education have been introduced.

However, the statistics for cooperation project applications in the current period show that out of 331 applications, support was granted to 99 projects, accounting for 30%. The success rate of funded projects has decreased both overall and individually in each sector over the years. The lowest success rate was observed in applications for school and adult education partnerships, at 17% and 33%, respectively. **The success rate of applications is primarily influenced by the quality and eligibility of the proposals, and overall, cooperation project applications have been of lower quality:** half of the applications failed due to quality issues, and another 10% were deemed ineligible due to technical errors. Applications for school and adult education partnerships had the lowest quality, indicating poorer project writing skills among the target group. Across the sectors, 26% of higher education applications, 32% of vocational education applications, 63% of school education applications and 55% of adult education applications fell below the quality threshold. For technical reasons, 16% of vocational education, 13% of general education and 7% of adult education applications were deemed ineligible. Projects that exceeded the quality threshold but did not receive funding accounted for 30% of higher education, 6% of vocational education, 4% of school education and 6% of adult education applications.

In the school education sector, the low success rate is partly attributed to the fact that group mobility was shifted from KA2 to KA1 during this period and it has taken time for the target groups to become familiar with the change. This means that student exchange applications are mistakenly submitted as cooperation projects instead of mobility projects. Despite this, compared with the previous period, the demand under the cooperation action has increased significantly more than the supply.

Cooperation projects in the education field are crucial because they provide institutions with the first opportunity to engage in international strategic cooperation. These projects serve as a starting point for institutions to seek funding from other sources, such as the European Horizon research and innovation framework or centralised Erasmus+ activities (e.g. capacity-building projects, Jean Monnet and Erasmus Mundus). Currently, the most challenging aspect of successful projects is finding partners. However, the effectiveness of cooperation projects lies in the creation of new competencies both in Estonia and abroad. Additionally, interviewees highlighted that they learned project management and international cooperation skills during their projects, which also contributes to effectiveness. The most popular themes across both periods were the development of new training courses/methodologies and new technologies and digital skills, which also helped achieve Estonia's Education Strategy 2021–2035 objectives.

3.7. Mobilities in the youth field

The statistics on youth field mobility applications for the previous period show that out of 1,391 applications, 689 applications, or 50%, were successful. **Thus, although there were more applications for mobilities in the youth field compared to those in the education field, fewer applicants received funding.** Comparing the quality points of applications and the allocated budget, the main reason for this is the small budget.

In the current period, the success rate of youth field mobility applications has been somewhat lower. Out of 389 applications, 216 applications, or 56%, received funding. Based on the average number of applications and successful applications per year, both the predicted number of applications and the nominal number of successful applications have decreased compared with the previous period. Looking inside the field, it appears that the problem is more about project quality than eligibility: 16% of all applications fell below the quality

threshold, while 3% were ineligible. The remaining projects failed to secure funding due to competition, so currently, 39% of all youth field mobility project applications remain unfunded, although they exceed the quality threshold.

The success of applications also varies across different activities within youth field mobilities. For example, applications for DiscoverEU inclusion and participation projects have been successful (83% and 78%, respectively). However, less than half of the applications received funding for youth exchanges and youth worker mobilities (46% and 45%, respectively). DiscoverEU travel passes have been granted to 531 youths, or 27% of applicants, during the current period. The large differences in the success of applications also point to the difference in competition within the various activities of learning mobility in the youth field. Thus, **the competition for youth exchanges and youth worker projects is greater than for youth participation projects**. One likely reason for this is the lack of awareness about the opportunities offered by participation project activities, as the target group may not know to look for this opportunity under youth field learning mobilities. The high competition for youth exchanges and youth worker mobilities means that compared with the education field, funding for youth field mobilities is not readily accessible to many.

The activities funded through youth field mobility are considered by interviewees as one of the few opportunities to fund mobility in the field, as funding can be difficult to secure due to limited resources from local governments or elsewhere. However, studies show that Erasmus+ activities significantly contribute to the strategic objectives of Estonia's youth field development plan by developing competencies in civic education. It is also important in youth field mobilities that participants feel their ideas and solutions are considered,^{19, 20} indirectly contributing to the effectiveness of activities.

Interviewees also spoke about the importance of participation projects for young people. Engaging in such projects is crucial for shaping the reputation of organisations. For participants, it provides an opportunity to enhance their CVs, analyse what they have learned and then seek funding themselves. The subsequent careers of participants also indicate effectiveness, as for some participants, the experience of writing projects served as a stepping stone to later becoming project writers.

The youth field activities funded through the mobility action are valuable in the sense that projects can be written not only by institutions but also by individuals, significantly increasing accessibility.

3.8. Cooperation projects in the youth field

The statistics on youth field cooperation project applications show that out of 165 applications, support was granted to 58, accounting for 35%. In the current period, the success rate of cooperation projects has been even lower, with 53 out of 181 applications receiving funding, amounting to 29%. Although the predicted number of successful applications is higher in this period compared with the previous one, there has been **a significant increase in demand for the action**.

Looking at the quality of applications, 42% of all applications fall below the quality threshold. An additional 7% of applications are ineligible. Regarding activities, funding has been granted

¹⁹ Salu, J., Haljasmets, K., Aps, J., Akkermann, C., Kaldmaa, K., Pedjasaar, M. (2021). Erasmus+: Euroopa Noored programmi tulemuste ja mõju-uuring 2015-2020. [European Youth programme results and impact study 2015–2020.] <https://europanoored.eu/erasmus-euroopa-noored-programmi-tulemuste-ja-moju-uuringu-raport/>

²⁰ Kendrali, E., & Raihhelgauz, M., (2023).

for small project applications at a rate of 25% and for large project applications at a rate of 37%. Considering the share of projects exceeding the quality threshold, the overall quality of applications is low, indicating that many writers need assistance in writing cooperation project proposals. However, competition is also high among projects exceeding the quality threshold: half of the projects surpassing the quality threshold in the youth field do not receive funding. **This indicates that demand currently significantly exceeds supply, and the action requires additional funding.**

The projects receiving funding are **relevant, innovative and effective**. Representatives of the interviewed institutions had clearly aligned their projects with the programme's objectives and horizontal priorities. Interviews revealed that projects address important issues for young people, resulting in the creation and sharing of new knowledge and the organisation of educational activities for young people. Representatives of the interviewed institutions were very successful in reaching a large number of young people and establishing international networks. This is evidenced by the continuation of similar themes and projects, often with the same partners. Interviewees provided examples of projects that gained attention due to success, which helped attract funding for their activities from other activities in both Erasmus+ and other programmes.

The main problem highlighted was the errors in the reporting platform (see Section 4.5). Interviewees mentioned situations where delays in funding occurred due to issues with the reporting environment, making activities challenging. One obstacle mentioned was the duration required for evaluating applications, particularly given the short timeframe between receiving responses and the subsequent submission deadline. Overall, however, there were few obstacles, and all issues (except for errors in the reporting environment) were resolved promptly in cooperation with the agency. Applicants have also been aided by the lump-sum grant system, as they plan their activities to fit within the budget.

3.9. Mobility and cooperation projects in the sport field

As the measures in the sports field are the most recent, there is currently limited information available to draw definitive conclusions. Therefore, this section covers both mobility and cooperation projects in the field.

In the sport field, applications for mobility projects have been submitted since 2023. Application statistics show that 59% of applications exceed the quality threshold, 38% of applications fall below the quality threshold, and 3% are ineligible. As this is a new activity, it is natural to have a relatively high number of applications falling below the quality threshold. The agency has provided guidance and training to those who needed it, and project writers have gained experience, which, according to agency representatives, has improved the quality of applications.

However, the issue lies not so much in the quality of applications but in the funding allocated for activities. Although the number of applications is small (26), only 30% of projects exceeding the quality threshold have been funded. This indicates that with the existing very limited budget, it is not possible to support all projects that meet the quality threshold. **Underfunding in the field makes it particularly challenging for new and less experienced applicants to obtain funding due to high competition.** However, it is still too early to assess the effectiveness of funded projects.

4. EFFICIENCY

Overall, the implementation of E+ has become more efficient over time, aligning with the programme's objectives. The following section discusses various aspects related to the efficiency of the programme.

4.1. Cost-effectiveness of actions

Due to insufficient data, problems with data quality and the lack of comparability between data, it is not possible to provide a comprehensive assessment of the cost-effectiveness of all actions and fields in the previous and current Erasmus+ periods.

Looking at efficiency through the impact of projects, all actions, fields and sectors are **efficient as they contribute to the fulfilment of the objectives of strategies and development plans**. Several new opportunities added have contributed to achieving the programme's objectives, increasing target group inclusion and reducing administrative costs.

When examining completed contracts from the 2014–2020 programming period and contracts signed in the 2021–2027 programming period and the number of beneficiaries, KA1 shows the lowest cost per beneficiary compared with the other actions. Specifically, **under KA1, the youth field has the lowest support per person (including administrative costs), and vocational and higher education have the highest support level** (see Annex 3). However, this difference is related to the different average durations of projects. According to agency representatives, KA2 projects are too diverse to look at the amount of support per person or organisation.

From the applicant's perspective, the most cost-effective project is one that receives funding (the effort of preparing the application pays off) or where the administrative burden of preparing the application is lower. Actions where accreditation affects the application process generally impose a lower administrative burden on the applicant, as it is sufficient to submit the necessary information for new period mobilities (activity, duration, number of participants) in a standardised format. **It is most cost-effective to apply for support from vocational and higher education KA1 because, by virtue of the Erasmus+ Charter and accreditations, all applications receive at least some funding. Across the key actions and fields, the highest competition for funding is in KA2 and within the youth field.** Thus, both the accreditation in vocational education and the Charter for Higher Education, introduced in the previous period, and the **mobility accreditations introduced in school and adult education and in the youth field in this period have reduced the administrative burden on institutions**. In interviews, institutions confirmed that they highly value this because, in addition to reducing administrative burden, it helps plan activities for achieving objectives over a longer period.

The cost-effectiveness of applying for support and the success of the application are also influenced by the application conditions and the thoughtfulness and clarity of the application process and forms. **Simplified application processes upon joining the Erasmus+ Charter or upon accreditation reduce the administrative burden of application** for both the applicant and the agency, and they have been well received by both interviewees and previous

studies.²¹ Additionally, smaller-scale cooperation projects, which are suitable for less experienced project managers, received positive mention. However, representatives of target groups continued to highlight that sometimes the same information needs to be provided multiple times in applications and reports.

Although the focus of the evaluation was on decentralised actions, the evaluation also revealed the overall low efficiency of centralised measures for Estonia. The advantages of implementing decentralised actions over centralise activities consistently emerged during the application, project implementation and reporting processes: distributing information about actions to potential target groups is more efficient, the threshold for application is lower, and evaluators of applications and reports are aware of Estonia's situation and needs. Information about centralised actions does not reach target groups in sufficient detail to generate interest in applying, and if there is interest, it gets stuck due to the administrative burden of obtaining a personal identification code (PIC) and the problem of responsibility dispersion. Thus, **Estonia's opportunities for centralised actions are underused.**

4.2. Budget and cost reimbursement

The total budget of the Erasmus+ programme and the funding allocated to Estonia per year have increased during the 2021–2027 period compared with 2014–2020. The management costs of the Estonian agency account for approximately 8% of the budget for Estonian calls for proposals. Considering that the total management cost budget also includes training and networking activities and compulsory governmental co-financing, the actual management cost is even lower, indicating rather effective but not sustainable management.

However, concerning the implementation and efficiency of the programme, the increased budget and additional calls and activities in the new period, the staff size of the agency responsible for managing the programme has remained roughly the same. Only one full-time position has been added. Thus, the necessary human resources for managing the programme have not increased in proportion to its volume, which could be considered inefficient. In reality, it means that staff are overloaded, and according to recommendations in the report, **more workforce should be recruited to manage the programme effectively.** If, for example, enhancing the efficiency of programme implementation and monitoring does not yield enough additional resources for recruiting additional workforce (see Section 4.5), then management costs must be increased to ensure the sustainability of programme implementation.

As shown in Annex 3, approximately 83% of the budget has been allocated to education projects in the periods between 2014 and 2023, with the highest allocation to higher education (42–43%) and the lowest to adult education (5–6%). The youth field has received 16–17% of the budget, while sport receives less than 1% in the current period. Considering the programme's objectives, application competition and project impact, **the proportionality of measures should be reviewed to ensure the most efficient use of the budget.** In a situation where the budget is limited, and the application process is burdensome for applicants, the agency and evaluators, national agencies should have greater freedom to decide on the number of calls in a specific field or action and the budget allocation for that field or action based on the local context.

Different funding models are used for financing projects and reimbursing costs: actual costs, fixed unit costs for various cost items and lump-sum grants. Contrary to the interim evaluation

²¹ KPMG Baltics. (2017). National report on the implementation and impact of Erasmus+ in Estonia.

results of the previous period,²² according to this study and in the opinion of the agency, **covering most of the expenses based on unit costs in KA1 is efficient considering the administrative burden on both the agency and the applicants**, taking into account cost items and the maximum budget for projects and sub-activities. However, **low unit costs** (e.g. travel or living expenses abroad) **do not support achieving the maximum possible impact of projects**. This is especially problematic for participants with fewer economic opportunities, who underuse these. **In KA2, due to the principle of lump-sum support starting in 2022, activities are more flexible, contributing to more efficient project implementation.**

4.3. Collaboration in programme development and implementation

Implementing E+ requires collaboration among multiple stakeholders, including the European Commission and its various units, the implementing agency, the national agency, the Ministry of Education and Research, the auditing institution, and representatives of international and domestic target groups. Cooperation, both domestically and internationally, is generally considered effective. Roles are mostly understood,²³ and the EU and international cooperation department at the Ministry of Education and Research trusts the agency to implement the programme. According to a representative of the Ministry, an independent audit of the agency and evaluations by the Commission have identified only minor deficiencies in programme implementation.

At the national level, **cooperation between the agency, the Ministry of Education and Research, and sectoral organisations is rather effective.** According to the evaluation, the agency and the various policy departments in the Ministry of Education and Research responsible for different education sectors should engage in more substantive cooperation, such as setting priorities.

Internationally, cooperation takes place in various thematic and regional working groups. The national agencies of the three Baltic states meet once a year to discuss programme issues in thematic working groups. Thematic cooperation is also evident in TCA activities: events are organised to discuss certain topics, exchange ideas and learn from experiences. Representatives from the education and youth fields meet to discuss certain topics and train agency staff. In vocational education, there is a joint cooperation group for Baltic and Nordic countries, but according to agency representatives, if possible, a Commission-supported network of vocational education coordinators should also be established to convene meetings. Collaboration is also illustrated by the national agencies' joint position paper on the effects and development opportunities of the programme. However, the interviewees generally noted that making changes to the programme or opposing changes requires closer cooperation with all member states, which is hindered by the infrequency of transnational meetings.

Regarding collaboration with the European Commission, the interviewees pointed out a need for greater consideration of national needs and assessments. As a workload-increasing aspect, situations were mentioned where the Commission introduces new major initiatives that blur the programme activities, do not take into account previously agreed-upon arrangements or reflect aspects that have not yet been agreed upon politically between

²² Ibid.

²³ Estonian Agency for Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps. Managing Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps. Accessed 11.11.2023, <https://euroopanoodred.eu/info/juhtimine/>

member states. This could lead to situations where the decisions and approaches of the E+ Programme Committee do not align with national legislation or strategies.

The evaluation identified **some shortcomings in cooperation between the agency and the EACEA, which implements centralised measures and activities**. This is especially evident regarding cooperation to promote centralised actions: target groups are not well-informed about centralised opportunities, and agency staff lack sufficient awareness of them, as well as adequate resources²⁴ for promoting these opportunities more comprehensively. As a result, Estonian organisations are underrepresented in centrally implemented actions.

4.4. Support and supervision of target groups, fraud prevention

To support applicants, beneficiaries and participants, as well as to supervise their activities, the following measures are implemented: programme promotion, guidance for target groups during application, project implementation and reporting, and training for target groups. The Erasmus+ portal, programme guides and the agency website also serve as tools for supporting target groups.

According to interviews and previous studies,²⁵ target groups are satisfied with the agency's support. From the perspective of beneficiaries, the agency's work has improved over time. Interviewees acknowledged that the support received, information shared and guidance provided have improved over time. The importance of agency-organised training and guidance in writing strong project proposals and successfully implementing projects (a more cost-effective application and implementation process) was repeatedly emphasised. Many representatives of target groups highlighted the value of receiving feedback on applications before submission, although this opportunity is currently underutilised. Applicants highly value agency support and the availability of materials in Estonian, as these contribute to resource optimisation on their end. Applicants avoid using the Erasmus+ portal and English materials if possible. Direct contact with the agency allows applicants to receive project-specific and Estonia-specific answers most effectively.

However, the evaluation identified some agency activities where effectiveness could be improved, and where the agency could support target groups more effectively to enhance their activities. According to interviews, the efficiency of the application process for the applicants and, as a result, the project's impact could presumably be increased by **providing even greater support in finding partners**, for example, by creating additional partner search options and organising partner search events. Confirming previous studies,²⁶ all education and training sector institutions (except universities) require greater support in finding partners. Additionally, the evaluation showed that **outreach should be more effective**. Although the programme has moved towards coherence and comprehensiveness, according to target group interviews, information about significant changes does not reach target groups quickly and clearly enough. For example, applications for KA2 in school education have been submitted for student exchanges, although this activity has been moved under KA1 for this period. However, adult education applicants are unaware that the definition of adult learners

²⁴ Each additional task assigned to the agencies brings the need to review the adequacy of the existing staff. In addition, the need to introduce the possibilities is accompanied by communication costs.

²⁵ Estonian Agency for Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps satisfaction survey. (2023). Education and Youth Board, Estonian Agency for Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps.

²⁶ European Court of Auditors, (2018). Mobility under Erasmus+: Millions of participants and multi-faceted European Added Value, however performance measurement needs to be further improved. Accessed 15 November 2023, https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR18_22/SR_ERASMUS_ET.pdf

participating in mobility (i.e. the target group) was expanded last year, allowing all adult education learners to participate in mobility.

Support for target groups and improving project quality and efficiency should also include support for language learning. Interviews confirmed what was stated in reports submitted to the Commission and in previous studies: **Online Language Support (OLS) is not as effective as face-to-face language courses**. It is not user-friendly or of high quality. Additionally, implementing it places a heavy workload on schools due to system functionality issues. A fixed grant of 150 euros is also offered for language learning, but this is too small for effective language learning and achieving a significant level of proficiency.

Applicants, beneficiaries and participants are supported by measures that are in place to prevent fraud and supervise beneficiaries and participants. According to agency representatives, there are no specific measures in place for successfully detecting and preventing fraud, including the automatic elimination of inappropriate applications. However, fraudulent applications have so far been filtered out through the quality assessment process. Possible violations are mitigated by quality checks on applications, background checks on applicants and communication with applicants. To improve the quality and supervision of funded projects, the following options are available: communication with funding recipients, review of reports, desk checks, system checks and on-the-spot checks after project completion. Online and written communication is combined with face-to-face meetings. According to representatives of the Ministry of Education and Research and the agency, as well as based on the report submitted to the Commission, there have been no significant violations. However, it was evident that conducting these checks on a small scale is worthwhile to ensure compliance with programme conditions. According to the evaluation, the **anti-fraud measures in place are sufficient** considering the size of projects and the detected deficiencies.

To enhance the agency's work in supporting target groups and ensure smoother programme implementation, **programme guides, application and reporting forms** (deemed especially complex for mobility and less-experienced applicants), **contracts should be reviewed and simplified**. Additionally, the **agency's website should include a frequently asked questions section that covers specific questions relevant to many applicants**. Based on the analysis, it would be important to clearly highlight in the guides and/or website what has changed for measures, fields or sectors over the past year or two. Special attention should be paid to small and inexperienced organisations and representatives of target groups to help them understand the programme and measure requirements, and to help them prepare high-quality applications and reports. **Ensuring the smooth functioning of the application and reporting environment is critical, as a significant portion of the agency's workload is devoted to guidance on system malfunctions.**

4.5. Programme implementation and monitoring

Various tools have been created to support management (e.g. E+ link, eForms, Mobility Tool, Lifecard NAM, PMM, BM, application forms, EU Academy, eGrants and a youth portal). Over time, some have also been replaced. Interviews showed that tools supporting application, reporting, partner search, activity monitoring (including international comparisons for feedback), etc. and exchanging data, are highly anticipated and necessary. **However, the relevance and adequacy of existing management-support tools cannot be evaluated**

because they are not yet functioning correctly or are not fully applied and do not significantly contribute to making work more efficient.

The evaluation revealed a lack of solutions or approaches that would allow for a quick, specific, cumulative and accurate overview of programme activities and results. Dashboard data is fragmented across different sub-pages, and due to limited functionality, making data-supported management decisions requires a lot of manual work to get a comprehensive picture of the programme, its actions or achievement of the objectives. Additionally, data obtained from the dashboard requires verification.

Reporting is fragmented and extended over long periods due to **technical issues with the IT system**. Access to projects is not always available, repeated data submissions are often required. Additional systems beyond the portal must be used for reporting to mitigate the risk of data loss, and occasional delays occur for system error fixes. Moreover, feedback forms from project participants are not always saved, project data is not reflected in the action statistics, extracts of programme indicators differ at different times, and project checks are not reflected in the system. Some interviewees also found the reporting system slow and difficult to use. **These issues make reporting by the agency, reports submitted to the Commission and conducting evaluations like this one very burdensome.** Furthermore, these problems may reduce the motivation of previous and potential new applicants to participate in the programme, increasing the agency's promotional costs.

Before devising new solutions, it is crucial to ensure that the fundamental features of the existing IT systems operate smoothly and reliably. Then it would be possible to better assess how much the currently available tools support management, what needs to be added to their development and which functions are completely missing. The evaluation shows that **the refinement of IT systems would reduce management costs, support informed decision-making, and allow agency staff to focus more on promoting the programme and improving project quality.**

Monitoring the achievement of programme objectives (which serves as the basis for adjustments) is also hindered by **the programme's inadequate indicator (monitoring) system**. For example, while the programme aims to include young people with fewer opportunities, the current monitoring of this indicator is insufficient. The inclusion of a young person with fewer opportunities is not reflected in the statistics unless it prompts the use of an additional budget. Additionally, there is no cumulative monitoring of indicators throughout the programming period across various years, which would facilitate an understanding of objective achievement.

5. COHERENCE AND ADDED VALUE

5.1. Benefits and impact of the programme

The Erasmus+ programme enables systematic engagement in sectoral development, internationalisation and exchange of experiences. The benefits and impact of the programme on its participants are significant. **All target groups across the fields consider the programme indispensable, especially because of the mobility activities. Cooperation projects have also been highly valuable for participants, contributing to leaps in development.** The most significant benefits of the programme for individuals and organisations participating in its activities are outlined below.²⁷

Benefits for individuals participating in programme activities:

- **Language proficiency:** Particularly enhanced through KA1 in the youth field, and in the vocational education and school education sectors. Language proficiency improved for 87% of participants in KA1 in the youth field and 93% in vocational education KA1.
- **Tolerance (especially through mobility):** Over 90% of KA1 participants noted increased tolerance, with the highest reported in the youth field and the lowest among higher education mobility participants. In KA1 youth activities, 93% of participants reported improved interaction with people from different cultural backgrounds. Participants stated that mobility experiences provide cultural insights, a sense of solidarity and a better understanding of Europe events.
- **Communication skills and teamwork:** Over 90% of KA1 participants from the previous programming period indicated that their social skills had improved. In KA1 youth activities, 85% of participants developed teamwork skills; and vocational education KA1 participants also saw improvements in their teamwork abilities (rated 4.4 out of 5).
- **Self-confidence and problem-solving skills:** Confidence increased for over 90% of KA1 participants in the previous programming period. In KA1 youth activities, 85% of participants reported increased self-confidence, and 83% noted improved problem-solving skills. Participants in vocational education KA1 assessed that their self-confidence (4.4 out of 5), problem-solving skills (4.3 out of 5) and adaptability (4.5 out of 5) developed significantly.
- **Self-awareness and awareness of personal development needs:** 87% of youth workers participating in KA1 in the youth field developed these skills, and vocational education KA1 participants also saw significant improvement (rated 4.4 out of 5).
- **Project writing and project management:** Especially for those involved in project writing and project management. 57% of youth workers participating in KA1 in the youth field saw improvement in project writing skills.

²⁷ The outline is based on the feedback and interviews of the participants in all fields and activities collected in the Mobility Tool / Beneficiary Module. Also included are findings from other studies on KA1 in the youth field regarding learning mobilities in 2021–2022 (Kendrali, E., & Raihnelgauz, M., (2023)) and on learning mobilities during the previous period in vocational education KA1 in 2014–2023 (Peterson, B., Sanglepp, M., Rekkor, S. (2024). Kutseõppurite võtmepädevuste ja tööelu üldoskuste arendamine Erasmus+ rahvusvahelise õpirände kaudu. [Development of vocational students' key competencies and general working life skills through Erasmus+ international learning mobility.] Research report. <https://eagentuur.ee/materialid/uuringaport-kutseoppurite-votmepadevuste-arendamine/>).

- **Professional skills:** The higher the qualification level of the participant, the more their specific professional skills developed. Among youth workers participating in KA1 youth activities, general knowledge in non-formal education and youth work saw the most development.
- **New experiences and broader horizons:** Over 90% of KA1 participants reported this in the previous programming period. This opportunity is particularly significant for youth with fewer opportunities, allowing them to experience the world beyond Estonia.
- **Higher motivation:** Participation in mobility, as well as experiencing different environments through collaboration projects, leads to increased motivation to work and learn, generate new ideas and apply what has been learned.
- **Positive perception of Estonia:** Particularly highlighted in vocational and school education. People's satisfaction with life in Estonia is higher, and early mobility experiences indirectly contribute to fewer people planning to leave Estonia permanently.
- **Contacts for future collaboration**

Benefits for participating organisations:

- **International contacts and collaboration:** Study exchanges have led to further cooperation the least in school education (just under 50% in 2014–2016) and the most in vocational and higher education.
- **More competent and motivated staff and learners:** See the list of benefits for individuals.
- **Development of teaching, research and other activities** as a result of applying new knowledge, methods and other experiences.
- **Institutional reputation:** There is interest in working and studying at institutions where it is easy to participate in mobility and international cooperation due to existing accreditation.

Participants in KA1 in the youth field recognised the significant impact of mobility on organisations.²⁸ The programme's impact also extends to those who do not directly participate in activities. This is thanks to colleagues and staff who have been involved in various actions through the institution or by interacting with people coming to Estonia for mobility. No detailed comparison was made between participants and non-participants in the programme, and the impact of the programme on non-participants was not studied in this survey.

The European dimension, integration and networking are central to mobility activities, although **the acquired experience may not immediately manifest in participants' behaviour.** Participants from the previous programming period in vocational, school and adult education in Estonia rated the promotion of European citizenship higher than participants from other countries.^{29, 30, 31} Moreover, the Erasmus+ programme is known as a European mobility programme that offers various individuals in Europe, especially young people, the opportunity to learn about and network with other European cultures and countries, thereby strengthening a shared European identity. After Erasmus+ activities, participants were more aware of EU

²⁸ Kendrali, E., & Raihnelgauz, M., (2023)

²⁹ Löffler, R., Steiner, M., Ryssevik, J., Skjervheim, Ø. (2020). Final report TCA Showing and Identifying Impact of Erasmus+ on EU and National Level – Adult Education. <https://oead.at/en/the-oead/downloads/tca>

³⁰ Löffler, R., Pedersen, S.H., Korkala, S., Ryssevik, J. (2019). Final report TCA Showing and Identifying Impact of Erasmus+ on EU and National Level, Part II. <https://oead.at/en/the-oead/downloads/tca>

³¹ Löffler, R., Steiner, M., Ryssevik, J., Skjervheim, Ø. (2021). Final report TCA Showing and Identifying Impact of Erasmus+ on EU and National Level – School Education. <https://oead.at/en/the-oead/downloads/tca>

common values (democracy, human rights and tolerance), with 85% in 2014 and 89% in 2020 acknowledging this. Additionally, over half of the mobility participants (63% in 2014, 67% in 2020) identified more strongly as a European after mobility, although compared with other attitudes and competencies, the change in this aspect was modestly rated. Positive trends were observed in the share of positive responses across all questions over the period.

5.2. Programme cohesion and synergy

The objectives of the programme and national sectoral development plans³² overlap significantly. The programme and its various actions contribute to addressing challenges that are important for Estonia. All beneficiaries interviewed agreed that the programme is crucial for them individually and/or at the organisational level. Looking at sectoral strategies, internationalisation and mobility are longstanding indicators at the national level for higher education, recently introduced for vocational education but not yet present for school education and the youth field.

According to the 2024 programme guide, the general objective of the programme is to support, through lifelong learning, the educational, professional and personal development of people in education, training, youth and sport, in Europe and beyond, thereby contributing to sustainable growth, quality jobs and social cohesion, to driving innovation, and to strengthening European identity and active citizenship. The programme is the main instrument for creating the European Education Area, including supporting European strategic cooperation in the field of education and training based on sectoral action plans. Additionally, the programme promotes youth policy cooperation under the EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027 and the European dimension in sport.

There is some overlap between most of the specific objectives within the programme's fields:

- mobility (for individuals and groups in the field of education and training / non-formal and informal learning in the youth field / sport staff in the field of sport);
- cooperation;
- quality improvement;
- creativity and innovation (at the organisational and policy levels in the education and training field / youth field / sport field);
- inclusion.

In addition to the above, **promoting equal opportunities and excellence in education and training is a specific objective in the education and training field, while promoting active youth participation is a specific objective in the youth field. Promoting equal opportunities could also be a horizontal objective**, meaning it should be equally and clearly prioritised across all programme areas.

KA1 offers individual mobility for both staff and learners, as well as group mobility for learners, in various fields. While the opportunities offered vary to some extent, conditions for staff mobility and learner mobility in the education and training field are quite similar. **For the purpose of simplifying the system, conditions could be even more similar**, as differentiation is not necessary. Below are some differences whose purpose is unclear. Staff mobility is a minimum of two days in all fields, but the minimum duration of individual mobility

³² Estonian Education Strategy 2021–2025, Estonian Youth Sector Development Plan 2021–2035 and Fundamentals of Estonian Sports Policy until 2030.

for learners varies from one to ten days across fields and sectors. In vocational education, there could be an opportunity for individual learner mobility for purposes other than VET skills competitions between 1 and 10 days, as there is demand for participation in training courses, according to the interviews. The sport field is new, and it is the only field where only staff mobility is offered. Language learning support is offered in all fields except education and training in higher education and the youth field. While the absence of language learning support in higher education may be appropriate, it should be provided to youth workers participating in mobility in the youth field.

In addition to international youth exchanges and the inclusion action of the DiscoverEU initiative (designed to support young people with fewer opportunities) and youth worker mobility, youth participation in the youth field is also included. This is the only activity under the action that does not include the promotion of mobility as an objective. This activity supports other programme objectives (active citizenship, common European values, inclusion) and therefore fits within the programme framework, but **since its conditions differ from those of the other mobility activities, this should be highlighted more clearly in the promotion and presentation of youth participation activities.**

Compared with the previous period, the inclusion and diversity objective is better supported by the changes introduced in this period, whereby additional points are awarded during the evaluation of KA1 applications for being a new or less experienced applicant and for including participants with fewer opportunities. In KA2, **the option to undertake small projects added in 2021 also supports inclusion**, allowing for cooperation with less experienced applicants and smaller organisations. This has been positively received and is becoming increasingly popular year by year, especially in school education, where the support allocated to such projects under KA2 is predominant.

The objectives of KA2 cooperation projects are predominantly focused on developing specific fields and fostering innovation, cooperation and mutual learning. However, in the youth field, objectives also include facilitating employment opportunities, active participation and smart youth work. In summary, the variability of objectives for cooperation projects is greater than that for mobility, depending more on priorities in the field.

There is some overlap between the programme fields in terms of which entities can apply for support for activities in which field or sector. For example, many educational institutions can apply for funding for activities in both the higher, vocational or school education sectors and the adult education sector. This overlap has not been analysed separately, but since the suitability of the applicant and project objective is assessed during the application process, **the possibility of applying in multiple areas is not necessarily detrimental.**

The logic between the actions is clear and they are mutually supportive. A certain synergy between the actions is evident – **contacts and networking established under KA1 lead to further cooperation, including under KA2**, and to some extent vice versa. Cooperation projects, in turn, boost further collaboration and the search for funding opportunities outside the programme.

The greater flexibility in the budget introduced in this period helps better accommodate the objectives of the programme and the needs of the target groups, allowing up to 35% of the budget to be reallocated between activities within the field according to needs, priorities and demand at the discretion of the national agency. Additionally, the opportunity to set national priorities is positive, but based on this evaluation, **national targeting could be used more extensively for both target groups and programme fields than before.**

5.3. Programme added value and synergy with other programmes

Erasmus+ plays a crucial role alongside other national budgetary allocations and Structural Fund grants, supporting the implementation of national strategic objectives in the fields of education, youth and sport, as well as the implementation of the EU objectives in the field of education and training and EU Youth Strategy.

The Erasmus+ programme significantly contributes to the internationalisation of the education and youth fields and the development of educational quality. The funding provided by the programme has enabled internationalisation, networking and mobility in all fields of education and training and in the youth field, which would not have been possible to support solely from the national budget. **Without the programme, there would be less extensive mobility across various educational sectors and the youth field. Additionally, the opportunities for international partnerships and cooperation would not be as favourable.** The programme plays a vital role in the development of participants' competencies and organisational capacity (see Section 5.1). The quality of formal and non-formal education, including the use of innovative methods and best practices, would not be at the same level without the programme. Educational institutions benefit from internationalisation due to their enhanced reputation, and internationalisation opportunities also open doors for participants in mobility and cooperation projects.

International mobility and cooperation, including cooperation projects, facilitate the exchange of experiences and learning from each other, mutual learning about countries and cultures (especially in KA1), and the establishment of contacts for the future. They also contribute to the development of supported fields through cooperation, both within EU member states and in third countries. The most popular themes for cooperation projects³³ in previous and current periods confirm that cooperation often focuses on developing new training courses, methods, technologies and digital skills. There has also been an increase in cooperation projects related to environmental and green themes, especially in 2023. Additionally, new learning and teaching methods are at the forefront of thematic mobility. Among mobility projects (including participation projects) and cooperation projects in the youth field, projects focusing on mental and physical health and well-being have been very popular from 2021 to 2023,³⁴ alongside projects aimed at improving democracy, inclusive participation, and developing the quality of and new methods for youth work.

After the completion of the Dora Plus programme (from 1 August 2015 to 31 May 2023), **the E+ programme is the main opportunity for internationalisation in higher education, especially for mobility and particularly for students and young researchers.** In addition to E+, international mobility and cooperation in higher education (for master's students, doctoral students and academic staff) are supported by the Kristjan Jaak scholarships and the EEA/Norway Cooperation Programme in Higher Education.

In the broader education field, the Nordplus programme, which brings together the Nordic and Baltic countries, offers similar opportunities for mobility and cooperation with a simpler application and reporting system, which makes it attractive to applicants. However, the limited funding and geographical focus of some sub-programmes indicate that its opportunities are restricted. In target group interviews, it was suggested that considering the burden of project

³³ Estonian Agency for Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps. (2020). Erasmus+ taotlusvoorud 2014–2020 haridusvaldkonna projektid ja eelarved. [Erasmus+ 2014–2020 calls: projects and budgets in the field of education.] https://infogram.com/haridusvaldaks_kokkuvote-1hmr6g7d3d75o6n

³⁴ Estonian Agency for Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps. (2023). Erasmus+ programmi noortevaldkonna 2021–2023 taotlusvoorutulemused. [Results of the 2021–2023 call of the youth field of the Erasmus+ programme]. <https://infogram.com/lpd3pqr9wrmr5qlim7en152p255uk5qrqp3l>

writing and management, it is reasonable for applicants to start with Nordplus projects, which involve less application and reporting burden and have a smaller budget, and then move on to Erasmus+ projects. Additionally, there are other scholarship opportunities with more limited resources available from Estonia and other countries. Erasmus+ is clearly the most comprehensive among them. Examples were given of some activities, such as **foreign internships in vocational education and youth participation projects, mobility, and cooperation projects, which are only possible thanks to the Erasmus+ programme.**

The Erasmus+ programme is essential for the following reasons:

- The programme supports mobility and cooperation between institutions in all fields to an extent not possible with any other programme.
- KA1 mobilities and exposure to the languages and cultures of other countries increase the tolerance and solidarity of people in Estonia and provide a better understanding of Europe and its developments.
- KA2 cooperation partnerships offer an opportunity for international cooperation to develop one's institution and field, such as adopting new methodologies and finding new partners and opportunities for development through collaboration.
- The funding provided by the programme is crucial for advancing the education, youth and sport fields. For example, the support for higher education, considering the volume of Estonian research funding, is relatively significant and plays a vital role in facilitating international cooperation, teaching, and research. Additionally, the programme's support, including partnerships, is particularly crucial in the youth field, where funding opportunities supporting development in the field are limited.

In addition to EU countries, the E+ programme allows cooperation and activities with associated third countries in all actions. Mobility and cooperation in the higher education sector with non-programme third countries are also allowed. Among non-programme third countries, the highest competition for mobility from 2021 to 2023 was for mobility to Asia and nearby Eastern Partnership countries (e.g. Armenia and Georgia), as well as the United States, Canada and the Pacific region. In 2022 (before the war in Ukraine), there was also competition for mobility to Russia (Region 4). However, budgets allocated for the Western Balkans and Africa are not fully utilised each year.

Due to the increased budget and flexibility of the Erasmus+ programme during the current period, there is a recognised need at the national level to plan the consistency of this programme with others. Furthermore, **it is advisable to carefully consider the objectives and priorities of different fields and activities at the national level.** The national focus is, to some extent, used in targeting Erasmus+ target groups and setting priority themes. For example, the Education and Youth Board's 2022 work programme stated that in the youth field, projects focusing on the quality, innovation and diversity of youth work were preferred among small KA2 projects, while a focus on digitally enhancing the field would be preferred for larger cooperation projects. According to the Education and Youth Board's 2023 report, synergy between E+, ESC and the new ESF programmes is planned to support activities for NEET youths, the quality of local youth work, and information activities and training opportunities for youth workers.

Currently, all activities allow for the selection of topics related to educational quality improvement and other related issues, and adherence to horizontal priorities is assessed. However, national sectoral objectives defined as a result of better cooperation between the Ministry of Education and Research and the agency (see Section 4.3) should be added to

these. Furthermore, the popularity of mental and physical health as topics among youth projects in 2023 confirms that participants' opinions about relevant topics are taken into account, at least in the youth field. **Through more precise setting and coordination of priorities, the programme could be adjusted** to complement sectoral strategic directions and address current concerns most effectively. It is also worth considering how to promote contribution to the substantive fulfilment of horizontal objectives, such as through evaluation criteria.

6. RELEVANCE

Every year, the Erasmus+ programme receives far more applications than it can support, and representatives from various fields believe the programme is open to all interested parties in their respective fields. Thus, the only way to expand the target audience is through increased funding, and the only way to diversify the target audience is by addressing the obstacles mentioned in this section and in previous reports to ensure the activities undertaken are more relevant. While the initial application is already considered as part of the evaluation criteria in this period, there is likely a need to pay even more attention to **disseminating information to less-aware target groups** (especially in adult education). **Simplifying the application and reporting processes would also support expanding the target audience.** Moreover, basing access conditions on various national sectoral priorities (which have not been well covered in the Erasmus+ programme so far) and considering them in applications could increase the programme's impact on sectoral development and target groups.

6.1. Supported activities

Generally, individuals working in education and training, as well as the youth field, are satisfied with the programme, its objectives and funding opportunities, finding that these correspond to their needs. Overall satisfaction with KA1 activities between 2014 and 2023 ranges above 97% among participants from all fields. Recipients from all fields acknowledged in interviews that **the programme and its key actions are indispensable** and crucial for both individuals and institutions. The opportunities provided by the programme are believed to greatly contribute to educational and other development objectives, with no significant target group being excluded from eligibility.

Centralised actions and activities, such as KA3 and Jean Monnet, were also considered important. However, the evaluation indicates that Estonian organisations have participated in these activities to a limited extent. Limited awareness impedes participation. An exception is the general call for proposals for DiscoverEU, which is conducted in cooperation with the European Commission. In addition, the apparent complexity of participating in centralised calls, including the requirement for the applicant to be a legal entity, was identified as a barrier to participation. This means that some Estonian schools (universities of applied sciences, vocational schools and general education schools) can participate in these activities (e.g. cooperation projects, the Jean Monnet action for school education and vocational schools) only if they use the Ministry's personal identification code (PIC). For schools, the application process is not clear, resulting in an increased administrative burden for both the applicant and the Ministry of Education and Research. Additionally, the Ministry cannot monitor the progress of projects, although it is legally responsible for their activities. Therefore, **to ensure the relevance of centralised actions and activities, access conditions should be reviewed, consideration should be given to simplifying the application process, including whether certain centralised actions could be better implemented in a decentralised manner, and awareness among target groups should be increased.**

Thematically, it was found that the programme's objectives meet the needs of the fields, including allowing enough flexibility to tailor mobility or cooperation to the needs of the beneficiaries. Additional themes that could be further supported include **mental health**. The interest in this area is evidenced by the popularity of mental and physical health and well-

being as the most popular themes in KA1 projects in the youth field, ahead of democracy and inclusion.³⁵ The expansion of Erasmus+ to the sport field is crucial, considering the importance of public health and the development needs of sport staff in national development plans. As part of the DiscoverEU activity, participants play the role of DiscoverEU ambassadors, who showcase their travel experiences. This strengthens the benefits and learning gained from mobility.

Regarding mobility, **short-term mobilities were emphasised as suitable for many target groups**, and the flexibility in budgeting for cooperation projects was highly appreciated. The various options for short-term mobilities under KA1 are very popular and provide an opportunity for those who cannot be away from home for long periods – many prefer mobilities of up to a week due to various work and family commitments. In 2023, there was an increased demand for support for mobility in school education, vocational education and adult education, although long-term mobility for school education students is still being explored – in 2023, the first five learners received relevant support. In vocational education, students would like to participate in shorter courses in addition to internships and participation in VET skills competitions, similar to workers.

KA2 cooperation projects have been welcomed by all aware institutions in every field, as these enable them to achieve objectives for which funding cannot be found elsewhere. In the new period, KA2 cooperation projects offer more opportunities, with **the addition of small-scale projects opening up possibilities for new activities for new target groups with less experience with the programme**. Especially in school education, the increased budget for KA2 and the popularity of small-scale projects are noted, and they align well with the objectives, needs, and skills of school education. The flexible budgeting method is also highly regarded.

The opportunity offered in higher education to combine online learning with short-term mobility (blended mobility and blended intensive programmes) is widely used. However, one of the main reasons for this is likely the opportunity to keep the physical mobility component relatively short. The online learning component is relatively unregulated in this regard, and therefore it is not currently clear how purposefully it is implemented – in other words, what the benefits of online learning are compared with if participants were limited to the short-term physical mobility component. It is not excluded that due to the lack of regulation, in many cases, the online learning component is simply a formality, so **an assessment of blended mobility would require a more thorough review and gathering feedback from the target group**. Based on the results, consideration should be given to regulating or discontinuing this in favour of shorter-term mobility – allowing for five-day short-term mobility also in bachelor's and master's studies. Representatives from other fields stated in the interviews that the web is well suited to preparing the preparatory part of a project. However, there was no desire for additional online learning options, as it was found that a large part of the so-called collateral effect is lost when communicating and learning online.

Although it is generally felt that opportunities in the education, youth and sport fields are open to all interested parties, certain factors hinder the participation of specific target groups. For example, Erasmus+ is still known primarily as a higher-education mobility programme. This may hinder the application of potential target groups as the programme's opportunities are not immediately associated with their target group and activity. In adult education, there is confusion about who the target group is – various target groups seeking funding appreciate this opportunity greatly, but some potential target groups (such as libraries) have yet to fully

³⁵ Ibid.

benefit from the programme's opportunities. Awareness among young people that they can engage directly in Erasmus+ youth activities without the involvement of an institution is limited. Therefore, it is crucial to introduce the programme's opportunities even more through activities tailored to specific target groups and less relying on the programme's name. Alternatively, enhancing the connection between the programme and potential activities for the target group could be beneficial. When promoting the agency and programme, it could also be analysed **how well potential users become acquainted with all possible activities** – for example, by studying relevant user experience or service design. It is also necessary to review whether the various websites direct users to move between fields.

In higher education, especially in long-term mobility, **participation in mobility is mainly hindered by work, family commitments, the small size of the grant, and the difficulty of aligning the curriculum; in school and vocational education, emotional and psychosocial factors also hold back learners**, including fear of a new environment, lack of motivation or need, and (mental) health problems. For school education, the uncertainty about the security situation due to the war in Ukraine was also highlighted in 2023. Thus, broader attitudes and fears also hinder participation in mobility.³⁶

For older participants, the greatest barrier to participation in the programme is language proficiency and the complexity of acquiring or improving it before mobility. Options include improving language skills, sending multiple individuals on mobility together and fostering confidence through best practices, encouraging individuals to go abroad even with relatively modest language skills.

Since the currently available information³⁷ suggests that applicants mainly come from larger urban centres and young people from rural areas are left out, **regional representation in programme activities** (or at least in applications) **should be analysed more thoroughly**. This is particularly important in school education, youth and sport, where institutions should be more evenly represented across Estonia. In this regard, the youth field has set a good example, paying attention to this aspect since 2022.

While opportunities for participation in the programme have been enhanced for newcomers, **finding partners remains a challenge** for less networked, smaller institutions and individuals entering the project arena. This challenge is prevalent across all programme fields except higher education and vocational education, where finding partners is comparatively easier and more dependent on the specific discipline. This is especially the case for KA2, but to some extent also for KA1. At the same time, in 2021 and 2023, there were fewer new grant recipients in higher education and the youth field. While this trend is expected in higher education due to the limited circle of institutions, in the youth field, it suggests that the same institutions apply repeatedly despite a wider pool of potential beneficiaries.

6.2. Budget and cost reimbursement

Increased budget flexibility throughout the programme for the current period contributes at the national level to the possibility of meeting the demands and needs of applicants for funding. KA1 has become more flexible in terms of budgeting rules, but according to interviews, programme management is still considered rather labour-intensive.

³⁶ Jurkov, K. & Kivistik, K., (2023).

³⁷ Kendrali, E., & Raihnelgauz, M., (2023).

On the other hand, the flexibility in budgeting for KA2 cooperation projects has been well received by the target group.

Simplified or **lump-sum grants have reduced the administrative burden on institutions**, but they have not affected the use of mobility or the choice of target countries. Rather, unit cost ceilings affect participation in mobility. The unit cost ceilings associated with simplified grants for travel expenses, living expenses, daily allowances and salaries have remained significantly below the cost of living, although the increased ceilings from 2024 may provide some relief.

So far, **for KA1 activities, a certain level of self-financing contribution from individuals, institutions or both has been expected**. For example, interviews in the education and training field (except for higher education) revealed that organisational support grants are also used to cover travel expenses for mobility. Satisfaction with the size of mobility scholarships also varies somewhat by sector: the least satisfaction is in higher education, where accommodation and other living expenses are more dependent on market conditions (such as the shortage or unsuitability of dormitory spaces) than in school or vocational education. Reimbursement based on unit costs in KA2 projects has been well received by the target groups and praised for its low administrative burden on implementers, although these projects have not yet been completed for results to be evaluated.

Interviews also highlighted **the complexity of the feedback form**. The feedback form used to assess the programme's impact and effectiveness could be improved both through IT system development and by making the questions more specific. For example, the feedback question "Do you identify more strongly as a European after participating in the activity?" causes confusion among respondents and does not accurately reflect the actual impact due to the question's ambiguity. Interviewees noted that the question could be interpreted as implying that the respondents were not Europeans before participating in the programme. Even if the question was not interpreted this way, respondents still had questions about how to evaluate being a European. Feedback surveys should also be critically reviewed for participants with educational special needs who may struggle with giving feedback. **Therefore, we recommend involving sectoral experts in refining the feedback questions.**

Issues with the inclusion of participants with fewer opportunities are discussed in more detail in Section 3.3. The administrative burden of the programme and the experience with the application and reporting system somewhat deter novice project writers, who are particularly abundant in the youth field, among young people and also among municipal youth field workers. To a lesser extent, this is also the case in other fields, such as vocational and school education, especially in kindergartens.

Although the programme generally fulfils its objective of promoting environmental awareness, the evaluation shows that sustainable travel is limited to neighbouring countries due to Estonia's geographical location. Representatives from the interviewed institutions highlighted that meeting this objective is often impractical in Estonia compared to Central European countries due to unreasonable time consumption. Therefore, compared with, for example, Central European countries, Estonian applicants are in an unequal position. **When applying the criterion of environmentally friendly travel, consideration should be given to the country's geographical location and existing transportation options.**

6.3. COVID-19 and flexibility measures related to the war in Ukraine

The COVID-19 pandemic hindered both KA1 and KA2 activities. According to a youth field survey,³⁸ three-quarters of respondents considered the pandemic to have significantly affected youth work, particularly events (many of which moved outdoors or online). For many, project budgets decreased: 31% of respondents reported a decrease for local projects, 43% for national projects, and 60% for international projects. **Most mobility activities in the education field were interrupted**, especially in vocational and school education.³⁹ Restarting the programme in both KA1 and KA2 after a complete standstill was challenging. As contacts were person-based and many employment relationships ended, connections were severed. While mobility in higher education has since recovered, **mobility has not resumed in fields such as healthcare**. Implementing the programme was also more challenging for the agency. With fewer applications in 2021 and 2022, a new call for proposals had to be organised, which was demanding for the team.

Flexibility measures during the COVID-19 pandemic were necessary and suitable for the target group. The most important was extending contracts, which allowed many institutions to complete their projects. Representatives of institutions noted in interviews that it was challenging to communicate the flexibility measures because they were constantly changing, and between two periods, Mobility Tool was replaced with the Beneficiary Module,⁴⁰ which brought many issues. **Moving online was the only way for many to continue activities during the pandemic.** Although a fully online format has not proven effective for activities, this shift has promoted the use of various methods and digital skills, and in some cases, hybrid activities are necessary and natural.

Using measures related to the war in Ukraine – that is, involving Ukrainian citizens as participants with fewer opportunities – has been beneficial but not necessarily for all institutions. This means that some institutions quickly and extensively used them while others used them less. However, fitting projects into flexibility measures has been somewhat challenging in higher education because issues have arisen.

³⁸ Horta, A & Pitschmann, A. (2022). Research project on the impact of the corona pandemic on youth work in Europe (RAY-COR). https://researchyouth.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/RAY_COR_case_study_draft_20221130.pdf

³⁹ Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps. (2022). Survey on the impact of COVID-19 on learning mobility activities. <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/document/coronavirus-learning-mobilities-impact-survey-results>

⁴⁰ Erasmus+ reporting environments of the previous and current period

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The programme is relevant, effective and necessary for all supported actions, fields and sectors. It promotes people's educational, professional, and personal development through lifelong learning in education, training, youth, and sport, and it contributes to promoting inclusion and diversity, digital transformation, environmental awareness, and internationalisation. The programme thus contributes to achieving both EU and Estonian strategic objectives in the fields of education, youth and sport. **The evaluation results show that, without the programme, it would be difficult to find national systems that could provide an equivalent substitute for Erasmus+ funding and support for mobility, transnational partnerships, cooperation and youth participation projects.** Both KA1 (mobility) and KA2 (cooperation) lead to improved quality in formal and non-formal education, including the use of innovative methods and the adoption of other best practices.

The benefits of the programme to participating individuals and institutions are diverse. Learning mobilities significantly increase the tolerance and solidarity of Estonian people and provide a better understanding of Europe and its affairs. In addition to contributing to the programme's objectives (learning mobilities, improving education and youth work quality, international cooperation, innovation, inclusion and specific objectives), participation in the programme develops a wide range of competencies (communication skills, teamwork, language skills, etc.). Furthermore, participants' self-confidence and motivation grow significantly, leading to more competent and motivated teams in participating institutions. After experiencing different environments and conditions, participants have a better perspective on where their domestic efforts stand compared with other countries and can assess both existing positives and areas for development.

Monitoring programme implementation and evaluating results and impacts is time-consuming and complex, and the information collected can be interpreted in various ways. Making management decisions and carrying out communication activities require up-to-date, accurate and unambiguous information. However, currently, the information collected about projects is sometimes inadequate. This is due to issues with the IT system, incomplete project data or statistics that fail to capture all essential aspects, such as the participation of youth with fewer opportunities or contributions to horizontal priorities. Additionally, feedback survey results are open to interpretation, and there is no possibility for a rapid cumulative overview of key indicators, such as the duration of learning mobilities or participant backgrounds. Various studies conducted concerning the programme are valuable but not uniformly available across all fields. Due to variations in starting points, these studies do not offer a comprehensive overview of the programme.

Compared with the previous period, significant steps have been taken to improve the efficiency of programme implementation and simplify it. Lump-sum grants in KA2 and unit costs in KA1 have reduced administrative burdens for both beneficiaries and the agency. Accreditations of participating organisations have been well received in all fields. The evaluation focused on decentralised activities, but it was observed that awareness of centralised actions (e.g. Jean Monnet) and participation in them are rather low, possibly necessitating improvement in conditions (e.g. allowing schools to participate in projects using their own personal identification code (PIC)) and/or outreach.

Increasing the programme's impact requires even better outreach to new participants.

While new participants can also engage in activities through repeatedly supported organisations, new institutional projects hold greater potential for reaching new target groups. Outreach is crucial. Information about programme actions and activity conditions, including any changes, does not reach all target groups, particularly those who have not been eligible target groups before. Additionally, there is uncertainty in interpreting conditions. At the same time, the evaluation shows that when new target groups are reached, it is difficult for new participants (institutions or individuals) to access funding because competition is intense. There is not enough funding for all applications that meet the quality threshold (in mobility, particularly in the youth field, but also in the education and training field in the school education and vocational education sectors). Therefore, ramping up promotional efforts for activities appears unnecessary without additional measures that support the participation of new participants.

Although the evaluation identified many good examples of reaching and engaging participants with fewer opportunities, **the programme's capacity to involve participants with fewer opportunities remains underused.** According to the survey, vocational and school education institutions use support for learners with fewer opportunities less frequently. The reason is a lack of awareness of how to use the support measures. Currently, using these, especially additional financial support, is perceived as a complex bureaucratic process requiring excessive documentation. Therefore, there is a need to raise awareness about the practical use of support measures. A similar need likely exists in the adult education sector.

From the perspectives of the target groups, various obstacles and areas for improvement exist in participating in the programme. IT system issues cause a significant burden for both the agency and the target groups. In addition, participation in the programme is hindered or complicated by the application and reporting system, which is partially related to the IT system. Other obstacles include difficulty finding partners, the inefficiency of language learning opportunities, and limitations on sustainable travel within Estonia. Another obstacle raised is the relatively low unit costs, despite recent increases, particularly concerning the coverage of travel and living expenses abroad. As a result, many institutions use organisational support grants to compensate for this.

Ensuring programme effectiveness and efficiency relies heavily on guidance, assistance, training and promotional activities for target groups, where the agency has done an excellent job but still has room for improvement.

Here is a brief summary of the programme's effectiveness and major challenges categorised by actions and fields:

- **KA1:** The number of participants in learning mobilities is on an upward trend, and accessibility has improved during the current period. The demand is now better met in both the education and training and youth and sport fields. However, there are currently high-quality providers available for all additional funding directed towards learning mobilities, regardless of the field. Erasmus+ is indispensable in all programme fields because few other funding opportunities exist for carrying out learning mobilities. Without the programme, it would not be possible to achieve the same level of added value. The activities contribute significantly to Estonia's strategic objectives in the education and youth fields. In summary, the action is effective, but the main obstacles are the limitation

of resources and the diversity or fragmentation of activity opportunities (including conditions).

- **KA2:** Demand for the action significantly exceeds supply and has grown over the years. Projects funded under this measure are relevant, innovative and effective, providing participants with valuable, often first-time experiences in strategic cooperation. Projects often create new competencies that enrich the fields of education and training, youth, and sport. The programme's flexibility and simplification measures have also been effective.
- **Higher education sector:** The demand, supply and quality of learning mobilities are best balanced here. Flexibility measures for learners have enhanced accessibility, but accessibility remains an issue for some participants with potentially fewer opportunities, despite improvements in flexibility measures.
- **Vocational education sector:** The programme opportunities are seen as very beneficial, and satisfaction with various activities is high. Difficulties arise in engaging and supporting target groups with fewer opportunities. Lack of language skills and other psychosocial factors hinder the participation of learners (less so for staff) in learning mobilities. In addition, there is a demand for learners to participate in short-term learning mobilities of different lengths and purposes, such as training.
- **School education sector:** There is quite good awareness of programme opportunities, coupled with high satisfaction levels, and significant benefits are observed for both participating individuals and institutions. There is room for improvement in long-term learning mobilities for learners. The inhibiting factors include limited project management experience/skills, difficulty integrating into the curriculum, insufficient language skills and psychosocial factors such as fear of an increased workload.
- **Adult education sector:** There is great satisfaction with the opportunities offered through the programme, but a challenge arises from the diverse applicant pool, coupled with a relative scarcity of the desired target groups. Some target groups, such as libraries, have already been separately contacted. In such a broad field, it would be advisable to more boldly promote and encourage the participation of desired target groups according to priorities.
- **Youth field:** E+, in the form of both learning mobilities and cooperation projects, is a very important support for underfunded areas. Demand significantly exceeds supply both in KA1 (mobility) and KA2 (cooperation). Due to the nature of the field, where, among other things, young and inexperienced workers operate under conditions of high turnover, despite various support activities from the agency, project writing and project management are perceived as difficult.
- **Sport field:** As a standalone field, it has received the least attention and resources so far. Learning mobility projects have been funded decentrally since 2023. The number of applications is small in the adult education sector, and the quality of applications has not reached the same level as in other fields. Only 30% of projects that have exceeded the quality threshold are being funded. It is too early to assess the effectiveness of funded projects. Underfunding in the field makes it particularly difficult for applicants with little project experience to obtain funding.

Based on the conclusions, we have formulated the following recommendations:

1. **Continue funding E+, implementing current actions and developing the programme.**
2. **Define specific measurable indicators for priorities.** Improve existing indicators to enhance the monitoring of priority objectives to ensure that the programme achieves its objectives. Currently, the programme's priorities are not measurable, making it impossible to assess the impact on priority topics. If priorities include green transition or inclusion, it is not sufficient to use only the number of topics classified under that theme as an indicator. We recommend involving experts in developing metrics to provide input for the development of participant feedback questionnaires. Relevant feedback must also be accompanied by a user-friendly feedback platform.
3. **Reduce administrative burden and improve programme accessibility.** Although the administrative burden of the programme on participants has been reduced compared with the previous period, some processes should be further simplified to make the programme more accessible to participants and reduce the administrative burden for both national agencies and applicants. The issue is particularly acute for centralised activities (especially activities where Estonia is modestly represented, such as Jean Monnet) and for engaging participants with fewer opportunities. For measures where demand significantly exceeds supply, and the application process is more administratively burdensome (e.g. cooperation projects in the education field), agencies should be granted more flexibility in determining the number of calls for proposals. For centralised activities less represented across various countries, barriers to participation, conditions for participation and the adequacy of promotional activities need to be reviewed. Decentralising the Jean Monnet actions should also be considered.
4. **Ensure the reliable functioning of the IT system.** Streamlining IT systems is very important as it reduces management costs, improves programme monitoring, supports programme management at the agency, and reduces the administrative burden of the application and reporting process for the programme beneficiary. Once the IT system operates reliably, it will be feasible to evaluate whether additional management-supporting tools are necessary to improve programme efficiency.
5. **Monitor effectiveness and gather feedback.** The feedback systems established by the Commission require improvement in order to collect more accurate and reliable information about the impact of the programme, including the inclusion of participants with fewer opportunities. Feedback in its current form does not allow for data-driven conclusions. Currently, questions are not always clear to the target group. A separate improvement area is adapting feedback surveys for target groups with special needs so that they can be completed without significant external assistance.
6. **Ensure programme adaptability and flexibility.** The programme has successfully adapted to rapidly changing circumstances, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. More flexible measures to continue activities in emergencies have been beneficial, and flexibility will also be important in the future. However, the precise conditions for such simplification measures need to be reviewed, as in some cases, additional funding has been small and conditions have been overly restrictive, leading to a lack of utilisation of these opportunities.
7. **Monitor the proportionality of field budgets and increase budget flexibility between programme fields.** The evaluation did not show clear differences in the effectiveness of actions between the programme fields. However, there are clear differences in competition for funding between the various fields. Therefore, we recommend reviewing the

proportions of field budgets. In addition, greater budget flexibility between programme fields should be considered. Flexibility in budget use between different fields would allow national agencies to fund more activities in the youth and sport fields (both KA1 and KA2) if demand for funding exceeds supply significantly in one field. Flexibility would enable national agencies to decide on prioritisation within actions. To better respond to emergencies, flexibility between different actions within a field, as demonstrated in the post-COVID-19 situation in the education and training field, should continue.

8. **Conduct a more in-depth evaluation of blended mobilities as an activity.** Since there is no clarity on how purposeful the online learning part is, more in-depth analysis and gathering of relevant feedback from the target group are required for evaluating blended mobilities. This is necessary to decide whether the activity requires more regulation or could be limited to short-term physical mobility, which currently constitutes one aspect of the activity.
9. **Develop a functional language-learning support scheme.** Limited language proficiency is a barrier for many potential participants. The Online Language Support (OLS) system does not fulfil its language learning purpose, and the language learning support grant is too small to significantly improve language proficiency. This situation could be addressed by increasing language learning support grants or improving the OLS system. In the case of improving the system, it is important to study the user-friendliness of the system based on feedback from previous users.

ANNEXES

Annex 1. Evaluation questions

The evaluation addressed the following questions, as outlined in the evaluation guidance note. The section numbers containing the corresponding answers are indicated after each question. As the questions sometimes overlap with others or cover several topics or evaluation criteria, responses may be distributed across different sections to avoid repetition.

Effectiveness

3.1.1. To what extent have the various programme fields (education and training, youth and sport) both within Erasmus+ 2021–2027 and Erasmus+ 2014–2020 delivered the expected outputs, results and impacts in Estonia? What factors have contributed to the achievement of results? What factors have hindered the achievement of results? To what extent are there differences in the effectiveness of key actions (mobility, cooperation among organisations and institutions, support for policy development and cooperation, and Jean Monnet)? Are there differences between programme areas? What would help make the programme's key actions more effective? (Sections 3.1, 3.5–3.9)

3.1.2. What are the results and long-term impacts of the Erasmus+ 2014–2020 in Estonia? (Section 3.2)

3.1.3. What is the quality of Erasmus+ 2021–2027 applications? What measures could be taken to improve the quality of applications and awarded projects in your country considering the doubling of budget for the 2021–2027 programme cycle? (Section 3.1)

3.1.4. To what extent has Erasmus+ 2021–2027 had a transformative effect in Estonia on systems, values and norms, in particular with respect to the four horizontal priorities of the programme: inclusion and diversity, digital transformation, green transition (environment and fight against climate change), and participation in democratic life and civic engagement? Which horizontal priorities did the programme have the highest impact on through its actions? (Section 3.2)

3.1.5. How have the key actions in different programme fields of Erasmus+ 2021–2027 affected people with fewer opportunities in Estonia who traditionally do not engage in transnational or international activities? What impact has the Framework of Inclusion Measures and of the Inclusion and Diversity Strategy had on promoting accessibility to funding for a wider range of organisations and on reaching out to more participants with fewer opportunities? (Section 3.3)

3.1.6. To what extent have the forms of cooperation and the types of actions under Erasmus+ 2021–2027 and Erasmus+ 2014–2020 influenced policy developments in the fields of education and training, youth and sport in Estonia? Which actions of the programmes are the most effective considering the needs of Estonia? Are there marked differences between the different fields? (Sections 3 and 4.1)

3.1.7. What specific approaches (such as co-financing, promotion or others) have target groups taken in order to try to enhance the effects of Erasmus+ 2021–2027 and Erasmus+

2014–2020 in Estonia? To what extent have these approaches been effective? Can any particular points for improvement be identified? (Section 3.4.)

3.1.8. To what extent are the results of Erasmus+ 2021–2027 and Erasmus+ 2014–2020 adequately being disseminated and exploited in Estonia? Where can possibilities for improvement be seen? (Section 3.4.)

3.1.9. To what extent are the effects likely to last in your country after the intervention ends, both cumulatively and at the level of each implemented grant (including the key action of cooperation among organisations and institutions)? (Sections 3.2, 5.1 and 5.2)

3.1.10. What if the Erasmus+ programme had not existed? Would the relevant sectors (higher education, school education, adult education, vocational education and training, youth and sport) in your country be supported in the same way and to a comparable extent? (Sections 3.2 and 5.3)

3.1.11. How did the COVID-19 pandemic impact the implementation of the programme in Estonia, and what was the effect of the measures taken to react to the consequences of the pandemic? What is the broader impact of the flexibility associated with blended learning during the COVID-19 pandemic on long-term and short-term mobility? Is there a shift in the preferred format of physical mobility, such as a preference for blended activities, short-term mobility only or a reduced willingness to engage in physical mobility altogether? (Section 6.3)

3.1.12. What was the effect in Estonia of the measures taken in the frame of the programme implementation to provide a reaction to the consequences of the Russian invasion of Ukraine? (Section 6.3)

Efficiency

3.1.13. What is the cost-effectiveness of various actions (clusters of actions) of Erasmus+ 2021–2027 and 2014–2020 in Estonia? (Sections 4.1 and 6.1)

3.1.14. To what extent, compared with the 2014–2020 programme, is the budget size appropriate and proportionate to what Erasmus+ 2021–2027 is set out to achieve? To what extent is the distribution of funds across the programme fields and key actions appropriate in relation to their level of effectiveness and utility? (Sections 4.2 and 6.2)

3.1.15. How efficient is the cooperation between the different actors involved in the implementation and supervision of the programme (Commission services, Erasmus+ Committee, executive agency, national authorities, national agencies, independent audit bodies, international organisations)? To what extent does the Commission fulfil its guiding role in the process? How has this changed between the two programming periods? What are the reasons for potential changes? What have been the challenges in cooperation? What are the areas for possible improvement in the implementation of Erasmus 2021–2027 or a successor programme? (Section 4.3)

3.1.16. To what extent are the measures applied by the national agency for monitoring and supporting applicants, beneficiaries (including small and newcomer organisations) and participants effective and proportionate? What are the areas for improvement/simplification, considering the need for a smooth and effective implementation of the programme? (Sections 4.4 and 4.5)

3.1.17. To what extent have simplification measures put in place by the Commission, such as the system of simplified grants and accreditation system, resulted in a reduction of the administrative burden for national agencies, programme beneficiaries and participants? Are

there differences across actions or fields? What elements of the programme could be changed to further reduce the administrative burden and simplify the programme's management and implementation, without unduly compromising its sound management, results and impact? (Sections 4.1, 4.2, 4.4 and 6.2)

3.1.18. To what extent do the indicators identified for the Erasmus+ 2021–2027 programme in the programme regulation correspond to the monitoring purposes at the national level? For example, with the fourth indicator of the first strategic objective of the Education Development Plan 2021–2035 (short-term mobility outside of Estonia). How could the overall management and monitoring system be improved? (Sections 3.1 and 5.3.)

3.1.19. To what extent are the new management support tools consistent with the Erasmus+ programme needs and architecture? Which additional features would you recommend for future developments? (Section 4.5)

3.1.20. To what extent have the antifraud measures allowed for the prevention and timely detection of fraud in your country? (Section 4.4)

Relevance

3.1.21. To what extent do the Erasmus+ 2021–2027 objectives regarding the EU policy agendas in the fields of education and training, and youth and sport continue to address the needs or challenges they are meant to help with? Are these needs or challenges (still) relevant in the Estonian context? Have the needs or challenges evolved in such a way that the objectives of Erasmus+ 2021–2027 or its successor programme need to be adjusted? (Section 6)

3.1.22. To what extent are the needs of different stakeholders and sectors in Estonia addressed by the Erasmus+ 2021–2027 objectives? How successful is the programme in attracting and reaching target audiences and groups within different fields of the programme's scope? How well is the Erasmus+ programme known to the education and training, and youth and sport communities in Estonia? In case some target groups are not sufficiently reached, what factors are limiting their access and what actions could be taken to remedy this? What are the reasons for the limited participation of certain target groups? Are there target groups who chose not to participate or are there always external factors preventing them? (Sections 6.1 and 6.2)

3.1.23. To what extent is the design of Erasmus+ 2021–2027 oriented and adapted towards the hard-to-reach groups, i.e. people with fewer opportunities or groups of the population who traditionally do not engage in transnational or international activities? In case some target groups are not sufficiently reached in Estonia, what factors are limiting their access and what actions could be taken to remedy this? (Sections 3.3 and 6.1)

3.1.24. What is the relevance of Erasmus+ 2021–2027 compared with the relevance of Erasmus+ 2014–2020 from the Estonian point of view? Has the relevance been improved in Erasmus+ 2021–2027? Are the new activities and flexibility measures created in the Erasmus+ 2021–2027 programme relevant? (Section 6)

Coherence

3.1.25. To what extent are the objectives of different programme fields within Erasmus+ 2021–2027 consistent and mutually supportive? What evidence exists of cooperation between the different programme fields and actions? How well do different actions work together? To what

extent do inconsistencies, overlaps or other disadvantageous issues exist between the programme fields, and how are they dealt with? (Section 5.2)

3.1.26. To what extent has Erasmus+ 2021–2027 proved to be complementary to other national and international programmes available in Estonia in the fields of education and training, youth and sport? To what extent is Erasmus+ 2021–2027 building effective synergies or interactions with other programmes at a national or regional level and other EU or international programmes with complementary objectives available in Estonia? What evidence exists of synergies and complementarities between Erasmus+ and other EU, national or regional programmes? Is it possible to identify any inconsistencies, overlaps or other disadvantageous issues with other programmes? (Section 5.3)

3.1.27. What is the coherence of Erasmus+ 2021–2027 compared with the coherence of Erasmus+ 2014–2020 from the point of view of Estonia? Has coherence improved in the Erasmus+ 2021–2027 programme? (Sections 4.1 and 5.2)

European added value

3.1.28. What is the additional value and benefit resulting from EU activities, compared to what could be achieved by similar actions initiated only at the national level in Estonia? What does Erasmus+ 2021–2027 offer in addition to other education and training support schemes available at the national level in Estonia? What possibilities do you see to adjust Erasmus+ 2021–2027 or its successor programme in order to increase its European added value? (Section 5.3)

3.1.29. To what extent does the Erasmus+ programme contribute to developing knowledge in European integration matters, to raising awareness about the EU common values and to fostering a European sense of belonging in Estonia? (Sections 3 and 5.1)

3.1.30. To what extent does Erasmus+ 2021–2027 promote cooperation between EU member states and third countries associated with the programme? And between these countries and third countries not associated with the programme? (Sections 3 and 5.3)

3.1.31. What are the benefits and added value of Erasmus+ 2021–2027 and Erasmus+ 2014–2020 for individuals or organisations participating in the programme compared to non-participants in Estonia? What impact does the Erasmus+ programme have on Estonian students who do not participate in mobility but study with exchange students or attend lectures by teachers from other countries participating in mobility? (Sections 3 and 5.1)

3.1.32. To what extent are the results of Erasmus+ 2021–2027 and Erasmus+ 2014–2020 sustainable beyond the projects' duration in Estonia? (Sections 3, 5 and 6)

Additional questions

3.1.33. How have the simplified grants introduced in the programme affected the participation of Estonian beneficiaries in programme activities, including participants' motivation and the choice of target countries? (Section 6.2)

3.1.34. How do beneficiaries and the parties involved in the implementation of the programme evaluate the internal and external coherence, adequacy and relevance of the simplification? (Sections 6.1 and 6.2)

Additional questions for the Estonian-language version of the report

3.1.35. How have the programme actions affected participants' competitiveness in the labour market and in their subsequent studies, including their learning motivation and skills? Do the programme actions help to prevent, solve and/or compensate for the mismatch between skills and the needs of the labour market? (Sections 3 and 5.1)

3.1.36. How can the target group be expanded to enhance the relevance and impact of the actions? For example, which employers should still be involved? (Section 6.1)

3.1.37. What is the beneficiaries' satisfaction level with the programme opportunities? Who are the non-participants within the target group, and what are the reasons for their non-participation (barriers)? (Section 6.1)

3.1.38. What has been the impact of the actions on the ability of the participating institutions to provide a high-quality service and contribute to the achievement of strategic objectives in the field of education and youth in Estonia? (Sections 3 and 5.1)

Annex 2. Methodology

Below is a more detailed description of the methods used in the evaluations presented in Section 2:

- Document analysis, including the analysis of programme documents,⁴¹ related strategies and development plans, and studies (both about the Erasmus+ programme and the respective fields, especially the youth field). The analysis aimed to provide an overview of the programme's structure, conditions, priorities, changes, implementation and connections to sectoral and other objectives, as well as the programme's benefits and impacts based on previous studies.
- Quantitative data on programme projects:
 - From the Dashboard: Overview of projects applied for, funded and implemented (E+ Reporting (MFF 2014–2020) and E+ and ESC (MFF 2021–2023)), including data on participants, participant feedback and satisfaction levels (participant survey indicators).
 - Quantitative data regarding the programme provided by the agency, such as data on applications, funded and completed projects (participants, budgets, application scores) by fields.
 - Agency infographics: information on applications.
- Individual and group interviews: Abbreviated interviews in the report (10 interviews with 41 participants) aimed at obtaining assessments from the target group regarding the programme, its conditions, the relevance of changes, and the benefits/impacts on participants.
 - Introductory interviews with representatives from the Ministry of Education and Research and the agency (3 interviews with 9 participants).
 - Focus group interviews with representatives of target groups (representatives of institutions); a total of 7 interviews were conducted with 32 participants, which were divided based on actions and fields as follows:
 - KA1 higher education
 - KA1 vocational education
 - KA1 school education
 - KA1 adult education
 - KA1 youth field
 - KA2 education field
 - KA2 youth and sport field
- Topics covered in the interviews:
 - Awareness of the programme, its target groups and new activities.
 - Barriers to participation in the programme and areas for improvement
 - Simplification and flexibility measures in the new programming period
 - Benefits, impacts and sustainability of programme activities
 - Added value of the programme (including compared with other programmes)
- Written feedback and clarifications received from four representatives of the target groups during the outreach process for the study interviews

⁴¹ Programme guidance notes, agency work programmes and reports to the Commission, application and reporting forms, slides of information seminars.

- Validation of results through focus group interviews with experts (five participants) and a validation seminar with representatives of the commissioning bodies
- Working meetings, questions and discussions with representatives of the commissioning bodies (the Ministry of Education and Research and the agency) by phone and email

Annex 4. Participants' assessment of key competence development in the youth field and education field sectors

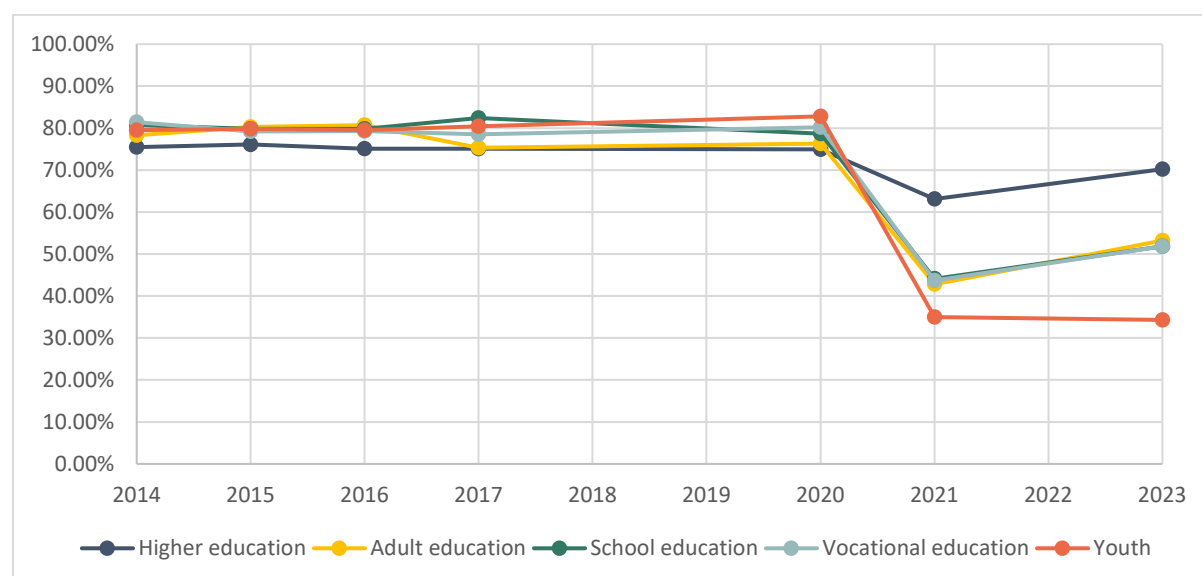


Figure 1. Participants' assessment of key competence development in the youth field and various sectors of the education field (share of positive responses). Source: Dashboard

Annex 5. Participants' assessment of tolerance awareness (share of positive responses)

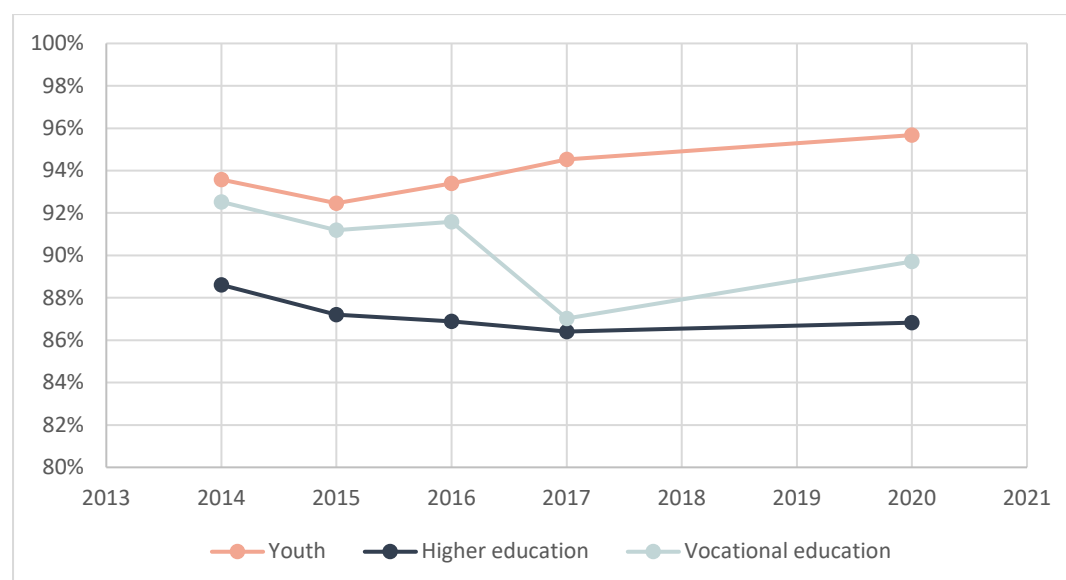


Figure 2. Participants' assessment of tolerance awareness (share of positive responses). Source: Dashboard