



National report on the implementation and impact of Erasmus+ in the field of education and training the Flemish Community of Belgium

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1 / Executive summary

1.1. Executive summary in English

This report details the evaluation of the implementation and impact of the Erasmus+ programme in the field of education and training in Flanders. The study provides input for a national report, which is required by the European Commission (EC) in light of the overall assessment of Erasmus+, i.e. the final evaluation of the programme 2014-2020 and interim evaluation of the programme 2021-2027. The focus of this study is on decentralised actions under indirect management and implementation by the National Agency (NA) Epos Vlaanderen vzw. The assessment was commissioned by the Flemish Department of Education & Training and executed by IDEA Consult.

The study was guided by five evaluation criteria (i.e. effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence and European added value) and a set of standard questions provided by the EC. A mix of research methods was used for analysis (i.e. triangulation): (1) document analysis, (2) analysis of existing data, (3) survey data for 203 beneficiary organisations, 616 staff members and 537 learners, and (4) focus groups with 29 stakeholders (from the National Agency, external experts, policymakers and stakeholders in the broader field), 28 beneficiary organisations and 30 participants across different target groups and sectors. For each evaluation criterion, the analysis resulted in various findings and recommendations to the NA and EC.

EFFECTIVENESS

- ▶ Survey results suggest that beneficiaries, staff and learners benefit from Erasmus+ participation in various ways: a high level of satisfaction with the Erasmus+ programme and positive results and impacts in line with the intended outcomes of the programme.
- ▶ Erasmus+ was found to contribute to internationalisation across different levels of organisations in education & training. Accreditation and repeated Erasmus+ engagement were found to reinforce this process. Moreover, various spill-over effects were found within the individual level (e.g. between teacher and learner) and between individual and institutional levels (e.g. staff affecting organisational practices). Yet more attention to spill-over from the individual/institutional levels to a systemic level is recommended, including more cooperation between the NA and stakeholders in the broader Flemish policy field.
- ▶ Various approaches have been employed by the NA and other organisations to enhance Erasmus+ effects and support dissemination/exploitation. Some points of attention remain. Beneficiaries report difficulties with dissemination/exploitation and would value NA guidelines or support to this end. Moreover, targeted communication and collaboration with intermediary actors could help to better reach newcomer organisations and actors in the broader sector.

- ▶ The quality of applications increased in the previous programme cycle, with a dip at the start of the new programme cycle. This is partly due to the introduction of KA210, i.e. small-scale partnerships. Further clarification of requirements for KA210 project could support quality assurance. NA support already positively affected the quality of applications in school education, but adult education lags behind.
- ▶ In particular the impact of Covid-19 measures on the programme's implementation in Flanders was substantial, but NA support was well received by target groups.

EFFICIENCY

- ▶ In terms of cost effectiveness, the allocated budget per project has significantly increased since the start of the programme 2014-2020. In terms of budget distribution, KA1 available budgets were consistently higher than the requested budgets, whereas for KA2 the available budgets were consistently lower than the requested budgets. Budget shortage is observed especially for adult education and school education, pointing towards the possible recommendation of budget shifts between sectors to improve efficiency.
- ▶ The evidence suggests a reduction in administrative burden for the NA and beneficiaries due to the simplification measures of accreditation and lump sum budgeting, with some points of attention remaining (e.g. perceived high barriers of entry for smaller and newcomer organisations). In contrast, the NA, beneficiaries and participants expressed clear dissatisfaction with the stability, functionality and lack of timely delivery of the new management support tools, most notably the Beneficiary Module. A further reduction of complexity and administrative load is strongly recommended to the EC, in terms of both administrative processes and tools.
- ▶ An improvement of the reliability, actuality and level of detail of data by the EC to monitor the implementation of the Erasmus+ on a system level is recommended. There is also still room for a more efficient cooperation between the different actors in the implementation and supervision of the programme.

RELEVANCE

- ▶ Overall, the objectives of the Erasmus+ programme remain aligned with the needs and challenges in Flanders. However, there are concerns that the addition of horizontal priorities create the risk of a diffuse effect due to an abundance of objectives. It is recommended to consider horizontal priorities as aspirations rather than objectives to be achieved.
- ▶ Erasmus+ is experienced as accessible in theory to people with fewer opportunities, but the target group is not always fully familiar with the options available. A recommendation to the NA is to support beneficiaries in developing personalised approaches towards fewer opportunities target groups and to collaborate with specialised intermediary organisations.
- ▶ The Erasmus+ focus on the digital and green transition are considered somewhat less aligned with the current needs and priorities, with beneficiaries and participants reporting that advances in digitalisation in Flemish education have already been made and that green objectives are difficult to reconcile with the core concept of Erasmus+.

COHERENCE

- ▶ The NA makes demonstrable efforts to guarantee both internal coherence (i.e. coherence within the programme) and external coherence (i.e. coherence with other (inter)national programmes). Overall, the evidence points towards complementarity between different actions within the programme, and between Erasmus+ and other national and international funding schemes.
- ▶ The findings point towards a stepping stone mechanism: engagement in accessible actions facilitate participation in other internationalisation activities through knowledge and network development. Especially amongst beneficiaries well-versed in Erasmus+, programme actions are found to be mutually reinforcing.
- ▶ Strategic behaviour by beneficiaries in the selection of funding schemes may create challenges for the Flemish government to oversee overlap between funding programmes, considering that not all policy stakeholders in adjacent domains appear familiar with Erasmus+. A continued coordination by the NA with



relevant authorities and implementing organisations is recommended, as well as efforts to raise awareness in adjacent policy areas.

EUROPEAN ADDED VALUE

- ▶ There is consensus across education & training sectors about the added value of Erasmus+, which delivers additional benefits as compared to actions initiated solely at regional or national level. The international dimension reportedly leads to stronger and more diverse learning effects for organisations and individuals. Yet realizing this added value with lasting results requires careful implementation and sufficient support for dissemination/exploitation.
- ▶ The Erasmus+ programme can contribute to raising awareness about EU common values and fostering a European sense of belonging and facilitates collaboration with organisations in partner or associated countries. Conversely, its importance for knowledge development in European integration matters appears limited and collaboration with non-associated countries proves to be intricate. Recommendations therefore include a reconsideration by the EC of expectations towards European integration knowledge development (already the focus of Jean Monnet actions) and continued NA efforts to ensure qualitative partnerships.

1.2. Executive summary in Dutch (managementsamenvatting)

Dit rapport omvat de evaluatie van de implementatie en impact van het Erasmus+ programma in het domein van onderwijs en vorming. De studie levert input voor een nationaal rapport dat opgeleverd moet worden aan de Europese Commissie (EC) in het kader van een algemene beoordeling van Erasmus+, met name de evalueatie van het programma 2014-2020 en de tussentijdse evaluatie van het programma 2021-2027. De focus ligt op gedecentraliseerde acties onder indirect beheer van het Nationaal Agentschap (NA) Epos Vlaanderen vzw. De evaluatie werd uitgevoerd door IDEA Consult in opdracht van het Vlaamse Departement Onderwijs en Vorming.

Het onderzoek werd gestuurd door vijf evaluatiecriteria (d.w.z. effectiviteit, efficiëntie, relevantie, coherentie en Europese toegevoegde waarde) en een reeks evaluatievragen aangeleverd door de EC. De analyse steunt op een mix van onderzoeksmethoden (triangulatie): (1) documentenanalyse, (2) analyse van bestaande gegevens, (3) enquêtegegevens voor 203 begunstigde organisaties, 616 personeelsleden en 537 lerenden, en (4) focusgroepen met 29 belanghebbenden (van het Nationaal Agentschap, externe deskundigen, beleidsmakers en belanghebbenden in het bredere veld), 28 begunstigde organisaties en 30 deelnemers uit verschillende doelgroepen en sectoren. Voor elk evaluatiecriterium biedt het rapport verschillende bevindingen en aanbevelingen voor het NA en de EC.

EFFECTIVITEIT

- ▶ Uit de enquêteresultaten blijkt dat begunstigten, personeel en lerenden verschillende baten hebben door een deelname aan Erasmus+: er bleek een hoge mate van tevredenheid over het Erasmus+-programma en positieve resultaten en impacts (in lijn met de beoogde uitkomsten van het programma).
- ▶ Erasmus+ blijkt bij te dragen aan internationalisering op verschillende niveaus van organisaties in onderwijs en vorming. Accreditatie en herhaalde betrokkenheid bij Erasmus+ versterken het proces. Bovendien werden verschillende positieve neveneffecten gevonden op individueel niveau (bv. tussen leerkracht en lerende) en tussen het individuele en institutionele niveau (bv. van personeels- naar organisatiepraktijken). Wel wordt meer aandacht gevraagd voor neveneffecten van het individuele/institutionele naar het systemisch niveau, en is meer samenwerking tussen het NA en stakeholders in het bredere Vlaamse beleidsveld wenselijk.
- ▶ Het NA en andere organisaties ondernamen vele acties om de effecten van Erasmus+ te vergroten en de disseminatie/exploitatie te ondersteunen. Er zijn enkele punten voor verbetering vatbaar. Vele begunstigten ervaren moeilijkheden met disseminatie/exploitatie en zijn vragende partij voor richtlijnen of ondersteuning vanuit het NA. Bovendien kan gerichte communicatie en samenwerking met intermediaire actoren helpen om nieuwkomersorganisaties en actoren in de bredere sector beter te bereiken.
- ▶ De kwaliteit van de aanvragen steeg in de vorige programmacyclus. Er was een dip aan het begin van de nieuwe programmacyclus, vermoedelijk gelinkt aan de introductie van kleinschalige partnerschappen



(KA210). Een verdere verduidelijking van de vereisten voor KA210-projecten zou tot meer kwaliteit kunnen leiden. Ondersteuning door NA heeft al een positief effect gehad op de kwaliteit van de aanvragen in het schoolonderwijs, maar het volwassenenonderwijs hinkt achter.

- ▶ Met name de impact van de Covid-19-maatregelen op de uitvoering van het programma in Vlaanderen was aanzienlijk, maar de steun van het NA werd goed ontvangen door de doelgroepen.

EFFICIËNTIE

- ▶ Wat betreft kosteneffectiviteit is het toegewezen budget per project aanzienlijk gestegen sinds de start van het programma 2014-2020. Wat betreft budgetverdeling waren de beschikbare KA1-budgetten consequent hoger dan de aangevraagde budgetten, terwijl de beschikbare KA2-budgetten consequent lager waren dan de aangevraagde budgetten. Vooral voor volwassenenonderwijs en schoolonderwijs wordt een tekort aan budgetten vastgesteld. Budgetverschuivingen tussen sectoren kunnen de efficiëntie mogelijk verbeteren.
- ▶ De bevindingen suggereren een vermindering van de administratieve lasten voor het NA en de begunstigden door de ingevoerde vereenvoudigingsmaatregelen van accreditatie en 'lump sum' budgettering, hoewel er nog enkele aandachtspunten overblijven (bijv. perceptie van hoge drempels voor kleinere organisaties en nieuwkomers). Het NA, de begunstigden en de deelnemers toonden zich daarentegen duidelijk ontevreden over de stabiliteit, de functionaliteit en vertraagde oplevering van de nieuwe managementondersteunende tools, in het bijzonder de Beneficiary Module. Een verdere vermindering van complexiteit en administratie wordt sterk aanbevolen aan de EC, zowel wat betreft administratieve processen als tools.
- ▶ De EC wordt aangeraden om te zorgen voor meer betrouwbare, actuele en gedetailleerde data om de impact van Erasmus+ te monitoren op systeemniveau. Er is ook nog ruimte voor een efficiëntere samenwerking tussen de verschillende actoren betrokken bij de uitvoering van en het toezicht op het programma.

RELEVANTIE

- ▶ Over het algemeen blijven de doelstellingen van het Erasmus+-programma afgestemd op de behoeften en uitdagingen in Vlaanderen. Er bestaat echter bezorgdheid dat de toevoeging van horizontale prioriteiten het risico van een diffuus effect met zich meebrengt door een overvloed aan doelstellingen. Er wordt aanbevolen om horizontale prioriteiten eerder als aspiraties dan als te bereiken doelstellingen te beschouwen.
- ▶ Erasmus+ wordt ervaren als theoretisch toegankelijk voor kansarme doelgroepen, maar in de praktijk zijn zij niet altijd volledig op de hoogte van de opties van Erasmus+. Een aanbeveling aan het NA is om begunstigden te ondersteunen bij het ontwikkelen van een gepersonaliseerde aanpak voor kansarme doelgroepen en om samen te werken met gespecialiseerde intermediaire organisaties.
- ▶ De focus van Erasmus+ op de digitale en groene transitie wordt beschouwd als iets minder afgestemd op de huidige behoeften en prioriteiten. Begunstigden en deelnemers melden immers dat er in het Vlaamse onderwijs reeds vooruitgang is geboekt op het gebied van digitalisering en dat groene doelstellingen moeilijk te verenigen zijn met het kernconcept van Erasmus+.

COHERENTIE

- ▶ Het NA levert aantoonbare inspanningen om zowel interne samenhang (d.w.z. samenhang binnen het programma) als externe samenhang (d.w.z. samenhang met andere (inter)nationale programma's) te garanderen. Over het algemeen kan complementariteit vastgesteld worden tussen verschillende acties binnen het programma en tussen Erasmus+ en andere nationale en internationale financieringsprogramma's.
- ▶ Het onderzoek wijst op een opstapmechanisme: betrokkenheid bij toegankelijke acties vergemakkelijkt de deelname aan andere internationaliseringsactiviteiten door de ontwikkeling van kennis en netwerken. Bij begunstigden die bedreven zijn in Erasmus+, lijken de programma-acties doorgaans elkaar te versterken.
- ▶ Strategisch gedrag van begunstigden bij de selectie van financieringsregelingen kan uitdagingen creëren voor de Vlaamse overheid om toe te zien op overlappingen tussen financieringsprogramma's, zeker gezien niet alle stakeholders in aangrenzende beleidsdomeinen vertrouwd lijken te zijn met Erasmus+. Een verderzetting van coördinatie-inspanningen door het NA met relevante autoriteiten en uitvoerende



organisaties wordt aanbevolen, evenals nieuwe acties om het bewustzijn in aangrenzende beleidsgebieden te vergroten.

EUROPESE TOEGEVOEGDE WAARDE

- ▶ Over de onderwijs- en opleidingssectoren heen bestaat consensus over de toegevoegde waarde van Erasmus+, dat extra voordelen oplevert in vergelijking met acties die uitsluitend op regionaal of nationaal niveau worden georganiseerd. De internationale dimensie leidt naar verluidt tot sterkere en meer diverse leereffecten voor organisaties en individuen. Om deze meerwaarde met blijvende resultaten te realiseren, is echter een zorgvuldige implementatie en voldoende steun voor verspreiding/exploitatie nodig.
- ▶ Het Erasmus+-programma kan bijdragen tot een groter bewustzijn van de gemeenschappelijke waarden van de EU en een Europees saamhorigheidsgevoel bevorderen, en het vergemakkelijkt de samenwerking met organisaties in partner- of geassocieerde landen. Daarentegen lijkt het belang van Erasmus+ voor kennisontwikkeling op het gebied van Europese integratie beperkt en blijkt samenwerking met niet-geassocieerde landen ingewikkeld. Tot de aanbevelingen behoren daarom een heroverweging door de EC van de verwachtingen omtrent kennis van Europese integratie (wat reeds de focus is van Jean Monnet-acties) en een verderzetting van de inspanningen door het NA om kwalitatieve partnerschappen te verzekeren.





2 / Methodology for the preparation of the national report

2.1. General background

This report is situated in a broader context of an overall evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme. The Erasmus+ Regulation¹ requires the European Commission to submit an evaluation report to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. To this end, all 33 countries participating in Erasmus+ need to provide a national report on the implementation and impact of the programme in their respective territories². These national reports will serve as essential supplementary information to the overall evaluation process.

The scope of the evaluation includes the final evaluation of the previous programme 2014-2020 and the interim evaluation of the ongoing programme 2021-2027. The evaluation also covers all fields and sectors of Erasmus+: education and training – i.e. higher education, vocational education and training, school education and adult education –, youth and sport. Moreover, national reports need to address three perspectives: a national perspective (i.e. taking into account national/regional specificities or peculiarities), the perspective of beneficiaries and participants and the implementation perspective (due to the majority of Erasmus+ budget being implemented through the National Agencies).

The European Commission has provided a guiding framework for the analysis underpinning the national reports which includes five evaluation criteria linked to a set of 37 standard questions. Two intervention logics (one for the 2014-2020 programme and one for the 2021-2027 programme) form the basis for the framework. National Authorities should address all five evaluation criteria but can focus on those questions that they deem most suited or valuable for the analysis.

¹ The legal requirements are described in Articles 24(2) and 24(6) of the Erasmus+ Regulation, i.e. Regulation (EU) 2021/817 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 establishing Erasmus+: the Union Programme for education and training, youth and sport and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 (OJ L189/1, 28.5.2021): EUR-Lex - 32021R0817 - EN - EUR-Lex (europa.eu).

² The legal requirements regarding the National Reports are stipulated in Articles 19(2) and 24(3) of the Erasmus+ Regulation. Guidelines on the planning, scope, methodology and content of the national reports, as well as the minimum framework to assure consistency and comparability across the reports, are stipulated in a Guidance Note "National reports on the implementation and impact of Erasmus+" (dated 11 January 2023) by the European Commission.

2.2. Context of this report

The aim of this report is to provide the **Flemish contribution to the national report³ for the field of Education and Training**. The Flemish Government, the National Authority for the implementation of the education and training actions of the Erasmus+ programme, has outsourced the collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data necessary for the interim evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027 and the final evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme 2014-2020 to IDEA Consult. The evaluation was supervised by a Steering Committee in which the National Authority, the National Agency, and relevant stakeholders⁴ from the education and training sector were represented.

2.3. Scoping

The scope of this evaluation is limited to the education and training field, and within this field, to the decentralised actions under indirect management and implementation of the National Agency Epos Vlaanderen vzw. This scope was validated by the Steering Committee of this evaluation. If findings relating to centralised actions (i.e. managed directly by the European Commission) emerged from the data, they are described solely in connection to the in-scope decentralised actions.

2.4. Triangulation

A combination of research methods and techniques has been used for this study. Data triangulation from these different sources has enabled the research team to answer the standard evaluation questions put forward by the European Commission.

For a general overview, see Figure 1. At the start of the project, a more detailed 'triangulation matrix' was developed at the level of the individual evaluation questions. For each evaluation question, this matrix indicated which sources we, i.e. the research team, expected to rely on, and which stakeholders would be consulted using which research method. The selection of respondents for the surveys and focus groups was based on a thorough actor analysis. The triangulation matrix formed the basis for the research team to develop questionnaires and interview guidelines for each group of respondents.

³ I.e. the National Report for the Member State Belgium.

⁴ These stakeholders included representatives from the Flemish Student Association (*Vlaamse Vereniging Studenten - VVS*), the Council of the Flemish Universities of Applied Sciences and Arts (*Vlaamse Hogescholen Raad - VHLORA*), the Flemish Community's educational inspectorate, and umbrella organisations *Gemeenschap Onderwijs (GO!)* and *Katholiek Onderwijs Vlaanderen*



Figure 1: Combination of research methods and techniques

	Document analysis	Analysis existing data	Online surveys	FG Epos	FG other actors	FG participants	FG beneficiaries
Effectiveness	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Efficiency	X	X	X	X		X	X
Relevance	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Coherence	X		X	X	X	X	X
European added value	X		X		X	X	X

2.4.1 Document analysis

We used evidence from document analysis to underpin the answers to the standard evaluation questions where relevant.

The full list of references can be found in Part 1 of the Annex.

2.4.2 Analysis of existing data

Analysis of existing (administrative) data gave valuable information to answer the evaluation questions related to effectiveness and efficiency.

The following sources of existing data have been used:

- ▶ Yearly reports of the National Agency to DG EAC between 2017 and 2022
- ▶ Data from Epos yearbooks between 2018 and 2022

Data tables prepared based on these data are attached in Part 4 of the Annex.

2.4.3 Online surveys

Online surveys were mainly used as input for all evaluation criteria, with a main focus on the effectiveness of the Erasmus+ programmes 2014-2020 and 2021-2027. The surveys were aimed both at beneficiaries and participants:

- ▶ For the beneficiary organisations, evaluation questions at institutional level were the focus. We also gauged opinions on efficiency, relevance (through a question on barriers of participation), coherence and European added value.
- ▶ For participants, the research team developed a separate survey for learners and for staff. The survey was mainly used to ask questions about effectiveness at the individual level, but also included some questions on efficiency (e.g. experiences with administration) and – to a limited extent – European added value (e.g. questions about the development of European values). We developed a separate survey for learners and for staff.

A full description of the survey results (in Dutch) can be found in Part 3 of the Annex.

In order to disseminate the survey, the research team was provided with a list of beneficiaries by the National Agency Epos. The research team removed duplicates. Each beneficiary received an invitation with one personalised link to the questionnaire. In addition, beneficiaries were asked to distribute open (non-personalised) survey links to learners and staff who had participated in the Erasmus+ programme since 2014. To this end, the research team provided beneficiaries with an optional communication to be used for distribution.

At the beginning of each survey, information was provided about the context, target audience, privacy/confidential treatment of data, and contact details in case of questions. The surveys mainly consisted of closed questions, combined with a small set of open-ended questions. At the end of each survey, respondents were asked if they were interested to participate in focus groups and via which email address they could be contacted to this end. The detailed questionnaires were submitted to the Steering Committee for approval.

The box below describes the actions that were taken by the research team to increase the response rate in the surveys. These actions consisted of repeated reminders, personal contact towards universities, online communication through social media and the extension of the survey deadline.

Box 1. Actions to increase response rate

The research team provided an active follow-up of survey response and undertook the following actions to increase the response rate:

- ▶ Sent out repeated reminders to all beneficiaries who had not yet filled out the survey.
- ▶ Provided interim status of response rate to the Steering Committee and identified actions for the Flemish Student Association (*Vlaamse Vereniging Studenten - VVS*), the Council of the Flemish Universities of Applied Sciences and Arts (*Vlaamse Hogescholen Raad - VHLORA*), and the relevant umbrella organisations within education and training.
- ▶ Undertook additional actions to reach Flemish universities: contacted the Flemish Interuniversity Council (*Vlaamse Interuniversitaire Raad - VLIR*) as well as each beneficiary university individually with a repeated request to fill out the survey for beneficiaries and distribute the survey links amongst staff members and learners.
- ▶ Spread the survey links for staff and learners via an easy-to-read communication on LinkedIn, including QR-codes.
- ▶ Extended the deadline for the survey with an additional 2 weeks to allow for more response.

Overall, the actions undertaken by the research team were effective in boosting the response rate except for staff from higher education, both from a mobility as an organisational viewpoint (see below).

After the survey deadline, the surveys underwent a process of data cleaning. In this step, respondents that solely had answered the first questions about personal characteristics, but no other questions, were deleted from the survey. The table below shows, for each survey, how many respondents in total were analysed after data cleaning.

Table 1. Overview of respondents for the different surveys and the number of cleaned (deleted) respondents

	Survey learners	Survey staff	Survey organisations
Respondents	621	723	213
Removed after data cleaning	84	107	10
Total respondents	537	616	203



The tables below give an indicative overview of the response distributions and representativity of the surveys for learners, staff, by comparing the relative presence by type of mobility (based on the sector in education and training) and organisations (based on organisation type and Key Action). Across the surveys we can conclude that higher education is relatively underrepresented, while there was a high response from school education.

Table 2. Representativity of the response by learners according to type of mobility, by share

	Mobility population 2022*	Survey
Pupils in school education	16,2%	72,4%
Students in higher education	73,4%	23,1%
Learners in vocational education or training	8,0%	3,5%
Learners in adult education	2,4%	0,9%

**Notes: The type of mobility is the most recent mobility of a learner in case of multiple participations. For school education, the number of group mobility was multiplied by 20, to represent the average group. Source: Yearbook Epos (2022). The year 2022, the most recent year for which data was available, was selected as an illustrative point of reference to the distribution of survey response.*

Table 3. Representativity of the response by staff according to type of mobility, by share

	Mobility population 2022	Survey
Staff in school education	40,2%	58,8%
Staff in higher education	33,3%	20,8%*
Staff in vocational education and training	14,3%	7,5%
Staff in adult education	12,2%	6,7%
Other	/	6,3%

**Note: 92% of respondents for staff in higher education work for a university of applied sciences, 8 work for a university. Source: Yearbook Epos (2022)*

Table 4. Distribution of the type of beneficiaries in the survey responses

	Survey (share)	Survey (total)
School for secondary education	43,80%	91
Other ⁵	14,40%	30
School for primary education	9,60%	20
Organisation for sociocultural work	4,80%	10
School for special secondary education	4,30%	9
Centre for Adult Education	3,80%	8

⁵ This option included an open-ended form so that respondents could add categories which were not presented in the list. The most common responses included: municipal or other public service institutions, organisations, non-profit organisation, nongovernmental organisations or artistic institutions.



School group/community	3,40%	7
Universities of applied sciences and arts	3,40%	7
University	2,90%	6
School for special primary education	2,40%	5
Pedagogical guidance service	1,90%	4
Centre for part-time education	1,40%	3
Company	1,40%	3
Education network or umbrella organisation	1,00%	2
Academy for part-time arts education	0,50%	1
SYNTRA training centre	0,50%	1
Employers' organisation	0,50%	1

The box below shows that the survey response was well distributed across key action types when compared to the indicative populations in recent years, pointing towards a good representativity for both KA1 as well as for KA2.

Table 5. Representativity of the organisational mobility, in absolute numbers

	Population 2020	Population 2021	Population 2022	Survey (beneficiaries)
KA 1	175	105	176	140
KA 2	60	70	47	112

2.4.4 Online focus groups

As presented in the table below, three types of online focus groups were organised aimed at covering various stakeholder perspectives and the experiences of target groups from different sectors in education and training. A total of 16 focus groups took place.

Note that, in line with the survey response, there was more attendance by interviewees from school education (in particular for beneficiaries and staff) as compared to other sectors in education and training. For higher education, it must be noted that no beneficiary organisations nor staff members⁶ from the larger universities in Flanders attended the focus groups.

⁶ Nevertheless, one interviewee worked for a university of applied sciences, but simultaneously was affiliated with a university.



Table 6. Focus groups

1.	Focus groups with stakeholders (n=30)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ National Agency Epos (n=6) ▶ Epos' (external) experts (responsible for the assessment of applications) (n=12) ▶ Policymakers in education and training (n=7) ▶ Relevant stakeholders in the broader field, including representatives of the Flemish unions/social partners and stakeholders focusing on societal priorities or specific target audiences (e.g. inclusion and participation) (n=5)
2.	Focus groups with beneficiaries (n=28)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Beneficiaries in school education (n=7) ▶ Beneficiaries in VET (n=9) ▶ Beneficiaries in higher education (n=3) ▶ Beneficiaries in adult education (n=3) ▶ Beneficiaries of KA2 projects, including profit and non-profit organisations (n=2) ▶ Beneficiaries of learners with fewer opportunities (n=4)
3.	Focus groups with participants (n=30)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Staff in school education (n=13) ▶ Staff in VET (n=4) ▶ Staff in higher education (n=4) ▶ Staff in adult education (n=4) ▶ Learners in (secondary) school education (n=3) ▶ Learners in higher education (n=2)

2.5. Strengths and limitations of the study

This study has several **strengths**:

- ▶ Based on the data collected from the sources described above and through the use of triangulation, most of the evaluation questions could be answered reliably and validly. This ensures sufficient insights for the national report, as well as the necessary comparability and consistency of inputs for the European Commission.
- ▶ The in-depth qualitative approach of our study, through the use of an extensive set of focus groups consulting various Erasmus+ stakeholders and target groups, allows for rich qualitative data on the implementation and impact of the Erasmus+ programme in Flanders. This approach is in line with the request by the European Commission to take into account different perspectives, including the national perspective that should offer insight into national/regional specificities and peculiarities.



- ▶ All surveys were comprehensive in terms of questions, with a broad set of indicators that were closely matched with the intervention logics of both programme periods (2014-2020 and 2021-2027). In combination with the focus groups, these indicators offer both an in-depth and a broad insight into the impact of the Erasmus+ programme, especially in terms of effectiveness. Also note that, despite the comprehensiveness of the survey questions, distribution reports showed very limited dropout by response past the more general and demographic questions (at the beginning of the survey). This suggests a good readability of the survey questions.
- ▶ The methodology included a thorough (re)analysis of the existing data. The resulting data tables (as presented in Part 4 of the Annex) offer a very clear overview of the evolution of applications and budgets over time.

However, the study also had some **limitations and challenges at the level of available data and at the level of analysis**.

Limitations and challenges at the level of the available data:

- ▶ There are doubts about the reliability of the available administrative data. This issue was also raised by the National Agency itself, which will be discussed in more detail in the findings section of this report (under evaluation criterion efficiency).
- ▶ Despite the efforts of the research team, higher education remained relatively underrepresented. Note that we did have at our disposal a position paper in which the Council of the Flemish Universities of Applied Sciences and Arts (*Vlaamse Hogescholen Raad – VHLORA*) – based on its own survey – summarised the concerns from that subsector within higher education. Considering that the position paper departs solely from the perspective of Universities of the Applied Sciences and Arts and that universities were less responsive to our survey and focus group invitations, universities in particular have thus remained largely out of the picture. A potential explanation for the lack of response from universities may be that Erasmus+ is so obvious in this sector that there is little desire to raise specific concerns.
- ▶ It was relatively difficult to reach learners because many organisations do not have access to contact details after the learners have graduated. Nevertheless, we were able to collect data on a sufficiently large sample.
- ▶ Although unprompted by the research team, the topic of traineeships frequently emerged during the focus groups. However, the importance of this type of mobility for learners was not clear at the time of the construction of the survey and, therefore, no specific questions on the topic were asked in the survey. This is a missed opportunity that we should pay more attention to next time.
- ▶ The possibility of a selection bias amongst respondents cannot be excluded: it is possible that organisations, staff or learners who were satisfied with their Erasmus+ participation were more likely to respond to the survey or partake in the focus groups. This may affect the extent to which the Erasmus+ programme was positively evaluated by respondents and/or interviewees.
- ▶ No control group was used for analysis, meaning that only Erasmus+ participants were consulted in the survey and focus groups. The perspective of organisations or individuals who have not participated in the Erasmus+ programme was not consulted. Therefore, the research team did not directly explore (real or perceived) barriers to entry for non-participants (e.g. from disadvantaged groups). Similarly, the analysis does not include the perspectives of applicants who planned on participating in Erasmus+ but did not do so in the end (e.g. due to not being granted funding, unforeseen circumstances, ...).

Limitations and challenges at the level of the requested analysis:

- ▶ The European Commission provided many evaluation questions, several of which consist of several sub-questions. Moreover, there is a lot of overlap: the analytical distinction between the questions is sometimes



difficult to make. It was therefore challenging to answer the questions in a nuanced way within the available number of pages.

- ▶ The intervention logic of the 2021-2027 programme is very detailed at the level of results and impact. Again, it is difficult to inquire about, differentiate between and describe all the requested elements in a meaningful way in the context of the evaluation. The intervention logic 2014-2020 defined fewer outcomes and impacts, at a higher level: this was easier to handle.
- ▶ Due to the differences in intervention logic, it was difficult to compare the two programmes.

Disclaimer: IDEA use of AI

Portions of this report were drafted with the assistance of artificial intelligence (AI) tools, specifically DeepL Write and ChatGPT. These tools were used to improve texts based on our own content. That is, to translate, elaborate, summarise, correct, ... drafts, not to generate new information. The AI output was thoroughly reviewed, edited and supplemented by the consultants to ensure accuracy, relevance and alignment with the report's objectives.





3 / Findings

This chapter summarizes the most important findings for each of the standard questions. A more elaborate justification for the answers to the questions can be found in Part 2 of the Annex.

3.1. Effectiveness

EQ 1. To what extent have the various programme fields both within Erasmus+ 2021-2027 and Erasmus+ 2014-2020 delivered the expected outputs, results and impacts in your country? Which negative and positive factors seem to be influencing outputs, results and impacts? Do you consider that certain actions are more effective than others? Are there differences across fields? What are the determining factors for making these actions of the programme more effective?

This part discusses the effectiveness of the Erasmus+ programme, as reported by learners, teaching staff and organisations.

LEARNERS

In the survey results, learners reported a high overall satisfaction with the Erasmus+ programme. The survey results suggest that the expected results, as defined in the intervention logic, were largely achieved. In terms of skills, learning a new language appeared as an important result from participation in Erasmus+. In terms of soft skills, learners reported that Erasmus+ participation contributed to their ability to work better with others. Learners also perceived an enhanced personal development, in terms of more belief in their own abilities (i.e. self-efficacy) and more independence. In terms of interaction with others, a heightened inter-cultural awareness, better ability to deal with and work better with people from different backgrounds and an expansion of the learners' network were observed.

Regarding expected impacts detailed in the intervention logic, Erasmus+ participation was perceived as contributing to a desire to engage in further education in the future and to a willingness to work abroad or to engage in other international projects/initiatives abroad. Learners also experienced a strong impact on their employability. The network established through Erasmus+ appears relatively durable: half of the learners surveyed said that they were still in contact with people they had met during their exchange.

There are not many explicit differences between the educational fields in the survey results. One point is that the perceived chances of getting an internship or a job, as well as the willingness to work abroad or get involved in



other international projects/initiatives abroad, are higher for learners in school or higher education than for learners in VET or adult education.

STAFF

Overall, results from the survey suggest that staff tend to be highly satisfied with their participation and would like to participate again in the future. Looking at the expected results, various elements stand out. In terms of skills and competences, staff mainly reported to have improved their practical skills (i.e. planning and organisation), analytical skills and knowledge or use of foreign languages due to their participation in Erasmus+. In addition, there appear to be positive results in terms of educational quality: staff reported an extension of their pedagogical, didactic, and professional/field-specific knowledge, a better understanding of educational policies abroad, the delivery of better quality work to learners, and the development of new learning practices or teaching methods. In terms of job quality, respondents perceived a strong contribution to their professional network development, their motivation and job satisfaction. In terms of social knowledge and commitment, staff members reported a heightened awareness of diversity in society, and a better understanding of and openness to social, linguistic and cultural diversity.

Survey results also suggest that Erasmus+ related to several, more durable impacts for staff. An increased capacity of staff to initiate modernisation was observed. Most respondents also reported an increased capacity to trigger more internationalisation in the organisation. Most respondents indicated that Erasmus+ has increased opportunities for future learning mobility, and that their organisations are more motivated than before to encourage mobility activities for both learners and staff.

Some differences between sectors could be observed. On average, survey results suggest that staff in higher education were most likely to have participated in a prior Erasmus+ activity (i.e. repeated engagement). On average, staff in adult education reported the least use of language training. Vocational training staff and school education staff in particular reported to remain in contact with friends or acquaintances abroad whom they have met as a result of their Erasmus+ participation.

BENEFICIARY ORGANISATIONS

Organisations generally reported a high level of satisfaction with the Erasmus+ programme. The survey findings suggest that participation in Erasmus+ has led to positive results in the organisations' approach to diversity, participation, and the needs of target groups. At the institutional level, participation in Erasmus+ reportedly has led to a more active involvement in social and civic life for most organisations. In addition, respondents reported that good practices and new methods are more easily used in their daily work and shared more within the organisation.

In terms of expected impacts, a clear contribution to the internationalisation of organisations and institutions emerged from the survey data. Most of the respondents indicated that they now utilise their Erasmus+ experience as a foundation to shape the professionalisation policy of the organisation. Most higher education institutions in the survey reported to have increased their capacity to carry out high-level research, to teach EU subjects and to attract new learners and researchers. Most organisations felt that Erasmus+ has increased the ability of the organisation to function in an international context and to share high-quality knowledge on European issues within the organisation.

EQ 2. What are the results and long-term impact of Erasmus+ 2014-2020 in your country? We are interested in the impact of all actions/elements of Erasmus+ 2014-2020, and with special attention to those actions/elements that are continued in Erasmus+ 2021-2027. We are also interested in the impact of actions/elements that have been discontinued to the extent that it might help design the future programme.



In 2021, Epos commissioned a study into the long-term impact of Erasmus+ in schools. Many of the findings from this study are confirmed in this evaluation, and also apply to the other sectors aside from school education. It appears that most of the outcomes identified above in EQ 1, have long-term impact.

To begin with, an impact on organisational development was reported by survey respondents and interviewees. Erasmus+ reportedly contributes to an organisational transition towards a more open and innovative school culture. Participation leads to innovation in the pedagogical project of schools and other institutions in education and training. Additionally, international projects were described as positively enhancing the image of the school and as strengthening cooperation with partners.

Another dimension concerns the impact on internationalisation. This impact is reflected in an increased institutional capacity for international projects, as reported by various beneficiaries during focus groups. The internationalisation process is reinforced by accreditation: since accreditation implies a longer-term commitment and requires prior experience with mobility projects, it was described as contributing to more durable internationalisation in schools. International networks are also further expanded through Erasmus+ participation, often resulting in long-term partnerships and international friendships. The research also showed that the different types of Erasmus+ projects and eTwinning are mutually reinforcing. Taken together, internationalisation is systematically built up in the school organisation and structure over time.

For school education, VET, and adult education, the former school exchange partnerships (KA219-229), available in the 2014-2020 programme, were considered by beneficiaries as an accessible and highly valuable action to build up an international network. In the current 2021-2027 programme, this type of collaboration was integrated under KA1 (albeit under different application requirements) and expanded to include VET and adult education. Despite the continued availability of this activity, there is a perception amongst schools that opportunities for school exchange partnerships have disappeared – constituting a perceived gap in the Erasmus+ offer.

There is also a durable impact on the quality of education, manifesting itself in various ways. Firstly, increased quality of education was described by interviewees as emerging through teachers and the personal and professional growth they experience. For teachers, analysis suggests that participation in Erasmus+ motivates and inspires, strengthens the team atmosphere and cooperation between teachers, and places the Flemish educational reality in a broader (less isolated) context – thereby adding a sense of meaningfulness to the job. Moreover, participation in Erasmus+ was described by interviewees as leading to greater understanding and respect between pupils and teachers. In class, the effects of Erasmus+ are reflected in the use of new teaching methods, the introduction of inspiring practical examples, and an altered relationship between teacher and pupils which tends to change towards 'the teacher as a coach'. All of this reportedly contributes to educational practices that better meet the needs of students.

For learners, as well, Erasmus+ was reported by interviewees to offer huge opportunities for long-term growth. To illustrate, for pupil mobility, interviewees described participation in Erasmus+ as resulting in a broadening of horizons, growth in terms of self-reliance, self-efficacy and self-confidence, an increased sense of responsibility and better social skills for the pupils concerned. In addition, evidence suggests that participation by learners leads to strengthened technical and substantive knowledge and skills, strengthened language skills and the courage to actively use foreign languages, and a motivational boost. In this way, Erasmus+ strengthens labour market opportunities or chances to transition to further levels of education.

EQ 3. What is your assessment of the quality of applications received in your country, and what measures could be taken to improve the quality of applications and awarded projects in your country taking into account the doubling of budget for the 2021-2027 programme cycle?



QUALITY OF APPLICATIONS

The data show that there is a clear gap between the share of KA1- and KA2-applications that meet the quality threshold in most years. The share of qualitative KA1-applications increased slowly over the years, with a noticeable dip at the start of the new programme cycle (2021). The evolution of the share of qualitative KA2-applications is more dramatic: from 19% in 2014 to 81% in 2020. This is due to considerable efforts that were made by the European Commission to improve the accessibility and success rate of KA2-applications during the previous programme cycle. In the new programme cycle (2021-2027) the share of qualitative KA2-applications seems to be decreasing again. This might be due to the introduction of small-scale partnerships (KA210) in the new cycle, since external experts deem those applications to be of relatively low quality. A possible explanation offered by external experts is that applicants may not be used to writing KA2 project applications. The quality concerns linked to small-scale partnerships are in contrast with the applications for Strategic partnerships in the previous programme cycle (KA201, KA202, KA203, KA226, KA227). The National Agency (NA) and external experts observed that applications for Strategic partnerships were of rather high quality since mostly organisations with prior experience took part in them.

The quality of applications also varies between the sectors. Especially in recent years, the share of qualitative applications is highest in higher education, and lowest in adult education. This data confirms observations made by the National Agency (NA) and the external experts: applications in higher education (especially KA1) generally score well because these institutions have departments dedicated to internationalisation, and they are experienced in writing applications. The experts see that the quality of applications in other sectors is rather inconsistent. Often applicants have good ideas content-wise, but they lack the knowledge and skills on how to write a good application. Epos offers writing support, and indicated that this has already had a substantial positive impact on the quality of applications, especially in school education. Despite the NA-support offered, the adult education sector continues to lag behind in terms of quality of applications. Epos mentions that, concerning KA1, the sector generally is not very aware of the possibilities within Erasmus+, which makes it especially important for organisations in this sector to get in touch with the NA before applying so they can get the support they need.

MEASURES TO IMPROVE QUALITY

The National Agency has already taken several measures to improve the quality of applications and final reports. Support measures in the applications phase include seminars, information days, writing sessions, individual advice, proactively reaching out to target audiences, and more. Epos notices that the quality of applications generally is high when applicants get in touch with the NA before applying, because that way, Epos can offer the support that the applicants need.

EQ 4. Please identify, describe and quantify (if possible) the spill-over effects between various actions (clusters of actions) of Erasmus+ 2014-2020 and 2021-2027 in your country, as described in the intervention logic

SPILL-OVER IN ERASMUS+ RESULTS

In line with the intervention logic, the data provides support for the expected spill-over of Erasmus+ results between the **individual and institutional level**. The following effects were found:

- ▶ **Spill-over from the individual to the institutional level:** engagement in KA1 triggered considerable improvements in internationalisation activities within Flemish organisations active in education and training.
- ▶ **Spill-over from the institutional to the individual level:** engagement in KA1 and/or KA2 activities appears beneficial for the professional development of staff due to an increase in institutional support for staff members.



- ▶ **Strengthening of effects due to dual involvement:** the data generally suggests that simultaneous participation in both KA1 and KA2 strengthens any positive results beneficiaries derive from Erasmus+. Interviewees suggested that synergies arise partly due to scale effects in network development: building on the trusted partnerships in both Key Actions help institutions to expand their activities more effectively and allow for mutual spill-overs between KA1 and KA2 activities. In particular for smaller organisations, interviewees also highlighted the value of a clear focus on one activity – emphasising the risk of loss in quality and less effective results when there are too many KA activities.
- ▶ Although not described in the intervention logic, it must be noted that the evidence points to important **spill-overs of KA1-actions between target groups on the individual level**. For learner mobility in school education and VET it was found that the Erasmus+ experience can create a closer connection between learners and staff. Moreover, the increase in the application of innovative teaching practices by staff members after KA1 engagement was reported to positively impact the motivation of learners in the classroom.

In contrast, only limited spill-over was observed from the individual and institutional levels to the **systemic level**. Such spill-over was described as existing only in theory and/or in implicit, hard-to-measure ways (e.g. experience with internationalisation affecting empathic abilities of individuals, which could support policy dialogue). Stakeholders have asked for more attention to this connection in the promotion, design and evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme.

EQ 5. To what extent has Erasmus+ 2021-2027 had a transformative effect in your country 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) – participation in democratic life and civic engagement? Could you identify the horizontal priorities the programme had the highest impact on through its actions?

EQ 7. To what extent do the actions/activities/projects supported by Erasmus+ 2021-2027 contribute to mainstreaming climate and environment actions and to achieving the climate and environment objectives, including those intended to reduce the environmental impact of the programme, in your country?

The effects on these new horizontal priorities are difficult to measure, due to limitations in the monitoring system. The evidence points towards effects of Erasmus+ on inclusion and diversity and participation in democratic life. Based on the survey findings, we can see that organisations that participated in the current programme 2021-2027 compared to organisations that participated in the previous programme 2014-2020 self-reported a higher estimate of the impact of Erasmus+ participation on these two horizontal priorities. Similarly, surveyed staff also agreed with the statements that participation in Erasmus+ contributes to greater awareness of diversity, greater understanding and openness to social, linguistic and cultural diversity, and better collaboration in an intercultural context. Similarly, the surveys found that participants and beneficiary organisations see a connection between participating in Erasmus+ and participation in democratic life and civic engagement. Focus group findings tended to corroborated these statements, although clear comparisons between programme cycles were not always feasible to make.

In contrast, the impact of Erasmus+ on the digital transformation and the green transition is less clear or convincing. Regarding the digital transformation, interviewees noted that the level of digitalisation in Flemish education is already quite advanced (as compared to other countries), due to which only marginal improvements in terms of digitalisation are possible through participation in Erasmus+. Interviewees also suggested that the improvement of digital skills is not a prior motivation, for instance amongst staff, to participate in Erasmus+. At the same time, however, survey results did indicate a perceived improvement of digital skills and use of digital



tools amongst VET staff and school education staff. Moreover, evidence suggests that teachers who are less advanced in terms of digital skills still learn new things through their participation.

A mixed picture also emerges for the green transition. According to learners who filled out the survey, participation in Erasmus+ only had a limited effect on their awareness of or commitment towards to the environment and sustainability. On the institutional level, the impact may be a bit more pronounced. Approximately 60 percent of the beneficiary organisations surveyed indicate that participation has increased the organisation's commitment to the environment, sustainability or combating climate.

EQ 6. What are the differences in impact of Erasmus+ 2021-2027 actions in your country on hard-to-reach groups, people with fewer opportunities or specific disadvantaged groups of the population who traditionally do not engage in transnational or international activities as compared to other groups that benefit from the programme? We are interested in the evaluation of the first effects of the Framework of Inclusion Measures and of the Inclusion and Diversity Strategy on promoting accessibility to funding for a wider range of organisations, and to better reach out to more participants with fewer opportunities.

To make sure Erasmus+ is oriented and adapted towards people with fewer opportunities, the European Commission developed a Framework on inclusion measures. In addition, as of 2022, all National Agencies are required to have an Inclusion and Diversity Plan. Epos hired a new European Horizontal priorities officer in June 2022 who worked on the Epos Inclusion Plan⁷.

Erasmus+ offers different financial support systems for people with fewer opportunities, for example the application for inclusion support. Besides these financial support systems, the Inclusion and Diversity plan of Epos states that Epos plans to focus on communication and raising awareness by developing a range of activities and campaigns. Epos also wants to set up a cooperation system between the different teams within the NA, managed by the inclusion officer.

The effects of these measures are not easy to monitor due to inherent challenges in tracking the number of Erasmus+ participants with fewer opportunities on a more aggregate level (see also EQ20 on the need for a clear EC monitoring framework for NAs). Policy actions such as the Brains on the Move plan (2013) suggest that Flanders has long been aware of the importance of (the monitoring of) inclusion and diversity in educational mobility. Especially in higher education this has resulted in clear policies and monitoring relying on official data at AHOVOKS (i.e., the Flemish Agency for Higher Education, Adult Education, Qualifications and Educational Grants). Nevertheless, difficulties remain, with interviewees in other sectors indicating for instance that expectations towards the reporting of the inclusion of people with 'fewer opportunities' do not match what can be measured in reality. Schools only have an overarching view of disadvantaged groups and, partly for the sake of privacy, have no insight into the individual situation of learners applying for mobility. As suggested during focus groups, schools therefore tend to resort to the use of averages for reporting, but there is no conclusive answer as to whether the actual group of learners going on mobility meets this reflection and an underrepresentation of this group is likely. This also applies to staff; it is not possible for schools to know if they are part of this category without asking explicitly.

Despite the challenges in quantitative monitoring, the focus groups do give insight in some noticeable qualitative impact. The projects that focus on VET seem to have a big impact on pupils. Considering that learners with fewer

⁷ Note that these measures are aligned with the regional policy context, in particular the 'Equal Educational Opportunities' (GOK) policy and the inclusive and integrated approach put forward by the Flemish Government.



opportunities tend to be less likely to pursue a higher education and more likely to come from low-income households, an exchange in school education may be their only opportunity for an intercultural experience in their youth. Interviewees therefore emphasize that this experience has a big impact on the personal growth and active citizenship of learners with fewer opportunities. Moreover, the focus groups also make it clear that there are doubts as to whether the extra financial aid for fewer opportunities will solve the financial barriers faced. There will always be a part that has to be financed by the participant, the sum must be paid in advance, and for some groups leaving for an exchange also implies missed income.

EQ 8. 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, in your country? Which actions of the programmes are the most effective considering the needs of your country? Are there marked differences between the different fields?

According to Flemish policy stakeholders, the influence of Erasmus+ actions on policy developments in the fields of education and training is largely indirect: different stakeholders, such as pedagogical counsellors, participate in Erasmus+ projects and they translate what they learn into policy in Flanders, consciously or not.

Flemish policy stakeholders are just as active outside Erasmus+ at the European level as within Erasmus+ e.g. monitoring the European Commission's policy, Belgian EU- Presidency 2024, ... There is permanent two-way interaction between Flemish and European policy. However, we could not identify Flemish policy developments that result directly and solely from Erasmus+ actions.

As observed by the NA and NAU, there is room for more collaboration between both parties to increase the direct policy impact of Erasmus+. Both parties expressed interest to set up more structural consultation and/or cooperation on topics with a shared relevance, e.g., on Continuing Professional Development (CPD) initiated/subsidized by the Flemish government, subsidies targeted at professionalisation, the potential of Erasmus+ in helping to address labour market shortages in educational staff, and more. Such cooperation may also contribute to external coherence by creating synergies and minimizing overlaps between programmes and activities in education and training (see EQ 29/30).

EQ 9. What specific approaches (such as co-financing, promotion or others) have you taken in order to try to enhance the effects of Erasmus+ 2021-2027 and Erasmus+ 2014-2020 in your country? To what extent have these approaches been effective? Can any particular points for improvement be identified?

ACTIVITIES BY THE NATIONAL AGENCY

In some cases, Epos resorts to co-financing to be able to grant high-quality proposals. In addition, the refinancing mechanism is used to maximize the budget. Nevertheless, efforts to increase co-financing would be welcomed for some actions. In KA2, the 20% co-financing from own funding rule can be a barrier to participate in KA2, when limited alternative budgets are available. This seems especially the case for adult education in Flanders.

Epos makes various efforts to promote Erasmus+, aimed, in the first place, at promoting the options available for different target groups in the educational sectors. Epos also wants to inform, inspire and train. These sessions are adapted to the needs of these sectors. For instance, higher education beneficiaries are already well-reached and larger institutions tend to have institutionalized support for internalisation activities, across different layers of the organisation (e.g. international office – departments – international coordinators). More efforts go to the other sectors where internationalisation is less developed. Actions include the sharing of good practices, practical writing sessions, training sessions on the use and management of social media, a brochure with tips and tricks for a sustainable Erasmus+ experience, specific actions to promote the new Erasmus+ accreditation, co-financing



of preparation visits for potential applicants (without a granted project) who are looking for partners, participation in contact seminars and thematic seminars, ...

Overall, these communication and promotion efforts of Epos are well received by **participants** and organisations are noticing a growing awareness over time. Most respondents in our survey agree with the statement that they know where to go with questions about the Erasmus+ programme in Flanders and the statement that there is sufficient information available about the Erasmus+ programme in Flanders.

Many of the communication actions are channelled through the Epos website. It contains up-to-date information about possibilities for project applications per action and per sector, including a Frequently Asked Questions section. There is room for improvement though: not all survey respondents agreed that the necessary information about Erasmus+ was easy to find on the Epos website.

Whereas the promotion and communication activities are generally well-received by **applicants** – in particular the information and writing sessions – the availability of information is described as less accessible for newcomers in the programme for whom Erasmus+ remains complex. Both in the survey and in the focus groups, the research team repeatedly heard the request to organise more opportunities to exchange experiences and to network with other participants in the Erasmus+ programme in Flanders, for instance through social media. Other, more experienced organisations appear to be a highly valuable source of information and inspiration for newcomers.

A final point of improvement is the communication towards potential beneficiaries outside the 'core' of higher and school education. There is still limited awareness in the broader sector (e.g. sector federations, businesses, socio-cultural sector,...) about the options of Erasmus+ and they also feel less targeted by the Epos communication. However, in September 2023, Epos has hired a coordinator for synergies and collaboration who will focus on improving this aspect as part of their job responsibilities.

ACTIVITIES BY OTHER ORGANISATIONS AND BY BENEFICIARIES THEMSELVES

Besides Epos, there are other organisations that provide information on Erasmus+ or support for applying in certain projects, e.g. the pedagogical advisory services, and Europahuis-Ryckvelde. Finally, also beneficiaries themselves reported that they undertake various actions to enhance the effects of Erasmus+, especially by promoting the programme and by trying to build a positive image towards colleagues, learners, parents (e.g. through teasers, campaigns, info sessions, social media, newsletters, local TV, ...). However, big differences are observed between organisations, depending on level of prior experience with internationalisation, available hours for coordination ...

EQ 10. To what extent are the results of Erasmus+ 2021-2027 and Erasmus+ 2014-2020 adequately being disseminated and exploited in your country? Where can you see the possibilities for improvements?

ACTIVITIES BY THE NATIONAL AGENCY

The dissemination and exploitation activities of Epos include the publication of a newsletter, yearbooks, compendia, and more. Aside from publications, Epos also organises or participates in events and competitions, such as the Epos yearly event "Grensverleggers", the Erasmus days, the EU day of languages, ...

ACTIVITIES BY BENEFICIARIES

Similar to the actions to enhance the effects of Erasmus+ (see EQ 11), beneficiary organisations also indicated during focus groups that they themselves take a wide range of actions to disseminate the results of Erasmus+. Social media channels are increasingly playing a role in this respect.

However, there still appear to be major differences between organisations in this area as well. Several organisations mentioned during focus groups that they struggle with the dissemination. However, there are learning effects in how to disseminate effectively, through regular participation and experimentation over time.



POSSIBILITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

An issue regarding dissemination/exploitation, according to several interviewees, is that there are no resources specifically reserved for this task after project completion. It needs to be noted, however, that project requirements do include a dissemination strategy, implying that project funding is meant to (at least to some extent) cover the costs of dissemination and that participants could proactively take (future) dissemination into account. Nevertheless, timing may be challenging in this respect: interviewees indicate that the project duration is needed to create the necessary outputs, but that dissemination and exploitation takes longer. This issue was more often reported for KA2 projects.

Another issue put forward by interviewees is that it is not always known that important Erasmus+ results or impacts originally emerged from the programme. Impact studies, and targeted communication about the results of these studies, are therefore described as very important tools to raise awareness. In this way, dissemination and exploitation of results are the best promotion for Erasmus+.

EQ 13. How did the Covid-19 pandemic impact the implementation of the two generations of the programme in your country, and what was the effect of the measures taken to react to the consequences of the pandemic?

As suggested by the National Agency itself in its yearly report to the European Commission (2020), Epos made various efforts to filter out relevant information on Covid-19 measures for the Flemish context (based on notes received from the DG EAC) and distribute it accordingly. This communication on the implementation of *Force Majeure* measures was reported by Epos as challenging and resource intensive due to an ongoing need for updates. Despite these challenges, the dedicated support offered by Epos was well received by beneficiaries.

The impact of Covid-19 on Erasmus+ projects in Flanders was extensive in 2020. All KA1 mobilities decreased by at least 45% when comparing 2019 and 2020, with mobilities in adult education characterised by the sharpest decrease.

In all educational domains, many projects contracted in the call years 2017 and 2018 were prolonged. KA2-projects and other projects that could intensify their online cooperation were in general less affected.

For projects that did take place, beneficiaries and participants reported on how the Covid-19 measures affected their project experiences and success. Interviewees highlighted difficulty in achieving project aims and/or the expected outputs and results, difficulty in disseminating results (e.g. having to resort to online multiplier events in KA2) and affected partnerships (e.g. partners cancelling their involvement or contributing less than expected, for both KA1 and KA2). In some cases, however, more positive impacts were also reported. Covid-19 was described as driving choices amongst applicants (e.g. more motivation to apply for Erasmus+, a digital awareness in content selection, ...) and as stimulating resilience and flexibility amongst participants.

After 2021 however, a relatively fast recovery could be observed, with some interviewees even reporting a perceived 'post-corona boost'.

EQ 14. What was the effect in your country of the measures taken in the frame of the programme implementation to provide a reaction to the consequences of the Russian invasion of Ukraine?

Epos used communication actions to inform target groups in Flanders about the possible implications of the restrictive measures in view of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Most notably, updated information was provided via a dedicated webpage on the Ukraine crisis, which described only limited implications of the measures for Flanders. This being said, interviewees did experience the crisis itself and the broader geopolitical developments as impactful. The following impacts emerged from analysis:



- ▶ In general, beneficiaries that had projects located in or partnerships with the neighbouring countries of Russia and Ukraine referred to a level of societal distress in these countries.
- ▶ For KA1 projects specifically, there has been a clear impact on the choice behaviour of beneficiaries and participants. Amongst learners and staff, it was observed that destinations in the above-mentioned countries have decreased in popularity. Amongst beneficiary organisations, more selective choices in partnerships abroad were reported but also the inadvertent loss of partners (e.g. Finnish partners offering less internship positions, Ukrainian refugees moving outside the EU).
- ▶ For KA2 projects, collaborations were affected mostly through the political sensitivity of the Ukraine crisis and a temporary shift in priorities amongst Eastern European partners (e.g. due to refugee inflow).

Finally, the evidence has also revealed that other crises and geopolitical issues in the world have affected the Erasmus+ programme in Flanders. In particular:

- ▶ At the brink of the 2014-2020 and the 2021-2027 Erasmus+ programmes, the United Kingdom left the European Union in the frame of the Brexit deal. Interviewees mentioned that priorly existing networks or partnerships came to an end, which, amongst other things, affected KA1 mobilities for both staff and learners. Considering the limited geographical distance and the fact Flemish speakers tend to be acquainted with English as a foreign language, the UK had been a popular destination (e.g. for traineeships) and Brexit was thus perceived as a loss of opportunities.
- ▶ More recently, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict was reported to have some effect on the current 2021-2027 programme. For example, one interviewee reported that a seminar on e-twinning in Jordan in 2023 caused worry amongst participants before departure and was cancelled in the end.

3.2. Efficiency

EQ 15. What is the cost-effectiveness of various actions (clusters of actions) of Erasmus+ 2021-2027 and Erasmus+ 2014-2020 in your country?

EQ 16. To what extent, compared to the previous programme, is the size of budget 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?

COST-EFFECTIVENESS

Epos aims to maximize the number of funded projects annually by utilizing residual budget from one action to support projects on the reserve list of other actions. It is noteworthy, however, that the allocated budget per project has significantly increased over the years. Notably, the available budget has more than doubled since the beginning of the previous programme period, while the number of funded projects has increased but not doubled.

The impact generated by each project is difficult to quantify, but there are indications that funded projects do not consistently achieve the impact that they aimed for. During a focus group, external experts raised several concerns:

- ▶ In some cases, experts indicated that promises made in project applications remain unfulfilled by the time the final report is submitted. Occasionally, the final report merely replicates the original application and outlines how the project will continue to take shape, even though it should already be completed.
- ▶ Experts observe that KA2-applications often lack concrete actions for impact generation. Instead, they tend to rely on vague strategies. The lack of clarity regarding the necessary content for KA2 applications poses a risk, potentially limiting the impact of KA2 projects.
- ▶ The shift towards lump sum financing in KA2 in the new programme cycle introduces challenges in assessing project budgets. Experts find it difficult to determine whether these projects will execute their



activities in a cost-effective manner. There is a concern that applicants may strive to reach the lump sum amount in their applications, potentially resulting in excess funds.

BUDGET DISTRIBUTION

There is a mismatch between the budget distribution between KA1 and KA2 and the needs of organisations participating in Erasmus+. The data consistently depict a larger available budget for KA1 compared to the requested budget. Conversely, for KA2, the available budget consistently falls short of the requested budget. This observation aligns with concerns expressed by Epos and various beneficiaries⁸. Furthermore, Epos faces a paradox: while the EC demands promotion of KA2, and one of the aims of the new programme cycle is to increase support for projects that foster cooperation, only limited resources are directed toward funding KA2-projects. Consequently, Epos is unable to finance all qualitative projects, which demotivates applicants. This sentiment is reflected in the experience of applicants.

The data also reveals that the allocated budgets for different sectors do not align appropriately with the requested budgets within those sectors. In higher education, the available KA1-budget consistently exceeds the requested budget, while in school education the available budget falls short. The allocated budgets for VET appear to be relatively appropriate compared to the requested budgets.

ADEQUACY OF PROJECT BUDGETS

The adequacy of KA1 project budgets generally varies depending on the destination of the mobility (e.g. outside of Europe is more expensive), the type of beneficiary (staff or student) and the beneficiary's expectations (whether the mobility is fully financed or co-financed). Different sectors express different concerns: budgets in adult education are reported to be insufficiently tailored to the needs of adult students (e.g. they cannot stay in a youth hostel to cut costs) and budget sizes have become less comfortable due to inflation. Staff mobilities in school education often incur higher travel expenses because they usually take place during busy travel periods. The Council of the Flemish Universities of Applied Sciences and Arts highlights that the connection between budgets for long and short mobility in higher education is not optimal, and furthermore indicates that KA171-budgets are too limited, posing a threat to the continuity of cooperation with partner institutions. Interestingly, there were relatively little concerns about the sufficiency of KA2 project budgets.

EQ 17. 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 Organisations⁶) from the point of view of your country, and to what extent does the Commission fulfil its guiding role in the process? How has this changed between the two programming periods? What are the reasons for potential changes? What are the areas for possible improvement in the implementation of Erasmus 2021-2027 or a successor programme?

The extent and quality of collaboration seems to vary across the actors:

- ▶ DG EAC: as experienced by the NA Epos, the roles are not always clear, but Epos experiences accessibility and willingness to offer support. DG EAC is described as making efforts to involve the NA's. Moreover, the collaboration is perceived to have improved in the current programming period compared to the previous one: there now is better two-way communication. An essential point of attention that remains is that Epos is bound to the rules and regulations stipulated by the Commission, which are reported to be updated frequently, are not always sufficiently planned out with feasibility for NA implementation in mind, and tend

⁸ Note that, although the data suggests that this KA2-budget shortage is most pressing for school education and higher education, in particular interviewees from the VET sector perceived the budget to be insufficient, contending that this issue has become more pronounced in recent years.



to be subject to late communications when changes are made. Reportedly, these issues hinder an efficient implementation by the NA, with Epos observing a lack of stability of the programme, lack of clarity in regulations, a continual need for adjustments, and more. A possible improvement in the collaboration could therefore be closer and more proactive consultation by the DG EAC of NA needs in terms of implementation, as well as a timely prior assessment of the practical feasibility and likely impact of changes to the programme;

- ▶ EACEA: the information flow is perceived by Epos as inefficient and the collaboration as rather difficult;
- ▶ Erasmus+ Committee: it is not so clear to the employees of Epos what this committee does, the flow of information is not always clear or well agreed upon;
- ▶ National Authority: as reported by the NA and NAU, cooperation is limited but positive. A willingness between the two parties is observed. Both parties also see opportunities for further cooperation on topics with a shared relevance (see also EQ 8).

EQ 18. To what extent are the measures applied by your National Agency/ies 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?

APPLICATION PROCEDURE

Epos invests in various activities to reach potential applicants (see effectiveness, EQ 9). When it comes to the application procedure itself, the evidence points towards several points of attention: the intensity and complexity of the application procedure, the challenge of finding experts, the lack of consistency across evaluations by external experts, and the resource-intensive review procedure for small-scale partnerships.

SUPPORT FOR BENEFICIARIES AND PARTICIPANTS

Epos provides all-round support to beneficiaries and applicants. The support from Epos, especially of the file managers, is generally very well received by beneficiaries. Overall, the support by Epos is described as having improved considerably over the last 10 years. Some smaller points of attention remain; such as special attention needed for smaller and newcomer organisations, and for less tech-savvy staff.

MONITORING AND PROJECT LIFE CYCLE MANAGEMENT

Reporting is experienced as challenging by both the National Agency and beneficiaries. In terms of monitoring beneficiaries, Epos combines a risk-based approach (as prescribed by the European Commission) and randomly generated checks. Beneficiaries reported that they experienced pressure from the required reporting and audits.

EQ 19. To what extent have simplification measures put in place, 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?

The data provides evidence for a reduction in administrative burden due to the simplification measures.

ACCREDITATION

A majority (74%) of beneficiaries with experience of both programme periods reported that the accreditation system constituted an administrative improvement in their institution. Interviewees described a reduction in administrative burden because short-term applications are no longer needed. Accreditation has proven increasingly popular amongst applicants in Flanders.



Both positive and negative effects of accreditation arise from the evidence. On the one hand, accreditation may facilitate the organisation of mobilities and leads to more sustainability of projects and collaborations, as the accreditation requires a long-term vision and engagement. On the other hand, the barrier of application for an accreditation is considered by several interviewees as too high for smaller and newcomer (or less experienced) organisations⁹. Small-scale partnerships were described as insufficiently mitigating that issue. This barrier has an additional negative side effect: some interviewees reported pressure on or even partnerships coming to an end because partners from priorly established networks were not able or willing to apply for an accreditation. This being said, accreditation may indirectly open access for smaller or less experienced organisations via a trickle-down system, in particular for school education and VET. Broader networks, such as school groups, were reported as a gateway for smaller schools to try out Erasmus+ activities with less perceived risk and less administrative burden.

From the perspective of Epos, the symmetry of having accreditation for all sectors was reported to facilitate the management of the Erasmus+ programme. At the same time, the actual follow-up of accreditations was described as more resource-intensive as compared to the previous programme 2014-2020.

LUMP SUM

Similar to accreditation, a majority (61,4%) of beneficiaries with experience of both programme periods, indicated that the introduction of the lump sum for the granting of subsidies constituted an administrative improvement in the institution. For the National Agency, however, there is a negative side effect in the form of a reduced transparency in budgeting.

EQ 21. 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?

Both the National Agency and beneficiaries are generally not satisfied with the new management support tools. The main criticism is that the announced functionalities of the tools are, for the most part, consistent with the programme needs and architecture in theory, but that the tools – especially the Beneficiary Module – do not function accordingly. In addition, the timing of implementation undermines an effective management and monitoring of the Erasmus+ programme: tools and related updates were announced but not ready in time and were not sufficiently aligned with changes to the Erasmus+ programme. Users need to adapt continuously due to changes to the tools within the current programme 2021-2027.

BENEFICIARY MODULE

A primary source of concern is the functioning of the Beneficiary Module. Across all sectors, the following issues arise from the evidence: technical issues and bugs, low functionality, lengthy and complex forms, delay in implementation, varying opinions on the potential for reducing administrative load.

ERASMUS WITHOUT PAPER AND THIRD-PARTY SOFTWARE

Data suggests that the principle behind Erasmus without paper (EWP) matches beneficiaries' needs, as the initiative has helped to reduce the level of paperwork needed over time. However, it was reported that the EWP tools do not sufficiently offer a fully paperless workflow.

Third-party tools are described as complex in use, which may act as a barrier for staff members to participate in Erasmus+. According to international coordinators of beneficiary organisations, there are some qualitative differences between the tools available.

⁹ Note that newcomer organisations can make use of accreditation by partaking in a consortium. However, in order to apply for accreditation themselves (with a coordinator status) they are required to have prior experience.



OTHER TOOLS

- ▶ The aim of the new **Online Language Support tool** was considered highly relevant by the universities of applied sciences, but a possibility is needed for monitoring of its use.
- ▶ The required information to be inserted in the **Distance Calculator** was described as infeasible, as many beneficiaries do not have the means to monitor the necessary indicators.
- ▶ For the National Agencies, the lack of stability and reliability of the **EAC Dashboard** leads to monitoring issues (see also EQ20).

EQ 20. To what extent do the indicators identified for the programme in the Regulation correspond to the monitoring purposes at national level? How could the overall management and monitoring system be improved?

EQ 22. To what extent have the antifraud measures allowed for the prevention and timely detection of fraud in your country?

MONITORING

For Epos the overarching monitoring purposes and indicators of the current Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027 are lacking in clarity. This highlights a request for the development of a clear monitoring framework delineated by the European Commission, which in turn, can be used and adapted flexibly in line with the Flemish monitoring needs. However, the National Agency expressed a level of concern regarding further changes to the current programme, because prior adaptations have made it more difficult to monitor the effectivity of the programme.

There is a clear lack of efficient monitoring of the impact of the Erasmus+ programme in line with programme aims and horizontal priorities, due to data limitations and insufficient measurement. The following issues emerge from analysis: low actuality and reliability of data, limited availability of data on horizontal priorities, level of (detail of) data, insufficient follow-up.

RISK MANAGEMENT

In terms of risk management, analysis revealed the following:

- ▶ **Risk assessment** of applicants is a point of attention for the coming years. In particular, one has seen an increase in recent years of strategic behaviour by applicants unknown to the National Agency, e.g. organisations specialising in submission of applications who submit the same applications across Member States. Epos expressed a preference for a targeted approach across National Agencies, steered by the European Commission.
- ▶ **Quality control** across Member States poses a challenge. There is a perception of differences in quality assessment and interpretation of quality criteria by National Agencies. This has led to frustration amongst Flemish beneficiaries and staff members, especially in VET who reported quality issues relating to commercial training organisations in certain Member States.
- ▶ Epos has not observed any noticeable impact of the **antifraud measures** on the prevention or detection of fraud. Moreover, it was pointed out that fraud is not within the scope of Epos' responsibilities and/or capabilities, considering that they do not have the necessary legal expertise or capacity, there are insufficient resources for antifraud actions and the antifraud measures leave much flexibility for interpretation by National Agencies and/or lack the potential impact to act on fraud. Moreover, fraud may act on a larger European level, where a stronger role at commission level might be appropriate. Therefore, there may be value in an intermediary or in-between actor specialising in fraud prevention and detection.



3.3. Relevance

EQ 23. To what extent do the Erasmus+ 2021-2027 objectives as set up in Article 3.1 and 3.2 of the Erasmus+ regulation, in link with the EU policy agendas in the field of education and training, continue to address the needs or challenges they are meant to help with? Are these needs or challenges (still) relevant in the context of your country? 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?

EQ 27. What is the relevance of Erasmus+ 2021-2027 compared to the relevance of Erasmus+ 2014-2020 from the point of view of your country? Has it been improved in the new programme generation?

NEEDS AND THE GENERAL OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAMME

The importance of the general objectives of Erasmus+ was emphasized during the focus groups. In particular, the quality of education (given the decline in the PISA scores) and the strong need for the professionalisation of education professionals (including their digital skills) emerged as important needs.

The 2014-2020 programme had emphasised economic challenges, which was reflected in increased attention for VET, traineeships in higher education, and the link with the labour market in general. According to policy stakeholders who participated in the focus groups, these challenges are still present and, moreover, have become even more precarious. The huge shortage on the labour market and the need for technical and STEM competencies is one of the biggest challenges for education. One need that, according to the stakeholders interviewed, is not sufficiently addressed in the current programme is the shortage of teachers in Flanders (but also in other European countries).

Various stakeholders indicate that the objectives formulated by Erasmus+ are broad enough to allow for individual interpretation.

HORIZONTAL PRIORITIES

The current programme also proposes horizontal priorities, namely inclusion and diversity, digital transformation, green transition, and fourthly, participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement. Policy actors, but also participating organisations and even participants, are critical of these additional priorities. It is stated that the addition creates too many objectives, with the risk of a diffuse effect. They are concerned that the 'learning in an international context' component may suffer.

It is argued that Erasmus+ does not have to provide an answer to all problems in education and, more generally, that there are other programmes and policy areas that respond to these horizontal priorities.

Moreover, small organisations indicate that it is difficult for them to achieve these horizontal priorities in addition to the main objectives of Erasmus+. They indicate that these criteria are not always relevant for a specific project at a specific institution, and that they do not know how to deal with this during the application and reporting.

EQ 24. To what extent are the needs of different stakeholders and sectors in your country 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 communities in your country? In case some target groups are not sufficiently reached, what factors are limiting their access and what actions could be taken to remedy this? What are the reasons of limited participation of certain target groups? Are there target groups who chose not to participate or are there always external factors preventing them?



OUTREACH OF THE PROGRAMME

Outside the education sector, findings from the focus groups suggest that there is still a strong perception of Erasmus+ existing only to support mobility for students in higher education. But even within the education sector, not all potential participants seem to be aware of all the possibilities. Findings from the focus groups also suggest that the possibility of submitting or collaborating in a KA2 project is relatively unknown among profit organisations.

Contacts within an existing consortium seem to be important for gaining access. Adult education centres and, to a lesser extent, small (primary) schools do not have the necessary financial resources to co-finance KA2 projects.

ATTRACTING THE TARGET GROUP

At the level of the intended participating organisations, interviewees indicated that it is more difficult to involve primary schools (e.g. due to low capacity), adult education (e.g. due to short programmes, lack of staff, low capacity), special education (but participation of this group is increasing) and the profit sector (see above). In addition, Erasmus+ seems to be difficult to implement within dual learning programmes.

At an individual level, interviewees mentioned that, apart from people with fewer opportunities (see also EQ25), some groups are harder to reach and motivate to participate:

- ▶ For parents of young children interviewees pointed towards the difficulty of finding childcare, especially if the parent is part of an already vulnerable target group. This target group is present among the staff, but also among the adult education students.
- ▶ The administrative threshold and its jargon is likely to weigh more heavily on non-native speakers. An example offered during focus groups was a secondary school student who was not allowed to participate because his non-native speaking parent did not understand Erasmus+.

There is a group of participants who are very enthusiastic and continue to participate after an initial participation (both learners and staff). At the same time, however, the focus groups also show that there is group of staff who are reluctant towards Erasmus+ and have a negative image of the programme, perceiving it as a holiday that inconveniences other colleagues. Participants in the study also mentioned that internationalisation is not a formal part of their job and therefore they do not have time for it.

FACTORS LIMITING ACCESS AND POSSIBLE ACTIONS TO REMEDY THIS

Common factors limiting access were identified building on the survey results, focus groups and findings from a prior study on the impact of Erasmus+ and eTwinning on schools¹⁰. A first barrier to access is the administrative burden. According to participants, participating in Erasmus+ requires a lot of heavy paperwork, including complex terminology. The use of standard translations in different languages for frequently used documents was suggested as a possible solution. A second barrier is the financial burden. For people living in poverty or deprivation, it is considered difficult to pay the costs of participation upfront. Students working while studying may have less possibilities to interrupt employment or lose income for a period of time. A third barrier to access, especially for staff and the beneficiary organisation, is the extra workload or organisational challenges (e.g. finding replacements; especially for teachers in school, vocational training, adult education). If a replacement cannot be found, interviewees mentioned that teachers need to teach their course online locally or provide an alternative assignment. This requires extra preparation and adaptation, in addition to preparing for the exchange and valorising the exchange afterwards. An additional factor that makes this barrier even more pressing is the staff shortage, which has become precarious in Flanders.

¹⁰ IDEA Consult (2022). Impact van Erasmus+ en eTwinning op scholen. Brussel: Epos vzw.



There are also some success factors that may overcome these barriers (based on focus groups data):

- ▶ **At school/organisational level:** support from school management¹¹, structural embeddedness of internationalisation¹², a prior tradition or history of participation in internationalisation, presence of an internationalisation strategy, availability of a standard replacement for teachers who go on an exchange (e.g. 'butterfly teachers'), formal dissemination, providing enough time and resources for international coordinators, organisational stability of the institution (especially in adult education), involvement of all staff.
- ▶ **At staff level:** spreading the Erasmus+ experience among other teachers, careful selection of staff, stimulating informal dissemination of experiences and practical information, involvement of the group of non-participants.¹³
- ▶ **At learner level:** targeted attempts to remove the barriers faced by learners and their parents (this requires in-depth counselling), strong communication to motivate students, guidance before, during and after the exchange, careful selection of learners, providing a full alternative for learners who stay at home (in the case of group exchanges).
- ▶ **At project level:** a strong project coordinator, careful selection of partner organisations, achievable goals with tangible outcomes, embedding of the project in a broader learning process, linking the project to the needs of the school, teachers/staff and learners.
- ▶ **Other external factors** that can have a positive impact are support from Epos, participation of coordinators in international contact seminars, obtaining accreditation and the use of the e-Twinning platform.

EQ 25. To what extent is the design of Erasmus+ 2021-2027 oriented and adapted towards the hard-to-reach groups, people with fewer opportunities or specific disadvantaged groups of the population who traditionally do not engage in transnational or international activities as compared to other groups that benefit from the programme? In case some target groups are not sufficiently reached in your country, what factors are limiting their access and what actions could be taken to remedy this?

The Erasmus+ Programme Guide 2023 provides a comprehensive description of the different barriers that may prevent or make it more difficult for participants with fewer opportunities to participate in the programme. In order to make the Erasmus+ programme more inclusive, additional financial resources ("inclusion support" for project management and/or for the participant) will be allocated when organisations develop activities for "less privileged" participants. To avoid organisations having to decide for themselves what the profile of a less privileged participant entails, Epos, in consultation with the National Authority, has drawn up a list of eligible profiles for the 2023 call. Particularly in higher education, a policy on monitoring students with fewer opportunities – including delineated definitions of such profiles – had already been in place and is viewed as matching Epos' approach.

Interviewees expressed a feeling that Erasmus+ is theoretically accessible to all groups, including those with fewer opportunities, but that the latter group is not sufficiently familiar with the programme or encounters a number of barriers (see also the barriers identified in EQ24 which also apply to those with fewer opportunities). This group also has the impression that Erasmus+ is mainly a programme for students with a higher social and

¹¹ This success factor was reported by interviewees to translate into trust by school management in staff to invest in internationalisation.

¹² Interviewees suggested that such embeddedness was strongly present in large institutions, but not so much in small schools. The level of the educational umbrella organisation can play a role here.

¹³ Interviewees suggested that non-participating staff are more likely to participate if they are motivated by another colleague.



financial status. This perception decreases the likelihood that people with fewer opportunities find their way to Erasmus+ (e.g. even preventing attendance at an information session about the possibilities of Erasmus+).

Some coordinators make it their business to personally motivate students with fewer opportunities to participate in the programme. According to interviewees this personal approach is effective but easier to achieve in school education due to the closer contact between students and teachers.

It was also mentioned that a physical disability or health problem can make an exchange difficult. Finding a campus, a place to stay and the appropriate support seems to be a rather difficult task. In addition, beneficiaries and staff in adult education were hesitant towards accepting students whose residence papers are not fully complete – fearing that their application will be considered invalid.

EQ 26. To what extent are the needs and challenges linked to Europe's green and digital transitions reflected in the actions/activities of Erasmus+ 2021-2027?

The Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027) is a European Union (EU) policy initiative that sets out a vision for high quality, inclusive and accessible digital education in Europe and aims to support the adaptation of Member States' education and training systems to the digital age. The plan calls for increased cooperation at a European level in the field of digital education to address the challenges and opportunities of the COVID-19 pandemic and to provide opportunities for the education and training community (teachers, students), policy makers, academia, and researchers at a national, EU and international level. These objectives and actions are reflected in the horizontal priorities of Erasmus+, namely digital transformation. The testimonies showed that there are some projects aiming at the exchange of digital knowledge and skills. However, interviewees noted that digitalisation is more advanced in Flanders than in most host countries. In recent years, digitalisation in education gained momentum through the 'Digisprong', which meant that schools received additional financial support to invest in their infrastructure, knowledge and skills. However, interviewees still mentioned that expanding teachers' digital skills remain an important need in Flanders.

The recurring comment on the green transition is that the green objectives are difficult to reconcile with the concept of Erasmus. It requires an international exchange that involves travelling by plane or other means of transport. Many interviewees said that they find this difficult to understand, that they struggle to find greener ways of travelling that are affordable within the available budget, and that the time needed for green travel is infeasible for most schools¹⁴. The green transition and focus on less air travel to distant destinations also do not fit in with the idea of getting to know different, often distant, cultures.

3.4. Coherence

EQ 28. 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, including those managed by different National Agencies, and actions? How well do different actions work together? To what extent there exist inconsistencies, overlaps, or other disadvantageous issues between the programme fields and how are they dealt with?

Epos makes demonstrable efforts to promote internal coherence within the programme. Structured meetings with both the youth agency and other Belgian Erasmus+ NAs are organised to cooperate between the different

¹⁴ The reasoning is that longer trips imply longer absences and, in the case of staff mobility, longer periods to find a replacement.



programme fields. However, since this evaluation is focused on the education and training field only, we cannot report on coherence between all programme fields.

The internal coherence within the education and training field is actively promoted by Epos. Integration with the centralised actions eTwinning, EPAL, Europass, Euroguidance,... and with Sport is structurally guaranteed by Epos, being the umbrella organisation for Erasmus+ and all these actions.

In relation to how these actions work together in practice, the evaluation revealed the following findings:

- ▶ With regard to **coherence within KA1**, the different mobility activities for pupils/learners and staff are perceived as very complementary, because they lead to different experiences of internationalisation, which can build on each other and thus reinforce each other. We also identified some inconsistencies:
 - Within KA1 for higher education, the KA171 has a more complex application and reporting procedure than the KA131, while there are fewer mobility options.
 - The centres for adult education in Flanders observe an inconsistency in the fact that adult learners that follow a vocationally oriented course, have to participate in VET mobility, and adult learners that follow a general course, can participate in adult education mobility. The minimum mobility in the latter is two days, but in the former it is two weeks, which is a barrier for many of their learners. It seems that due to the intended symmetry in KA1, VET mobility appears to be too much tailored to the situation of young people.
- ▶ **KA1 and KA2** in general work well together. Beneficiaries that combine KA1 and KA2 clearly experience an amplifying effect. However, coherence and interconnectedness also lead to a certain degree of confusion and ambiguity in the demarcation, both for the beneficiary and the NA. This is especially true for the KA2 small-scale partnerships in school education, VET and adult education, which has a budget for individual mobility, while KA1 also allows organisations to work institutionally (through accreditations, but also e.g. by organising individual mobilities in school-wide projects). Another example of interaction are organisations which are active in KA2 projects and supports schools in KA1 (e.g. the Eekhout academy).
- ▶ **Erasmus+ and Europass** work well together in the sense that organisations are stimulated to use Europass via Erasmus+. However, some decide not to use it and develop their own tool, because they find the system insufficiently user-friendly or because the content does not meet the needs of general education.
- ▶ Also **Erasmus+ and eTwinning** work well together, in the sense that many organisations in Erasmus+ use the platform. Interviewees also gave examples of eTwinning projects that functioned as stepping stones towards Erasmus+ projects. At the same time, however, several interviewees described eTwinning as a cumbersome platform and opt for an alternative communication channel for virtual contacts. Apparently, it is unclear for some whether eTwinning is obligatory or not.
- ▶ **KA1/KA2 and KA3** are perceived as complementary. It's another level of ambition and budgets, another type of partners is involved.

Survey results confirm that the general internal coherence and amplifying effects described above are noticeable in practice for organisations.

EQ 29. To what extent is Erasmus+ 2021-2027 coherent with other national or regional programmes, other forms of EU cooperation (bilateral programmes) as well as international programmes with similar objectives available in your country? Can you identify any inconsistencies, overlaps or other disadvantageous issues with other programmes?



EQ 30. To what extent has Erasmus+ 2021-2027 proved to be complementary to other national and international programmes available in your country 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 national or regional level and other EU or international programmes with complementary objectives available in your country? What evidence exist of synergies and complementarities between Erasmus+ and other EU, national or regional programmes? Can you identify any inconsistencies, overlaps or other disadvantageous issues with other programmes? Can you compare with the synergies and complementarities developed in the previous Erasmus+ programme 2014-2020?

The table below summarises the relevant programmes with similar objectives that have been mentioned by beneficiaries and stakeholders throughout this evaluation (this should not be considered as an exhaustive inventory):

National	International
Buurklassen, Erasmus Belgica, Intercom (managed by Epos)	AMIF, ESF, Interreg, Media, Creative Europe, CERV, Leader
Prins Filip fonds (KBS), VVOB	European Universities alliances
Funding from local authorities	NextGeneration EU
Sectoral funding for traineeships	
Brains on the move (higher education)	

Coherence with national programmes

The national programmes in the table above are mainly aimed at **higher education, school education and VET**. Some of them are managed by Epos. Although the survey shows that organisations use additional funding or programmes to expand their international activities, these are usually funds obtained through their own activities or through sponsoring.

The other programmes are considered complementary (by 74.1% of organisations). Financially, they are of limited importance. The added value lies in the synergies that arise: national programmes are more accessible and can therefore be important for organisations, staff and learners as a stepping stone to Erasmus+. A gap in the national offer that is regularly mentioned by schools and small organisations is the lack of a supporting budget to reimburse staff costs for the coordination of internationalisation. This could make a difference in assuring quality and impact of projects.

For **higher education** a complementary national programme is "Brains on the Move", subsidised by the Department of Education and managed by VLUHR-i. It mainly provides student mobility scholarships for a list of countries that are not in the list of Erasmus+ programme countries. It requires constant attention to keep both programmes consistent.

Coherence with international programmes

Epos makes demonstrable efforts to promote external coherence of Erasmus+ with other international programmes. They maintain active contacts with the NCPs (national contact points), NAs and Flemish support services for other EU programmes, often facilitated by the Flemish-European liaison office Flanders-Europe (VLEVA). They also learn from NAs in other countries how these synergies can take shape.

For the international programmes below, some specific remarks can be made:



- ▶ **European Universities alliances.** At the time of this evaluation, 9 out of 18 Flemish higher education institutions were members of an approved alliance. In a positive sense, the Flemish government has complemented this initiative by providing extra funding (through the Department of Economy, Science and Innovation) and by providing an exception to the language regulations in higher education for the programmes within these alliances. A potential disadvantageous issue that might arise is that more KA1 resources for students and staff will be needed in more advanced alliances. Any exploration of potential solutions to address this issue need to take into account the totality of the budgets for KA1, for the rest of the higher education institutions but also taking into account the budget needs of other sectors (see EQ15 and EQ16).
- ▶ **NextGeneration EU.** Through this temporary European recovery instrument – translated to the Flemish recovery and resilience plan ‘Vlaamse Veerkracht’ – programmes related to the green and digital transition have been set up in various policy domains, including education and training. An effective synergy that was mentioned is with the ‘Digisprong’ programme in school and adult education: this investment in digital infrastructure reduces the cost of digital communication for organisations. At the same time, however, there is a risk of overlap, particularly in higher education. As a policy actor in the field of innovation observed, higher education institutions tend to ‘shop around’ for subsidies related to the digital and green transitions, locally and internationally, and within various policy domains, but the government has no oversight to monitor leverage.

External coherence in organisations

The reinforcing effects of external coherence also have an impact on organisations in the field. It has already been mentioned that local programmes can be a stepping stone to Erasmus+. Participation in projects coordinated by others can also be a stepping stone to one’s own project (within or outside Erasmus+).

In international programmes, focus group findings suggest that organisations which are successful in one programme are more likely to be successful in others. They speak the right language, develop richer ideas and end up in international networks in which Erasmus+ is only part of an ecosystem of international relations.

Survey and focus group findings suggest that most organisations that combine Erasmus+ with other programmes perceive them as complementary. Other (European) programmes clearly have different objectives, rules, platforms and so on. Organisations choose the appropriate programme to support their various objectives. To some extent, strategic behaviour can be observed: as a beneficiary (where is the highest chance of success?) or as a partner (which network can we join?). Nevertheless, many organisations lack sufficient knowledge and capacity to investigate the possibilities of various (funding) programmes.

EQ 31. What is the coherence of Erasmus+ 2021-2027 compared to the coherence of Erasmus+ 2014-2020 from the point of view of your country? Has it been improved in the new programme generation?

In the mid-term evaluation of Erasmus+ 2014-2020 the integration of the several programmes into Erasmus+ was an explicit issue. Since then, a further development of symmetry between the KA1 actions (e.g. accreditation in all sectors) can indeed be observed.

Another expectation in 2014-2020 was that integration would create more space to accommodate policy changes and to use Erasmus+ as a policy tool. The horizontal priorities of Erasmus+ 2021-2027 explicitly aim for this. However, during the evaluation, focus group findings demonstrated that policy stakeholders from the relevant policy areas (innovation, work, sustainability, equal opportunities, etc.) either did not see the relevance of participating in the focus group, or still only know Erasmus+ as a programme for individual learning mobility of pupils and students. Hence, there is still room for growth in external coherence.



A deterioration at the level of implementation in Erasmus+ 2021-2027 compared to 2014-2020, is observed with regard to the coherence between KA1 and KA2 for school education, adult education and VET.

In the previous programme period, specifically the former school exchange partnerships in KA2 appeared to have been a stepping stone towards KA1 for beneficiaries in school education, adult education and VET. The system changed in 2021 toward the integration of school exchange opportunities in KA1, the introduction of small-scale partnerships, and less promotion of KA2 on a budgetary level as compared to KA1. Focus groups findings suggest that beneficiaries need to look for new ways to achieve their intended goals, but are not yet aware or do not find their way to school exchange opportunities within KA1 or small-scale partnerships in KA2, resulting in frustration and a decrease in opportunities for synergy as described above. Moreover, schools with more internationalisation experience were described as no longer being able to rely on KA2 opportunities, considering that they are not the target group for small-scale partnerships and that success rates for cooperation partnerships are rather low.

3.5. European added value

EQ 33. 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 your country?

The survey results demonstrate that the Erasmus+ programme significantly contributes to a heightened awareness of EU common values and to fostering a sense of European belonging. In the focus groups, certain respondents aptly described how EU common values and the experience of European citizenship function as catalysts for peace and act as barriers against polarization.

The Erasmus+ programme, along with the Commission's priorities, underscores the role that the programme must play concerning migrants. In one of the focus groups, interviewees highlighted the significance of learning EU values through Erasmus+ in Dutch language lessons in adult education, particularly for newcomers. This exemplifies the contribution of Erasmus+ in this domain.

However, the contribution to knowledge in European integration matters appears to be considerably lower. Some interviewees questioned whether this should be an objective of Erasmus+, which points towards the option of perhaps leaving such objectives exclusively to the Jean Monnet actions (which were not in the scope of this evaluation).

EQ 34. To what extent does Erasmus+ 2021-2027 promote cooperation between Member States and third countries associated to the programme? And between these countries and third countries not associated to the programme

The survey results indicate that Erasmus+ has facilitated cooperation with partner or third countries for approximately one-third of the organisations in our sample, while about two-thirds have not engaged in such collaborations. For organisations that solely participated in KA1, the proportion involved in collaborations with partner countries is lower, at around one-fifth.

The primary added value of Erasmus+ lies in its ability to enhance the attractiveness of the organisation in these partner countries. On the other hand, the fact that some countries, with which stakeholders in Flanders have good collaboration relationships, are not associated to the programme (e.g. Switzerland, United Kingdom,...), makes collaboration with partner organisations in these countries much more complicated.

EQ 32. What is the additional value and benefit resulting from EU activities, compared to what could be achieved by similar actions initiated only at regional or national levels in your country? What does Erasmus+ 2021-2027



offer in addition to other education and training support schemes available at regional or national levels in your country? What possibilities do you see to adjust Erasmus+ or its successor programme in order to increase its European added value?

EQ 35. What is the benefit and added value of Erasmus+ 2021-2027 and Erasmus+ 2014-2020 for individuals or organisations participating to the programme compared to non-participants in your country?

Most organisations in the survey that are also involved in other programmes, indicate that Erasmus+ has enabled them to achieve results that would have been unattainable through other funding channels or programmes alone (81.5%). Additionally, concerning collaboration under KA2, 79.5% of organisations believe that positive results can be achieved through joint efforts that would not be possible as an individual effort. Consequently, there is a robust added value of the Erasmus+ programme.

The focus groups reveal that the added value of Erasmus+ for organisations predominantly lies in the importation of knowledge, creativity, and good practices from abroad to Flanders. Moreover, due to the quality standards imposed by Erasmus+, organisations develop a more strategic approach to their internationalisation policy. For instance, a school may transition from organizing separate school trips to subsidized internships or class exchanges that are better aligned with curriculum objectives. In school contexts, international experiences with teachers and pupils tend to enhance their bond, fostering increased well-being and a positive atmosphere at school.

As demonstrated by both survey and focus group findings, the added value for individuals is evident for both staff and learners. Staff members participating in Erasmus+ experience a broadening of their horizons and mindset, feeling more connected to global events. Tangibly, they bring inspiring learning content and methodologies from abroad to their practices in Flanders, while emotionally, the experience provides them with new energy and motivation for their job.

Learners participating in Erasmus+ reportedly gain a boost to their self-reliance and independence, which is depicted as a more profound experience compared to other programmes due to having to manage on their own, far away from home. As discussed in EV 1, the survey results also suggest that learners experience skill development in dealing with diversity and communication with other cultures, enhancing their ability to work collaboratively in a team.

However, the added value of Erasmus+ does not occur automatically. Careful implementation is essential to guarantee quality. One challenge is the perception that Erasmus+ is often associated with a 'holiday' within school teams (see also EQ24). Indeed, instances of low-quality courses in sunny destinations were mentioned during focus groups. Therefore, active efforts toward establishing qualitative partnerships are crucial. As reported by interviewees, tensions or a sense of jealousy may arise within organisations between participants and non-participants; addressing this requires thoughtful implementation, such as offering an alternative programme for those who stay at home, along with effective communication to prevent such issues.

EQ 11. To what extent are the effects likely to last in your country after the intervention ends, both cumulatively and the level of each implemented grant?

EQ 36. To what extent are the results of Erasmus+ 2021-2027 and Erasmus+ 2014-2020 sustainable beyond the projects duration in your country?

EFFECTS THAT ARE MORE LIKELY TO LAST/RESULTS THAT ARE EASIER TO MAKE SUSTAINABLE

At the individual level, the following effects appear more likely to endure: the ability for independent reasoning, the capacity to work independently, self-reliance, self-efficacy (i.e. the belief that one can achieve something), and adaptability. Additionally, the foundational aspects of learning a new language (i.e. not the actual knowledge but



the capability to learn) and a positive attitude towards interaction with other cultures/diversity were described by interviewees as sustainable results.

For beneficiaries or at the institutional level, many European networks developed through Erasmus+ appear to be enduring. In the survey, 83.3% of responding organisations describe the Erasmus+ collaboration as durable (excluding partnerships affected by COVID or geopolitical circumstances). However, interviewees noted that mutual trust and a shared work culture are crucial prerequisites for this type of sustainable cooperation. Additionally, repeated engagement reinforces durability.

Concerning outputs, digital outputs tend to last, as they are more easily accessible and, therefore, easier to disseminate and exploit after the project ends. Similarly, small-scale innovations in teaching practices in schools (e.g. language buddies, peer observation, etc.) were reported as more likely to be sustainable due to their incremental nature. Interviewees noted, however, that the faster the dissemination/exploitation occurs after project completion, the greater the chances for durability of certain output components.

EFFECTS THAT ARE LESS LIKELY TO LAST/ RESULTS THAT ARE MORE DIFFICULT TO MAKE SUSTAINABLE

At the individual level, staff mobilities without formalized or embedded immediate dissemination actions tend to exhibit fewer lasting effects – according to interviewees. This is attributed to the fact that the motivation to disseminate often occurs immediately after project completion and subsequently diminishes rapidly. Additionally, specific language competencies or knowledge tends to dissipate swiftly.

For beneficiaries or at the institutional level, the implementation of highly specific course-related topics in schools proves challenging. Similarly, innovative educational practices linked to more fundamental differences between educational systems do not always facilitate transferability, as the contextual nuances of each country or region's educational system play a crucial role.

In general, creating lasting results becomes challenging in the absence of sufficient support for dissemination/exploitation, either within the organisation (e.g. from management or school directors) or within the project budget. This concern has been expressed by interviewees, for instance, in relation to KA2 in higher education.

EQ 12. What if the Erasmus+ programme had not existed? Would the relevant sectors (higher education, school education, adult education, vocational education and training,) in your country be supported in the same way and to a comparable extent?

EQ 37. What would be the most likely consequences in your country if the Erasmus+ programme were possibly to be discontinued?

There is a consensus across all sectors that they would not receive the same level of support had the Erasmus+ programme not existed. The Flemish government would be unable to generate an equally substantial budget to facilitate internationalisation in education and training.

Drawing from insights into the added value of Erasmus+, we can deduce that the most likely consequences of discontinuing the programme would include reduced international mobility and exchanges, an increasing isolation of Flemish education and training institutions, a decline in challenges for individuals (including pupils, students, and staff), heightened monotony for everyone, a narrowing of perspectives within a global context, diminished innovation, a decrease in the quality of education, reduced tolerability, and an increase in black-and-white thinking.





4 / Conclusions and suggestions for improvement

In this final chapter, we summarise the conclusions of this interim evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027 and the final evaluation of the programme 2014-2020 in the Flemish Community of Belgium. The conclusions are organised around the main evaluation criteria: effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence and European added value. In the boxes suggestions for improvement to Erasmus+ as well as suggestions for a future programme are presented.

4.1. Effectiveness

The survey findings suggest that the benefits of Erasmus+ for on individuals – learners as well as staff members - encompass a broad spectrum, including enhanced knowledge of foreign languages, self-development, belief in one's abilities, improved communication, the ability to interact with people from diverse backgrounds, increased tolerance, and the establishment of an international network.

Specifically for learners, we found that the programme has demonstrated positive outcomes such as fostering initiative, independence, facilitating a smoother transition to further education, and enhancing employability. Particularly impactful are the benefits observed for pupils with fewer opportunities.

Staff members specifically, reported to have experienced substantial gains in pedagogical and didactic knowledge, acquisition of new learning practices and teaching methods, development of practical skills, a deeper understanding of different policies and practices, and heightened motivation and satisfaction.

Organisations have witnessed positive changes, including the adoption and sharing of innovative practices and new methods, Erasmus+ serving as a source for professionalisation policy, improved quality of education, heightened civic engagement, and increased cooperation with partners.

The overall satisfaction with Erasmus+ among learners, staff and organisations is notably positive.

Participating learners express a willingness to engage in future internationalisation projects and work abroad. Staff members, many of them through multiple participations, reported an increased capacity to initiate internationalisation within their institutions. Organisations, in turn, have exhibited an improved ability to function in an international context. This appears to be reinforced by the accreditation process. Repeated engagement clearly results in a longer-term reinforcement of the positive effects of Erasmus+.



Spill-over effects were identified between the individual to the institutional levels and between key actions. Spill-over effects were also observed between target groups on the individual level, such as learners and staff, and between Erasmus+ and other centralized projects. A clear 'stepping stone' mechanism or learning curve is observed.

Effects at systemic level are more difficult to evaluate and appear rather indirect. The transformative effects are challenging to monitor, partly due to the lack of a formulated strategy. However, there are indications that the programme's impact on the horizontal priorities 'inclusion and diversity', and 'participation in democratic life and civic engagement', surpasses its influence on 'digital transformation' and 'green transition'.

Various approaches have been employed by Epos and by other organisations to enhance effects and support dissemination/exploitation, with a focus on sectors where internationalisation is less developed and on disadvantaged groups.

The quality of applications increased in the previous programme cycle, for both KA1 and KA2. There was however a dip at the start of the new programme cycle. There are differences between educational sectors, mostly due to differences in experience and dedicated time. The support offered by Epos already had impact on the quality of applications in school education, adult education lags behind.

The impact of Covid-19 on the programme's implementation in Flanders was substantial. Epos organized effective communication on Covid-19 measures, and the dedicated support offered by Epos was well received. However, physical mobilities decreased, and projects were prolonged. There were limited implications of restrictive measures in Flanders regarding the Russian invasion of Ukraine, although beneficiaries and participants did experience the crisis itself and the broader geopolitical developments as impactful.

Box 2: Suggestions to improve effectiveness

- ▶ Increase communication actions targeted specifically at newcomers (basic information, e.g. via social media) and the broader sector (i.e. profit sector, sector federations, sociocultural actors...) (Epos).
- ▶ Expand and promote existing support options to minimize barriers to participation, e.g. replacement staff, financial support, ... (Epos and European Commission).
- ▶ For smaller or less experienced organisations, further stimulate promotion of less resource-intensive forms of mobility, such as short-term staff training, due to low barriers of entry, likelihood of spill-over to other mobility forms and relatively high impact. Utilise opportunities for collaboration with intermediary organisations, such as Europahuis Ryckvelde, to support smaller and newcomer organisations (Epos).
- ▶ Make sure the Epos website is user-friendly and easily accessible, also for newcomers to the programme (Epos).
- ▶ Facilitate exchange of experiences, also by using social media (Epos).
- ▶ Keep supporting school education, VET and adult education in improving the quality of KA1 applications, with a specific focus on adult education (Epos).
- ▶ Make sure the requirements for the KA2 applications are clear, for the small-scale partnerships in particular. This will also facilitate the review process. (Epos and European Commission).
- ▶ Quick win: further expand efforts to guide organisations and participants to a more sustainable Erasmus+ experience, for example through the development of tools or guidelines for beneficiaries on how to effectively disseminate and exploit Erasmus+ outputs and results (Epos).



- ▶ For KA2 projects: explore alternative options (e.g. separate budgets, guidelines, active follow-up, sharing of good practices...) to support dissemination/exploitation after project completion aside from the requested dissemination/exploitation strategy. Over time, this can include impact studies and built-in follow-up after project completion (Epos and European Commission).
- ▶ Support/guidance for beneficiary organisations to maximise spill-over effects between the staff level and institutional level (Epos).
- ▶ More attention to effectiveness on a systemic level to maximise impact and spill-over effects. This includes more targeting of and cooperation with stakeholders in the broader Flemish policy field (Epos).
- ▶ Define a strategy and monitoring framework for the potential transformative effect of the horizontal priorities (European Commission).

4.2. Efficiency

The available budget of Erasmus+ has more than doubled since the beginning of the previous programme period, while the number of funded projects has increased, but not doubled. Consequently, the allocated budget per project has significantly increased. Regarding cost-effectiveness, there are indications that funded projects do not consistently achieve the impact that they aimed for.

There is a mismatch between the budget distribution between KA1 and KA2 and the needs of organisations participating in Erasmus+. Our analysis consistently depicts a larger available budget for KA1 compared to the requested budget. For KA2 there is a paradox: while the European Commission reportedly demands promotion of KA2, the budget allocated for KA2 in Flanders is consistently insufficient.

The adequacy of KA1 project budgets generally varies depending on the destination of the mobility, the type of beneficiary ... Different sectors express different concerns. In general, especially in adult education and school education the available budgets fall short. There are relatively little concerns about the sufficiency of KA2 project budgets.

The efficiency of cooperation between Epos and the different actors at European level can be improved.

Overall, measures to simplify administration, i.e. the introduction of accreditation and the lump sum, have helped to alleviate administrative burden for beneficiaries. Reliance on accreditation has proven popular in Flanders, but an important point of attention remains: perceived high barriers of entry for smaller and newcomer (or less experienced) organisations, which affect priority established networks between schools.

There is clear evidence for dissatisfaction amongst users regarding the management tools, with the most pressing issues being the stability and functionality of the tools. Frustration arises from the frequent updates and incremental changes to the platforms and the delay in delivery of functionality, e.g. in the Beneficiary Module.

Beneficiaries and participants request further administrative simplification focused on reduced complexity in the required information/paperwork – both in procedures and the design of the tools.

There is dissatisfaction amongst Flemish policymakers in education and training and Epos with options for monitoring the Erasmus+ programme on an aggregate/system level, which renders targeted actions for the follow-up and improvement as very challenging.

Box 3: Suggestions to improve efficiency

- ▶ Explore options to increase budget efficiency, including a potential budget shift from higher education towards adult education and school education, to be able to increase KA1 project budgets in these sectors (Epos and European Commission).



- ▶ Make sure the project budgets are in line with the needs of the target group and the destination of the mobility, and follow inflation (Epos and European Commission).
- ▶ For higher education: separate the budgets for short and long mobilities (Epos and European Commission).
- ▶ Ensure efficient two-way communication between DG EAC, EACEA, Erasmus+ Committee and the National Agencies (Epos and European Commission).
- ▶ Improve the application procedure for applicants by evaluating the customer journey to highlight potential simplification (European Commission).
 - As a quick win, clarification/clear translation of evaluation criteria to external reviewers (Epos).
 - With an eye on efficiency gains for the National Agency, further monitor the resource intensity for the evaluation of small-scale partnership applications (Epos).
- ▶ Explore options for further administrative simplification. In terms of reporting across the lifecycle of projects, pay attention to the needs of smaller and newcomer organisations, higher education staff and learners, and less technically-skilled staff members (European Commission and Epos).
- ▶ Review options for aligning the timing of reporting, both for regular reporting and auditing, with the school or academic year (Epos).
- ▶ Set priorities in the necessary information requested from beneficiaries and participants in order to reduce the complexity of reporting (i.e. balance of required indicators in line with programme targets and user-friendly procedures) (European Commission).
- ▶ Design options to support external reviewers in the evaluation of lump sum budgets, ideally through cross-national knowledge sharing (e.g. across National Agencies) (European Commission).
- ▶ For higher education, provide administrative simplification for Blended Intensive Programmes, and KA 171 projects (European Commission).
- ▶ As a main priority, improve the stability and functionality of tools, most urgently the Beneficiary Module and reduce paperwork – contingent on extensive prior testing before the implementation of IT updates or changes (European Commission).
- ▶ With an eye on the design of the future programme, provide more integration/streamlining of IT tools and platforms (European Commission).
- ▶ Consult National Agencies to identify needs for a framework and/or guidelines on monitoring (European Commission).
- ▶ Improve reliability, actuality and level of detail of data to monitor progress and effectiveness of the current Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027 and to identify policy actions (European Commission).
- ▶ Evaluate (quantitative) options for systematically tracking aggregate progress on horizontal priorities and follow-up after project completion. As a quick win, organise monitoring sessions with other National Agencies on these topics (European Commission).
- ▶ Explore options for a targeted European approach addressing strategic application behaviour, quality control across National Agencies, and antifraud prevention and detection (European Commission).
- ▶ Point of attention for the Commission: the improvements mentioned above should be made with a clear vision for the longer run, with an eye on the design of the future programme and contingent on early communication to stakeholders. An integration or streamlining of the administrative procedures should be the target, whereas constant incremental changes to the current programme 2021-2027 should be



avoided. Prior consultation with NAs about the practical feasibility of programme changes is highly recommended (European Commission).

4.3. Relevance

The objectives of the Erasmus+ programme remain aligned with the needs and challenges in Flanders, with a particular emphasis on addressing pressing issues such as quality of education in view of the declining PISA scores, the imperative for the professionalisation of education professionals (including the enhancement of their digital skills), and a strategic focus on the relationship with the labour market. The latter involves tackling shortages in the labour market and meeting the demand for technical and STEM competencies.

However, a critical need that receives insufficient attention in the current programme is the shortage of teachers in Flanders.

Respondents express concerns about the Erasmus+ horizontal priorities, citing the risk of diffuse effects due to an abundance of objectives. The central objective of 'learning in an international context' might get compromised. Furthermore, some respondents argue that certain objectives may not always be relevant to specific projects at individual institutions.

In relation to the digital horizontal priority, although some projects aim to exchange digital knowledge and skills, participants note that the level of digitalization in Flanders surpasses that of many host countries. Additionally, achieving green objectives poses challenges, as green travel requires more time and budget, presenting a potential conflict with the core concept of Erasmus+.

Beyond the educational domain, there persists a prevalent misconception that Erasmus+ primarily consists of mobilities for students in higher education. Even within the education sector, not all potential participants seem to be fully aware of the diverse opportunities available.

Reaching certain types of organisations proves challenging, including primary schools, adult education institutions, special education providers, entities in the profit sector, and organisations for dual learning.

Individuals from disadvantaged groups tend to perceive Erasmus+ as a programme tailored for students from higher social and financial classes, often hesitating to attend information sessions.

Besides the groups identified as participant with fewer opportunities, other difficult-to-reach individuals are parents of young children (both staff and adult learners) and non-native speakers.

Factors limiting access include administrative burdens, financial constraints (such as upfront payments and loss of income), additional workload, and organisational challenges within schools. To address these challenges, beneficiaries, Epos, and other supporting organisations can take various actions. A personalised approach has been found effective in motivating pupils with fewer opportunities.

Box 4: Suggestions to improve relevance

- ▶ Consider the horizontal priorities as aspirations to be pursued rather than objectives to be achieved (European Commission).
- ▶ Provide translations in different languages for frequently used documents (e.g. also to inform non-native parents) (Epos).
- ▶ Support, inspire and maybe even finance beneficiary organisations to develop a tailored, personalised approach towards fewer opportunities target groups (Epos).



- ▶ Collaborate with specialised intermediary organisations (e.g. LEVL) to communicate towards the hard-to-reach groups (Epos).

4.4. Coherence

Epos endeavours to promote both internal and external coherence. The identification and resolution of inconsistencies, both within Erasmus+ and with other programmes, necessitate continual attention and coordination with the relevant authorities and implementing organisations.

For beneficiaries well-versed in Erasmus+, programme actions are found to be mutually reinforcing. Many Erasmus+ beneficiaries tend to set up multiple internationalisation activities. This pattern extends to other local and international programmes, where typically the objectives, target groups, procedures, etc., are complementary, and organisations actively seek actions that align with their objectives.

A certain degree of strategic behaviour is evident, with organisations estimating their chances of success across various programmes. In this context, it becomes challenging for the Flemish government (with not all policy stakeholders in adjacent domains appearing to be familiar with Erasmus+) to oversee whether there is an overlap that might compromise the leverage effect of individual programmes.

Within Erasmus+ and its interaction with other programmes, a stepping stone mechanism can be established, wherein more accessible actions serve as stepping stones to others, facilitated by the accumulation of necessary knowledge and network building. This mechanism forms the foundation for spill-over effects.

Regarding this stepping stone mechanism, we see a specific decline in 2021-2027 compared to the previous period (2014-2020): the former school exchange partnerships in KA2, which acted as stepping stones towards KA1 for beneficiaries in school education, are no longer as prominent due to changes in the system in 2021. Therefore, beneficiaries are compelled to explore new avenues to achieve their goals, resulting in a (potentially temporary) decrease in opportunities for synergy.

Box 5: Suggestions to improve coherence

- ▶ Continue the coordination with relevant authorities and implementing organisations to identify and resolve inconsistencies within Erasmus+ and with respect to other programmes (Epos).
- ▶ Specifically for higher education:
 - Create a separate budget line for mobilities financed within the framework of the European University Alliances, ensuring that they do not deplete the budget allocated for general student and staff mobilities within existing partnerships (European Commission).
 - At the Flemish level: legislative anchoring of the increased scholarship amount for students from disadvantaged groups and the expansion of the recognized disadvantaged groups for all scholarship programmes (NAU).
- ▶ Invest in raising awareness of the opportunities of Erasmus+ in other, adjacent policy areas (Epos).

4.5. European added value

There is a consensus across all sectors that they would not receive the same level of support had the Erasmus+ programme not existed.

Findings from the survey and focus groups suggest that the Erasmus+ programme contributes considerably to raising awareness about EU common values and fostering a European sense of belonging across all target groups.



Nevertheless, its importance for the development of knowledge in European integration matters appears comparatively limited. Participation in Erasmus+ facilitates collaboration with organisations in partner or associated third countries, enhancing cooperation. Conversely, collaboration with organisations in countries not associated with the programme proves to be intricate.

Erasmus+ stands out by delivering added value compared to actions initiated solely at regional or national levels. The international dimension of the programme reportedly leads to stronger and more diverse learning effects for both organisations and individuals, encompassing staff and learners. Effects that are more likely to endure, as estimated by interviewees, are individual-level traits like independent reasoning, self-reliance, and adaptability. Also, networks developed through Erasmus+ at the institutional level tend to be enduring, contingent on mutual trust and a shared work culture. Digital outputs and small-scale teaching innovations tend to last. On the other hand, staff mobilities without formalized dissemination actions, and specific language competencies may not have lasting effects.

Realizing the added value of Erasmus+ requires careful implementation to ensure quality outcomes, and sufficient support for dissemination/exploitation to generate lasting results.

Box 6: Suggestions to improve European added value

- ▶ Continue the general contours of the Erasmus+ programme, taking into account the suggestions for improvement (European Commission).
- ▶ Reconsider the general expectation towards Erasmus+ that it should also contribute to knowledge of European integration matters: let this be the focus of the Jean Monnet actions (European Commission).
- ▶ Continue active efforts toward establishing qualitative partnerships (Epos).
- ▶ Provide sufficient support for dissemination/exploitation within the project budgets, as a lever for lasting results (Epos and European Commission).



5 / Glossary of terms and abbreviations¹⁵

Accreditation	A procedure to ensure that organisations seeking financial support for an action covered by the Erasmus+ programme adhere to a set of quality standards or requirements set by the European Commission for that specific action.
Applicant	A participating organisation or informal group of young people applying for an Erasmus+ grant. Applicants may apply for financial support individually or on behalf of other organisations involved in the project. In the latter case, the applicant is also the coordinator.
Beneficiary	If a project is approved for an Erasmus+ grant, the applicant organisation becomes a beneficiary by signing an agreement with the National Agency or Executive Agency that selected the project. If the application was submitted on behalf of other participating organisations, the partners may become co-beneficiaries of the grant.
Co-funding	A principle of co-funding is applicable when the costs of an EU-supported project are partly borne by the beneficiary, or covered by external contributions other than the EU grant.
Consortium	Two or more participating organisations working together as a team for the preparation, implementation and follow-up of a project or project-based activity. A consortium can be national (i.e. with participation of organisations based in the same country) or international (with participation of organisations from different countries) in scope.
Coordinator/coordinating organisation	<p>A participating organisation applying for an Erasmus+ grant on behalf of a consortium of partner organisations.</p> <p>The coordinator has special duties set out in the grant agreement.</p>
ECHE (Erasmus Charter for Higher Education)	An accreditation granted by the European Commission that allows higher education institutions from EU Member States and third countries associated with the programme to be eligible to apply for financial support for and participate in learning and cooperation activities covered by the Erasmus+ programme. The charter outlines the fundamental principles to which an institution must adhere when organising and implementing high-quality mobility and cooperation. It defines the requirements that the institution declares it will meet to ensure the high quality of their services and procedures as well as to provide reliable and transparent information.
Europass	The Europass online platform, an action under the European Skills Agenda, provides individuals and organisations with online tools and information on learning opportunities, qualifications frameworks and qualifications, guidance, skills information, self-assessment and documentation tools for skills and

¹⁵ Based on documentation delivered by the National Agency Epos.



qualifications, and links to learning and employment opportunities. The Europass platform also provides tools and software to support digitally signed qualifications, as was announced in the Digital Education Action Plan. The platform is linked to national data sources for learning opportunities

Fewer opportunities	People with fewer opportunities are people who, for economic, social, cultural, geographical or health reasons, due to their migration background, for reasons such as disability and educational difficulties or for other reasons (including reasons that may give rise to discrimination in accordance with Article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union) are prevented from having effective access to opportunities under the programme.
KA101	Mobility projects in school education (programme 2014-2020)
KA102/KA116	Mobility projects in VET (programme 2014-2020)
KA103	Mobility projects in higher education inside Europe (programme 2014-2020)
KA107	Mobility projects in higher education outside Europe (programme 2014-2020)
KA104	Mobility projects in adult education (programme 2014-2020)
KA120(-ADU/-SCH/-VET)	Erasmus accreditation in adult education, VET and school education (programme 2021-2027)
KA121(-ADU/-SCH/-VET)	Accredited mobility projects for learners and staff in adult education, school education and VET (programme 2021-2027)
KA122(-ADU/-SCH/-VET)	Short-term projects for mobility of learners and staff in school education (programme 2021-2027)
KA130	Erasmus accreditation for mobility consortia in higher education (programme 2021-2027)
KA131	Mobility projects between EU Member States and with third countries associated with the programme in higher education (European dimension) (programme 2021-2027)
KA171	Mobility projects with third countries not associated with the programme in higher education (European dimension) (programme 2021-2027)
KA201/202/203/204/226/227	Strategic partnerships in school education, VET in higher education (programme 2014-2020)
KA210(-ADU/-SCH/-VET)	Small-scale partnerships in adult education, school education or VET (programme 2021-2027)
KA219-229	School exchange partnerships (programme 2014-2020)



KA220(-ADU/-SCH/-VET/-HED)	Cooperation partnerships in adult education, school education, VET or higher education (programme 2021-2027)
Key Action (KA)	<p>In order to achieve its objectives, the Erasmus+ programme foresees the implementation across three main initiatives or Key Actions at the individual, institutional and systemic level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ KA1: mobility of individuals ▶ KA2: cooperation among organisations and institutions ▶ KA3: support to policy development and cooperation
Less experienced organisation	An organisation or an institution that has not received support under any type of action supported by this programme or the previous programme more than twice in the past seven years. This category includes the "new applicant" category.
Member States of the European Union, third countries associated with the programme, third countries not associated with the programme	<p>EU Member States: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden</p> <p>Third countries associated with the programme: Iceland, Liechtenstein, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, Turkey</p> <p>Third countries not associated with the programme: the countries that do not participate fully in the Erasmus+ programme, but which may be involved as partners or applicants in certain programme actions.</p>
National agency (NA)	<p>A body responsible for managing the implementation of the programme at national level in a Member State or in a third country associated with the programme. One or more national agencies may exist in each country.</p> <p>Epos is the national agency in Flanders for implementing the decentralised actions of the education and training component under Erasmus+.</p>
National Authority (NAU)	<p>An authority responsible at national level for monitoring and supervising the management of the programme in a Member State or in a third country associated with the programme. One or more national authorities may exist in each country.</p> <p>In Flanders, the Flemish Department of Education and Training is in charge of that task for the education and training section under Erasmus+.</p>
Newcomer	An organisation or institution that has not previously received support as a coordinator or partner under a particular type of action supported by this programme or the previous programme.



Participants	Under the Erasmus+ programme, those who are fully involved in a project and, in some cases, receive part of the EU grant to cover the costs of their participation (in particular travel and subsistence expenses).
Partnership	An agreement between a group of institutions or organisations to carry out joint activities and projects.
Preparatory visit	Visits to the country of the host organisation before the start of mobility activities in order to prepare them and ensure their high quality. These visits are intended, for example, to facilitate administrative arrangements and build trust and understanding between the organisations involved.
Project	A coherent set of activities designed and organised to achieve defined objectives and outcomes.
Study visit	A trip where the participant gets to know and is able to study another organisation or institution and its practices and systems. This visit enables the participant to have a learning experience based on direct contact and observation of the host organisation's methods and practices.
Traineeship	Time spent at a company or organisation in another country with the aim of acquiring specific competences demanded by the labour market, gaining work experience and better understanding the economic and social backgrounds of the country concerned.
Transnational	Concerns an action involving at least two EU Member States and third countries associated with the programme, unless otherwise indicated.
VET	Vocational education and training (VET) is the training in skills and teaching of knowledge related to a specific trade, occupation or vocation in which a student or employee wishes to participate ¹⁶ .

¹⁶ Based on [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Vocational_education_and_training_\(VET\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Vocational_education_and_training_(VET)).

