



NATIONAL REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT OF ERASMUS+ IN ESTONIA

2017

KPMG Baltics OÜ



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Abbreviations

EC – European Commission

ENEB – Estonian National Agency for the Youth in Action

ELLS2020 - Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020

EVS - European Voluntary Service

NA – Estonian National Agency (Archimedes Foundation)

YFDP2020 – Youth Field Development Plan for 2014-2020

NAU – Estonian National Authority (Ministry of Education and Research)

SANA –Archimedes Foundation Youth Agency

Executive summary

The conclusions presented in the report are based on the empirical data collected from the NAU, the NA and the organisations participating in the programme via interviews, focus groups and questionnaires, which have been supplemented with document analysis.

The overall opinion of Erasmus+ and its predecessors is positive. The grants allocated from the programme have a significant role in the development of the Estonian education and youth field, including internationalisation and improvement of quality. The objectives and actions of the programme contribute to the achievement of the goals set in the national framework documents of Estonia. As the scope of other measures with similar objectives has been smaller, then Erasmus+ and its predecessors have been an **important factors influencing internationalisation**.

Learning mobility (Key Action 1) is one of the key activities through which Erasmus + and its predecessors have influenced the education and the field of youth. In recent years, the learning mobility of teachers and employees in the fields of higher and vocational education has considerably increased. Also, the number of students participating in the learning mobility has steadily raised. However, the target level set for 2020 has not been reached yet. There can be methodological reasons for the variations between the actual and target levels, as the methodology used for learning mobility does not include all the potential data to be considered. There are other measures affecting the statistics gathered on learning mobility. Nonetheless, the level of influence of each particular measure has cannot be assessed. In Estonia, the data gathered about education and learning mobility is recorded in the Estonian Information System. Yet, the system does not record all the data necessary, as it only has statistics on the students matriculated in Estonian universities.

There is a lot of interest in projects supported from **Key Action 2, Strategic Partnership**. It has the potential to contribute in the internationalisation of education, improvement of quality, as well as in the development of youth work and youth policy. However, the budget of the action is so small that only a few among high-quality projects receive financing. Steering the development requires a flexible budget that is also bigger than the present one.

Key Action 3 has great potential. The opportunities it offers can currently be used decentrally by the youth field and the policy-makers (both at the local and national levels); projects in the fields of education and youth have been centrally supported.

The field of sports should be separately mentioned, as it is relatively new in the programme. The programme's opportunities are largely unused by the target groups. The field's capability to use the opportunities of the programme is low, although the estimated potential of the programme for supporting the development of sport is high.

Effectiveness

Estonia will probably be able to use all of the planned budget growth for the objectives, but the **specific features of fields and their capability** to use the grants effectively must be taken into account. Guaranteeing the flexibility for reallocating the money between fields if necessary would be good for the use of the budget.

- The number and quality of applications in the youth field are high and the mechanisms through which the programme contributes to the field's development are understandable.
- The number and quality of applications in the field of vocational education are somewhat lower. The contribution of the programme to the field's development is clear.
- The number of applications in the field of general education is relatively low, but their quality is good. The contribution of the programme to the field's development has not been clearly worded and its impact is less understandable. Although the programme adds opportunities, but based on the absolute numbers of participants, the conclusion is that the impact is mainly felt at the level of the individual.
- The number of applications in the field of adult education is relatively small and their quality is modest. The contribution of the programme to the field's development is indirect.
- Increasing the number of learning mobility participants is a challenge in the field of higher education, which is also the field with the biggest budget.

Using the grants effectively in a context of an increasing budget requires **increasing the scope of outreach and consultation work** in the fields where new applicants need to be mobilised. These fields are: youth, adult education, general education and to a smaller extent also vocational education. Within the process of increasing the scope of outreach and consultations, there should be a separate focus on companies. **The participation of companies in the programme's actions is small at the moment**, but their inclusion in the actions of the programme would give it added value by increasing the positive impact of the actions.

The staff of the NA must be increased together with the growth in the programme's budget. A shortage of staff would cause the quality of the implementation of the programme to decrease. The first thing to decrease would probably be the volume of outreach and consultation work, which would have a serious impact on the effectiveness of the programme, as it lays its foundation.

Changing the structure of the programme has not had a significant impact on the effectiveness of the programme. **No significant synergy has become evident between the fields yet**, but when opinions of the programme are given, it must be kept in mind that the programme in its present format has been implemented for a short time and coping with the practical transition difficulties associated with the changes in the system (IT concerns, etc.) have taken some of that time. Irrespective of the implementation of the action-based and cross-domain structure, **the majority of activities are still mainly sectoral**. Additionally, the focus group revealed that some potential applicants decided not to apply in the first year after the programme's transition to the new structure, because the changes and transition difficulties seemed too big for them.

New IT systems and application forms were introduced with the structural changes and the process did not go smoothly. The IT systems were completed too late and did not meet the expectations, as they were full of errors. The situation has improved considerably by now. The new forms meant that the NA and applicants had to get used to them and learn how to use

them. Nevertheless, even after the transition difficulties have been overcome, **applying will still be too complicated** for smaller and less capable applicants, who may not know how to draft quality applications without the assistance of a qualified project applicant or a NA consultant. Limited foreign language skills are also an obstacle to the preparation of quality applications.

The financing scheme changed with the new structure from cost-based to unit-based with the implementation of **simplified grants**. The system of simplified grants has made the management of applications and grants somewhat more **cost-effective**, but the question now is **whether the unit cost covers the actual costs of an activity**. The activities where the unit cost rate is too small have been identified. For example, the unit costs based on a country's living standards is an obstacle to the inclusion of top specialists in projects, if they do not correspond to the actual cost of living in the state.

It was often mentioned by the NA and the recipients that too many changes have been made to the programme too often in recent years. The difficulties that may be caused by even the smallest change were repeatedly highlighted. **Enough time must be given for the present structure to function to allow the actual impact of the programme to become evident**. The benefits of fine-tuning the programme structure will probably not outweigh the damage that the implementation of a constantly changing programme will bring to the NA as well as the programme applicants and recipients. Changes must only be made if they are unavoidable or their impact will clearly be positive.

Erasmus+ has created considerable added value. The budgets of the programmes have been a significant addition to the other budgetary funds of Estonia. It is possible that without Erasmus+ (and its predecessors):

- There would be no (or less) international cooperation in the youth field, which has contributed a lot to the development of the field.
- There would be no (or fewer) pan-European cooperation opportunities. Erasmus+ enables to search for potential partners and develop knowledge alliances. There are no similar systems within the scope of other programmes that cover almost all European countries.
- The level of internationalisation of Estonian education would be lower. The size of the grants allocated from the Erasmus+ programme exceeds the size of grants from other programmes.

Recommendations	
Performance	
Sector	Recommendation
Higher education	Providing information about the possibilities learning mobility to potential future students , e.g. upper secondary school students or at the start of the first semester in universities. This would create better opportunities for including learning mobility in study plans.

	<p>Creating a short-term introductory learning mobility possibilities for students to allow them to personally experience it and thereby becoming more prepared for long-term learning mobility.</p>
	<p>Creating the possibility to organise student mobility in groups (eg. preparation classes and intensive learning projects) should be considered. At the moment, there is a limited amount of activities that support learning mobility, the measure would help the students to be more prepared.</p>
	<p>Changing the structure of the courses at institutions of higher education in such a manner that the credit points earned at a foreign university are more easily transferred to the home university.</p>
	<p>Reducing the economic reasons that hinder learning mobility, e.g. increasing grants at the level of higher education, creating the possibility of preserving one's job during the visit abroad, and supporting the people dependent on the students who would like to use learning mobility and other measures.</p>
General education	<p>Facilitating staff mobility of groups should be considered. Advocating teachers to create professional and sustainable networks that would help them to enrich their knowledge and teaching methods as well as develop their international relations.</p>
All	<p>The projects supported from the Strategic Partnership measures create valuable outcomes, which the participants can later use in their work to increase the quality of the provided service. There is a lot of interest in participating in the projects, but most applicants do not receive grants. The financial resources of the Strategic Partnership must be increased in order to improve the situation.</p>
All	<p>It was found that the quality of the projects supported from the Strategic Partnership is limited by salary rates that are low (and differ in different countries), which makes it difficult for top experts to participate in the projects. Low travel allowances also have a negative impact on the selection of countries of destination and consequently also the selection of partners. The unit cost rates must be increased to solve the problem.</p>
Sports	<p>Bringing grants in the field of sports partially to the level of state should be considered due to the specific nature of the field of sports – many small organisations. A national agency has a better overview of the needs and possibilities of the field. Additionally, the agency has a better contact at the level of organisations and the ministry, which means that this arrangement would probably increase the participation of sports organisations in the programme.</p>
All	<p>Application of additional measures for the inclusion of companies in Erasmus+ activities should be considered. Not many companies participate in projects in Estonia, however they would immensely contribute to the realisation of the Erasmus+ objectives.</p>

Vocational education	Creating possibilities of teacher mobility for other school staff in vocational education; similar opportunities have been created in general education.
Adult education	Expanding learning mobility opportunities to adult education (people who are not studying for a degree) should also be considered.
All	More flexible budget between different sectors and activities. The national agency could have more options for moving funds as necessary. Distributing the budget more flexibly would make it possible to develop more specific activities that meet the needs of the state and thereby improve performance. Flexibility is particularly important when the budget is increasing and the capability of sectors to absorb budgetary funds is different.
All	Increasing the volume of outreach and consultation activities for organisations that apply for support in the sectors where it is needed the most: sports, adult education, general education, and youth. Due to the structure of the sectors, increasing the budget of the programme means that new participants must be found. However, the capability of organisations in these sectors to manage projects is lower due to their small size, which results in relatively low organisational capability. These sectors need the support of the national agency in order to prepare quality applications. Using the know-how and experience of the youth sector for increasing the capability of the fields of adult education and sports could be a solution.

Simplification

Sector	Recommendation
EVS and youth	Establishing a Charter system in other sectors besides higher and vocational education should be considered, in order to increase the cost-effectiveness of the implementation of the programme. For example, applying three times a year is not justified in the case of EVS organisations, because the organisations are valued and their quality is high.
All	The number of IT systems must be reduced and they should communicate with each other. Additionally, they should be made more user-friendly. It would be important to ensure that data is entered in databases by the 'one time only' principle, data exchange between different databases is automatic and simple, and the reliability of IT systems is high. When IT systems are developed, it must be kept in mind that they will be taken in use after adequate reliability and user-friendliness have been achieved.
All	The new Erasmus+ programme period should be planned on the assumption that the same IT systems, which were developed for the present Erasmus+ period, will also be used in the next period. Introducing new IT systems is a complicated process, and in the beginning the systems often fail to meet expectations. All parties to the process have contributed

	a lot of time and energy to the development of the present IT systems, and their contribution should also be used in the new period.
All	Applying for, managing and reporting on the Erasmus+ projects should be made less labour-intensive and easier. This primarily concerns the sectors and activities where many applicants are small organisations: adult education, general education, youth and sports. The organisational capability of these organisations to manage projects is smaller. Applying, management and reporting must be related to the size of the organisations and grants.
All	As the budget is increasing, it is necessary to make sure that the number of staff in the NA also increases in relevant proportions.

Methodology

12 different types of data sources, earlier surveys and reports were used for the assessment. Additionally, the opinions of the experts and programme beneficiaries involved in the implementation of the programme were analysed. The project data were collected with **interviews** (13 semi-structured individual interviews and three group interviews) and one **focus group**; 30 people in total, who worked in the national agency Archimedes Foundation, ministries and organisations that had received grants. An **online survey** was carried out among the organisations that had received grants and the representatives of 83 organisations responded.

The following data sources were used for analysing documents:

1. Work plans for the implementation of Erasmus+ to the European Commission (2014-2017);
2. Reports on the implementation of Erasmus+ to the European Commission (2014-2016);
3. Annual reports of Archimedes Foundation (2010-2016);
4. Activity reports of ENEB/SANA (2007-2014);
5. Statistics on the activities of Archimedes Foundation;
6. Surveys related to the implementation of Erasmus+, earlier Lifelong Learning programmes and the Youth in Action;
7. Earlier assessment surveys of Lifelong Learning programmes and the Youth in Action;
8. National development plans;
9. Statistical overviews of the implementation of Erasmus+ and/or earlier Lifelong Learning programmes and/or the Youth in Action.

The qualitative method was used for the survey.

The feedback from the NAU and NA on the first versions of the report was taken into account when the opinions and the final text of the interim assessment of Erasmus+ were prepared.

Answers to standard questions

Effectiveness

(Question 1) To what extent have Erasmus+ and its predecessor programmes contributed to the realisation of the Erasmus+ specific objectives in your country? Are there differences across fields? Please provide, where relevant, your assessment for each of the specific objectives and provide evidence and examples where possible.).

Erasmus+ and the preceding programmes are primarily seen as a **measure for internationalisation of the education system** in Estonia, but the respondents also believe that it has a broader positive impact on the development of the country. Erasmus+ and its predecessor programmes have been highly valued. They are considered irreplaceable for offering the opportunity of **learning mobility** experience to students and teachers. Learning mobility is valuable, because it supports personal and professional development (of students and teachers alike), and is the basis for the formation of networks and initiation of projects¹. The students who studied abroad with the support of the Comenius, Erasmus and Erasmus+ programmes think highly of learning mobility. The experience of learning mobility as such generated the most satisfaction, followed by personal development and improvement of cultural knowledge. Improvement of language skills, increase in independence and the academic aspects of learning mobility were rated lower. There are obstacles in the transfer of the credit points obtained in learning mobility², so the impact on the quality of degree studies has not been as big as it could have been.^{3 4 5 6} School directors value the participation of teachers in projects supported by Erasmus+.⁷ Almost 90% of the programme recipients find that the likelihood of the programme participants completing their studies successfully and finding a good job has increased due to their participation in the programme.

The number of students who studied abroad with the support of Erasmus grew from 717 to 1,153 from 2007-2013, which is an increase of 61%.⁸ **In the 2011/12, Estonia ranked sixth among other countries participating in the Erasmus programme in terms of the ratio of mobile students to graduates (9.5%).⁹ The number of students who participated in learning mobility increased by 14%¹⁰ in the field of higher education from 2014-2016.** The increase occurred mainly on the basis of the learning mobility of teachers, as the student mobility has not increased. This has several reasons: the decrease of the total number of students (by 15% in the aforementioned period¹¹), the structure of the courses at universities (transferring credit points is difficult and studies are likely to take longer), low awareness and motivation to study abroad, plus social and economic limitations. These limitations are outside the programme, but their impact on the achievement of the programme's objectives is large.

The number of learning mobility participants in the **field of vocational education** has increased by 12% largely on the basis of the increase in the number of employees who participated in learning mobility, the share of students who went to practicums is 2%.¹² Participation in learning mobility in the field of general education has increased by 27% and in the field of adult education decreased by 46%.¹³ The number of young people who participated in **learning mobility in the youth field** has increased by 8% and the number of youth organisations

participating by 4%.¹⁴ In total, the number of participants who received support from Key Action 1 has increased by 10%.¹⁵ In the opinion of participants and leaders in the youth field, participating in learning mobility has improved their key competencies, improved their knowledge of other cultures as well as strengthened their active citizen attitude and European identity.^{16 17} The activities of the foreign volunteers who worked in Estonian pre-schools via EVS have helped develop the competencies of pre-school teachers. It has also had a positive impact on the development of the children¹⁸ as group work skills develop even in the course of short-term youth exchange.

Nevertheless, it must be noted that there are limitations to the methodology used for measuring learning mobility. The Estonian Education Information System only records data of the students that are matriculated in Estonian universities. The statistics of students that are matriculated as students in foreign universities is not recorded. In addition, the Information System does not include data from earlier mobility activities. Although, it was not used for this impact study, it will be of more help for the next one.

The impact of Erasmus+ and its predecessor Youth in Action on the youth field and the achievement of the goals of the youth field development plan is seen as positive. The programme opened and broadened international cooperation opportunities and consequently **improved the quality of youth work**. In the opinion of the experts, the programme has supported the development of the quality of youth work in the entire field. 99% of programme recipients assessed the programme's **impact on the capability of organisations to provide quality services and contribute to strategic goals** as positive; 97% considered the impact strong.

Learning mobility has a positive influence on the quality of studies (irrespective of the level of education). The teachers who participated in learning mobility acquired new experiences, which they could later use in their daily work. The students can become more demanding about their studies in Estonia, as they experience different course structures abroad. The foreign students who come to Estonia through learning mobility (within the scope of Erasmus+ or for other reasons), make teachers teach in foreign languages and maintain a high contemporary level in their work. Additionally, the quality of studies increases on the basis of the experiences gained from the participation in cooperation projects via Strategic Partnership, which can facilitate the development of teaching methods, creation of new teaching aids and thereby improve the quality of studies.

[\(Question 2\) To what extent has the progress on the realisation of the specific objectives contributed to the realisation of the Erasmus+ general objectives in your country?](#)

The specific objectives of the programme contribute to the realisation of the Erasmus+ general objectives. Participation in the programme has supported the development of competencies and attitudes, the growth of entrepreneurship, the development of youth work proficiencies, individual development, the increase in knowledge of other cultures, and the increase in the attitude of an active citizen. It has also strengthened the European identity of young people and youth workers. According to the survey of the RAY Consortium¹⁹, participants and youth workers alike find that young people acquire and/or develop all of the aforementioned competencies in youth exchange. Less privileged young people and young people with special needs have also been included in the projects. However, it can be seen

that the share of less privileged young people is considerable only in the youth field, and the share of young people with special needs in the youth field and vocational education.²⁰ According to the 2010 interim assessment report of the Youth in Action, the participants of the supported projects were mostly ordinary young people.²¹

(Question 3) To what extent have Erasmus+ actions influenced policy developments in the domains of education and training, youth and sport in your country? Which actions were most effective in doing so? Are there marked differences between different fields?

Erasmus+ has considerable influence on policy-making in the domains. An analysis of policy documents indicates that Erasmus+ has been taken into account during the preparation of several sectoral development plans. As field of sport is a new domain for Erasmus+, the influence of the programme on policy measures is not perceivable. According to plans, up to a quarter of the cost of the youth field development would be covered from Erasmus+ funds.²² The role of Erasmus+ in the vocational education programme is to support participation in international networks²³, and in the adult education programme to support the development of international cooperation and information exchange.²⁴ The interviewees found that the activities of Erasmus+ have influenced the developments in different domains positively and in their opinion the extent of this influence has been positive as well, even if the rate of positivity cannot always be determined.

Key Action 3 'cooperation between youth and policy-makers' has great potential to influence policy-making, the decentralised application of the measure only occurs in the youth field (centralised application also occurs in the field of education). The projects supported from Key Action 3 contributed mainly to contacts between the local and national policy-makers and young people; 3,725 young people participated in 24 projects in three years.

(Question 4) What specific approaches (such as co-financing, promotion or others) have you taken in order to try to enhance the effects of Erasmus+ in your country? To what extent have these approaches been effective? Can any particular points for improvement be identified?

The effects of Erasmus+ in Estonia are enhanced by ELLS2020 and YFDP2020, as using the funds of the programme is planned for the achievement of their objectives. Participation in learning mobility and international cooperation projects supported by Erasmus+ is important for improving the quality of education within the scope of ELLS2020.²⁵ According to YFDP2020, guaranteeing high-quality youth policy and the development of youth work requires increasing international cooperation opportunities, which are supported by Erasmus+.²⁶ According to the Report on the Operational Programme, Erasmus+ continued to significantly increase the inclusion of young people in youth work in 2014²⁷, i.e. the influence of the programme extended to the whole field via integration into the national development plan.

At the level of institutions of higher education, the influence of the programme will be increased by the implementation of **performance-based financing** from 2017, where one of the six components is related to student mobility and the other with the share of foreign students. Their total share of the operating grant is 4%, thus not very significant, but it should encourage the use of opportunities to offer student mobility, including the opportunities offered by Erasmus+.²⁸

The NA has offered information, consultations and training in the project-writing, implementation and reporting stage in the domains of education and training in order to support the use of the programme's opportunities. It has also organised information events and distributed information during other events. Information about the programme can be obtained from the special online environment <http://www.erasmuspluss.ee/>. The programme is also introduced in Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Erasmus+ newsletters, which are sent to thousands of contacts (3,500-3,600 contacts in 2014, 2015 and 2016). In the field of youth, SANA distributes information about the programme via four websites: www.noored.ee, https://europa.eu/youth/EE_et, www.mitteformaalne.ee, www.noored.ee/telepurk. SANA has carried out numerous outreach and consultation events every year, which have attracted thousands of people (in 2014, information was given to 4,064 event attendees and consultations were offered to 1,152 youth workers, and 70 events with 6,310 attendees were organised in 2016). It also distributes information in electronic channels. Outreach and consultation work in the field of youth is considerably broader than in the field of education and training.²⁹ In the annual reports of Archimedes Foundation, the need for broader and better focussed training and consultations has been separately highlighted in the fields of adult education and vocational education, plus the projects supported from the Strategic Partnership. The analysis of the quality of applications also indicates that applicants in these domains need more support.³⁰

The Republic of Estonia has supported the accessibility of the programme with **co-funding**. The co-funding for implementing the activities of Erasmus and later Erasmus+ in the field of higher education has varied between 3.4% (2012) and 5.7% (2014), averaging 4% from 2010-2016. The change of programme periods did not bring about any significant changes in the rate of co-funding. This has been used to **finance language courses** for education managers going abroad (until 2013), grants for students using learning mobility and Estonian language courses for foreign students coming to Estonia.³¹

It is also important to mention the support of the Republic of Estonia for the management of the programme and the implementation of some of its activities in the fields of education and training as well as youth. A part of the costs of SANA, which implements the programme in the field of youth, are **covered from the state budget**.³²

(Question 5) Do you consider that certain actions of the programme are more effective than others? Are there differences across fields? What are the determining factors for making these actions of the programme more effective?

Based on the interviews, there is no evidence to suggest that some actions are more or less effective than others, and there is also no evidence to suggest there are any differences across fields. There are only a couple of comments that can be used to answer the question.

Although the number of people participating in learning mobility is big, and the number of people influenced is therefore also high, there is no reason to claim that learning mobility is more effective than some other action. A difference across fields that can be brought out is the fact that the future students choose a particular educational institution based on the possibility to utilise learning mobility. Whilst this trend has not been proven in higher education, the opportunity of learning mobility may influence the selection of the school in vocational education. This is explained by the different structure of learning mobility in the

vocational and higher education systems. The mobility opportunity in higher education in essence does not distinguish one school from another, but schools are distinguished in vocational education. The size of the grant paid to students using learning mobility in vocational and higher education is different. Although learning mobility participants in vocational education get grants big enough to allow them to cope normally in the country of destination, then the amounts of the grants in higher education are not enough to cover living expenses in more expensive countries (e.g. Denmark and Norway).

The share of cooperation projects supported from the Strategic Partnership is higher in the fields of adult education and general education. However, irrespective of the differences across fields, there is no evidence to suggest that the effectiveness of actions in one field or another is different.

(Question 6) To what extent has the integration of several programmes into Erasmus+ made the programme more effective in your country? Do you see scope for changes to the structure of Erasmus+ or its successor programme that could increase effectiveness?

In Estonia, the majority of programmes have been processed by one agency from the very beginning, which is why the **changes to the structure of the programme (the creation of Erasmus+ programme) has not required any fundamental reorganisation of the national agency.**

Several changes took place in the NA at the time when the programmes were being integrated, which is why it is impossible to assess the impact of the integration of the programme separately from the impact of the other changes. However, the employees of the NA generally found that the integration of the programmes has not had a significant impact on effectiveness. The reason they mentioned was that the previous fields still exist within the scope of the three new key actions.

Youth field stands out with its opinion among the other fields, as they find that the integrated programme has had a somewhat negative impact on effectiveness. One of the examples of possible negative impact on effectiveness and/or efficiency was that before Erasmus+ national youth activities could be financed as well. The experience gained from the activities at home prepared young people for participation in international projects. The rules of Erasmus+ did not permit financing activities in Estonia at first. Nonetheless, negotiations with the EC about exceptions have produced the result that financing is possible and opportunities are expanding. Thus, the financing possibilities are basically the same as before Erasmus+, but the option of an exception had to be used to achieve the same financing possibilities, which required a lot of negotiating and took a lot of time that could have been spent on other activities.

(Question 7) Is the size of budget appropriate and proportionate to what Erasmus+ is set out to achieve? Is the distribution of funds across the programme's fields and actions appropriate in relation to their level of effectiveness and utility?

We proceed from the framework of target levels of the indicators of the programme objectives with assessing the appropriateness of the budget.

The programme indicator arising from the main educational objective of the strategy Europe 2020: the indicator of people aged 18-24 with a low level of education who are not studying

has been achieved in Estonia or Estonia is very close to it; the target level in 2014 was 11,4%, the actual level 11.6%.³³

The programme indicator arising from the main educational objective of the strategy Europe 2020: the indicator of people aged 30-34 who have acquired tertiary education has been achieved in Estonia; the target level of the indicators in 2016 was 40% and the actual level 46%.³⁴

The third indicator of the programme arises from the target level of mobility: the share of people with higher education who have tertiary education-related learning or teaching experience abroad (including practicums). According to the European Education and Training Framework 2020³⁵ the set is such that by 2020 at least 20% of people who have acquired higher education must have studied or performed (part of) their practicum abroad (earned at least 15 ECTS points or studied for three months). The share of those who participated in learning mobility with the support of Erasmus+ in the last three years is slightly over a tenth (11.5% in 2014 and 11.4% in 2016).³⁶ The share of those who had participated in learning mobility was smaller in earlier years (8.2% in 2009, 9.2 in 2011 and 9.3% in 2013).³⁷ Thus, the share of those who participated in learning mobility is smaller than the target level of 20% set for 2020³⁸, but the share of students who have used learning mobility during the implementation of Erasmus+ has increased. The growing budget is supporting the increase of participation in learning mobility. The individual learning mobility grants in higher education that cover the grants of teachers in addition to students as well as other expenses, has increased at the average speed of +8.6% per year since 2009.³⁹ It is worthy of mention that the students' expenses make up more than three quarters of aforementioned grants.

The fourth indicator of the programme arises from the target level of mobility and is related to learning mobility at the level of vocational education: the share of people aged 18-34 who have acquired primary vocational education and training and have primary vocational education and training-related experience abroad (including practicums). 1.3% to 2.4% of students used the opportunity of learning mobility for their practicums with the support of the Leonardo da Vinci programme from 2009-2013, and 3% to 3.2% of students did it from 2014-2016.⁴⁰ Learning mobility has increased constantly in the field of vocational education and the growth planned to the budget of Erasmus+ covers the increased need.

The fifth programme indicator arises from the category of quantitative general indicators: the number of participants with special needs and less privileged participants. In projects supported by learning mobility, 13.3% of those who participated in 2014 were less privileged and 1.3% had special needs. The respective indicators in 2016 were 14.6% and 0.9%. The total share of these two categories has therefore increased by 1.2 percentage points. In terms of fields, less privileged young people only participated in the youth field in 2014. In 2016, 96.6% of projects in the youth field had participants who were less privileged, whilst in vocational education the percentage of projects was 3.4%. In 2014, young people with special needs participated in 65.3% of youth field projects and 34.7% of vocational education projects. The respective figures in 2016 were 48.2% and 51.8%.⁴¹ In conclusion, the participation of less privileged young people has concentrated in the youth field. The participation of young people with special needs has divided between the youth field and vocational education.

Thus, the budget can generally be considered appropriate (considering also the planned increase in the budget), but two differences must be pointed out. Firstly, it became evident in

the youth field that more actions could have been carried out in the youth field with a larger budget. Secondly, the budget of Key Action 2 (cooperation aimed at innovations) is not sufficient, because only a few of the submitted high-quality applications are financed.

(Question 8) What challenges and difficulties do you encounter while implementing the various actions of Erasmus+? What changes would need to be introduced in Erasmus+ or its successor programme to remedy these?

The survey revealed numerous problems that the NA as well as the applicants and programme recipients have had to cope with. The challenges can be divided in two large groups that are related to each other, but do not overlap:

- Problems with IT systems that do not work or work badly and are unreliable. There are also too many of them and they are not connected with each other.
- Problems with applications and reporting, which is labour-intensive and complicated, including problems with forms and deadlines.⁴²

The third challenge is that the implementation of Erasmus+ has been characterised by **constant changes**. There is no opportunity to solely focus on the implementation of the programme as all rules, forms and systems are not ready plus everyone has not learnt how to use them.

The employees interviewed at the NA named several specific and general challenges that they have encountered. The application and reporting processes were most often named as a problem: preparing applications and reports is very time-consuming and difficult. Filling the forms in correctly is a challenge for the programme recipients. The problem is bigger for smaller organisations that cannot employ separate specialists to deal with project applications, management and reporting. This is the situation in the fields of youth, adult education and partially also general education. Limited English skills are also an obstacle in these organisations. This may restrict access to the programme opportunities and also decreases the impact of the programme in the society.

With the structural changes, instead of the former sectoral organisation of actions, Erasmus+ now includes three key actions, which contain the former fields⁴³. Therefore, applicants must find a suitable opportunity for their application within the scope of the new measure and the sectoral division. A lot of time and money has been spent on explaining this to the applicants. Explaining the new structure has been a challenge for the employees of the NA. The second challenge for the applications and the consultants alike is the change in the compensation of costs: in the new programme, costs are compensated according to the pre-determined unit costs instead of the former method according to which actual costs were compensated. The applicants were not aware of the new application forms and the ways in which costs are calculated when the programme was launched, and explaining this required extra time and resources. However, they have adapted to the changes by now.

The issue of unit costs was a separate problem, because the **wage rates established for Estonia are too low**.⁴⁴ The rates established in the programme are not motivating for top specialists. Allegedly they refuse to do work that is just as complicated and difficult as in many other countries at lower wage, and claim that such differentiation of rates is also discriminating. According to the 2016 annual report of Archimedes Foundation, the

compensation paid to 50% of the foreign experts who have come to Estonia is also inadequate, as the amounts are smaller than their actual living expenses.⁴⁵ The cost of living in Estonia does not correspond to the category in which Estonia has been placed as a country of destination.

Additionally, it is impossible to make payouts to employees on the basis of the Estonian Income Tax Act according to the established unit prices. The Income Tax Act does not allow educational institutions to pay grants to its employees, thus they have to proceed from the usual procedure of paying secondment allowances for trips. After the payment of social and income tax, the amounts are almost twice as big as they would be if the same amount was paid out as a grant.

One of the problems in the implementation of the programme mentioned by the employees of the NA are the **frequent changes made at short notice**, as responding to them requires extra work. The same problem was already highlighted in the Assessment Report of the 2010 Lifelong Learning Programme.⁴⁶

The poor quality of administrative databases is a significant issue. The information in databases is not reliable, which makes it difficult to obtain an adequate overview of the functioning of the programme, which is necessary for the assessment of its effectiveness and influence. The new structure has also made the collection of statistics more difficult and data arrive later, which is why, for example, responding quickly to the decrease in learning mobility figures is difficult.

[\(Question 9\) To what extent are the approaches and tools that are used for disseminating and exploiting the results of Erasmus+ and its predecessor programmes in your country effective? Where can you see the possibilities for improvements?](#)

According to the statistics on the activities of the NA and the annual reports of the SANA, the NA has carried out a number of different consultation and outreach events for various target groups, which have been attended by thousands of potential applicants and the people and organisations that actually receive support from the programme. The general public is informed about the opportunities and results via several electronic information channels; the programme's homepage has been set up and the programme's newsletter is sent to over 3,700 contacts.

Based on the interviews, it can be said that the spectrum of tools for dissemination of information and results about the programme is broad. It includes information events, seminars, conferences, the project database of the EC, exchange of experience, websites, social media tools, flyers, information materials, articles in mass media, exhibitions, use of other events to introduce the opportunities of Erasmus+, presentations by practitioners, introduction of success stories at events and via video interviews, essay competitions and exchange of experience. The activity of fields in outreach is different, the youth field stands out by being active; results are introduced to recruit new young people or organisations to participate in the programme. People in the fields of youth and sport alike mentioned that direct communication is the most effective. The interviews also revealed some doubt whether conferences can still serve their purpose, as they have been organised for years and are attended by the same people. This situation may be related to the fact that the programme has reached the age where many people involved in implementation and

programme recipients have had the chance to attend many events and they do not include anything new to them. Yet the need for direct communication was emphasised again, which is something that conferences do offer.

The information channels that received the most mentions included various online solutions: home pages, specialised websites on the internet and in social media, social media channels on a broader scale, the database for dissemination of project results developed by the EC and presentation of success stories in video format on the internet. According to the survey carried out in late 2015, the majority of young people obtained information about international opportunities via Facebook (80%), friends and acquaintance (67%) and teachers (63%). The Rajaleidja portal, parents and newspapers/magazines are also popular.

Efficiency

(Question 10) To what extent is the system of cooperation and division of tasks between the Commission, Executive Agency, National Agencies, European Investment Fund, National Authorities, Independent Audit Bodies, and Erasmus+ Committee efficient and well-functioning from the point of view of your country? What are the areas for possible improvement or simplification in the implementation of Erasmus+ or a successor programme?

Satisfaction with cooperation at the national and international levels, both in the NAU and the NA, is predominantly high. Both national and international cooperation are generally characterised by knowing the roles and limits of each other and sticking with them. National cooperation between the NAU and the NA is characterised by high level of trust from the ministry: it values the competence of the NA and gives the NA considerable autonomy in the implementation of the programme. The management of the NA stated that it is satisfied with the present situation. No significant problems in cooperation or any need for changing the present cooperation formats were detected in the course of the study.

Cooperation between the NAU, NA and EC level and the EACEA is also functioning well. Information exchange is generally working and the employed formats of cooperation support the successful implementation of the programme; any inefficient approaches in the cooperation from the viewpoint of cost-effectiveness were not found. However, it was mentioned that the cooperation in project management at an international level could be discussed more, and more information could be given about it, thereby guaranteeing that all of the relevant employees of the NA and NAU are more aware of matters related to the management of the programme.

(Question 11) To what extent has the integration of several programmes into Erasmus+ resulted in efficiency gains or losses for the implementation of the programme in your country, both at the level of the National Agency/ies and on the beneficiaries' and participants' level? Do you see scope for changes to the structure of Erasmus+ or its successor programme that could increase efficiency?

In the context of the integration of programmes into the single Erasmus+ programme, it is important to point out that **in Estonia, the implementation of the programmes had been assigned to one organisation – Archimedes Foundation – already before Erasmus+.** A significant number of the measures aimed at guaranteeing efficiency gains had therefore

already been implemented. The integration of the programmes brought along the following: changes in management and the organisation of work, the termination of some sub-programmes and the launch of others, the introduction of the system of units costs and the related reorganisation of applications and reporting, the introduction of new databases, and the budget growths. The simultaneous implementation of several changes makes it impossible to highlight the exact impact of each component on efficiency gains, so the efficiency gains can be looked at as a whole.

The employees of the NA find that the integration of programmes has increased the efficiency gains for the implementation; management and cooperation between different units have improved. Processing of applications has become easier, as uniform application forms are used in the new programme, thus dealing with several different forms is no longer necessary. Nevertheless, the general volume of work and the complexity of the programme have not decreased.

(Question 12) Do you consider that the implementation of certain actions of the programme is more efficient than others? Are there differences across fields? What good practices of these more efficient actions of the programme could be transferred to others?

The bureaucracy of implementation must be reduced further in order to increase the efficiency of the implementation of the programme.

The **establishment of a sectoral charter** and the accreditation of organisations within its scope is an administrative measure that could reduce the implementation expenses of the programme; at present, Erasmus+ Charters exist in the fields of higher education and vocational education (since 2016). Participation in the field of higher education is only possible on the basis of the Charter, in the field of vocational education on the basis of both the Charter and projects. The efficiency of the Charter system in the field of vocational education cannot be assessed on the basis of statistical data yet⁴⁷, but according to the opinions of experts, efficiency (from the view of the specific organisation) has clearly improved due to the implementation of the Charter, and efficiency gains for the programme as a whole will increase as other organisations join the Charter (in Estonia, there are seven **vocational educational institutions that have learning mobility Charters; five projects were supported on the basis of the Charter from 2014-2016, 94 projects in total**⁴⁸).

The charter system of Erasmus could also be expanded to other fields. Implementation on the basis of a charter would reduce the amount of work for the NA in analysing the suitability of potential project partners: it would no longer be necessary to carry out additional checks of already approved partners, as it would have no added value.

The large quantities of work and complexity are also an important aspect for applicants, for organisations experienced, and in particular for small organisations. **The capability and experience of small organisations in preparing applications, implementing the project and writing reports is generally smaller.** Smaller organisations may decide not to apply at all, as they have no money to hire an employee with experience in writing project applications and the skills of their existing employees are not sufficient for this (or they think that their skills are not sufficient). They need support through consultations. The negative effects of limited capability become more evident in the field of adult education, where the quality of applications was relatively low. The general capability of preparing quality applications is also

limited in the field of general education. It must be emphasised that there are few organisations, which stand out: the quality of their applications is high and their capability is good irrespective of their small size (this comment also applies to the field of general education). The capability to prepare quality application is also related to foreign language skills. Foreign language teachers who speak English can prepare quality applications, but this is less likely in the case of teachers of other subjects. In the field of general education, the relative quantity of projects concerning language training is therefore relatively higher.

Additionally, it became evident that the capability of preparing project applications and project management is particularly problematic in the field of sport, as very few people have the required skills. Also the budgets of the organisations do not allow them to outsource the skills. The capability of the field of sport needs to be improved, which requires increasing the scope of outreach, training and consultation activities.

It must be pointed out that although the number of small organisations in the youth field is large, the quality of the applications of these organisations is not an issue. The extensive outreach, training and consultation work of the Youth Agency has helped to achieve this. Since these activities take a lot of working time, it is necessary to guarantee that this time is there also during the further implementation of the programme, or the quality of the applications in the youth field may deteriorate.

The survey revealed that irrespective of the efforts already made to simplify the application process and implementation of projects, it is still possible to **increase the efficiency gains for programme implementation by making the application, project implementation and reporting processes simpler.**

(Question 13) To what extent has the system of simplified grants resulted in a reduction of the administrative burden for National Agencies and programme beneficiaries and participants? Are there differences across actions or fields? What elements of the programme could be changed to further reduce the administrative burden, without unduly compromising its results and impact?

The implementation of simplified grants **has generally reduced the administrative burden of the programme recipients** (55% of the respondents). However, but there is no consensus in opinions, as some find that it has had no impact (25% of the respondents) and some claim that the administrative burden has increased (20%). The share of the latter is the largest in the area of higher education (38%), which means that the administrative burden in higher education could be separately analysed. It is important to note that the burden may not arise from the rules of Erasmus+ alone, as the rules of the institutions of higher education in confluence (or lack thereof) with the rules of Erasmus+ may increase the burden.

The implementation of simplified grants has not changed the administrative burden of schools (at all levels of education), but it became evident that there were some difficulties during the transition to simplified grants, as the new system had to be explained to the applicants and the new practices required implementation.

As programme recipients in their accounting calculate the costs on actual basis and not in unit prices, it has added some complexity and created extra work for accountants and project managers. Additional activities are necessary, because the data obtained from accounting must be converted into a format that suits project reporting.

In the NA view the introduction of simplified grants in the area of youth and vocational education has not led to significant simplification or reduced the amount of work required for processing applications and projects. In the area of higher education, the NA pointed out that the volume of work has increased because reports are more voluminous than before.

In the opinion of the programme recipient and the NA alike, **it is important that the technical systems related to grant applications, implementation and reporting, function without any problems and are tuned to support the process of application procedure** (it must be possible to complete all of the activities at the right time and in full).

(Question 14) To what extent are the IT tools provided by the Commission adequate for the efficient management and implementation of the programme in your country? Do they answer your needs? Give specific examples where they can be improved. Is the set of IT tools appropriate or should it cover more/less elements of the programme implementation?

As far as the IT systems are concerned, it is important to emphasise that:

- The implementation of IT systems is certainly a step forward in the management of the programme.
- The reliability, performance and user-friendliness of the IT systems have been problematic.

The programme recipient and the NA both find that the provided IT systems are necessary, but using them creates too many problems.^{49 50}

The user-friendliness and reliability of IT systems and databases was strongly influenced by the change in the structure of the programme, which led to the introduction of new formats. The EC was late with their digitisation (development of the IT systems) and the differences in sectors were not initially taken into account either. For example, there were no IT solutions for some applications in the youth sector, as the IT system had been prepared according to the organisation of the programme supporting formal education that had one deadline, whilst there were three deadlines in the field of youth⁵¹. At the start of the implementation of the programme, it often happened that the IT systems were not working properly or not working at all. The transfer of data from one database to another was unreliable and the data had to be checked. Although faults and low reliability were described in the NA interviews, they also revealed that the situation is improving. The situation was very bad in 2014 and 2015, but it has improved noticeably by now. It is particularly important that the **speed of responding to error messages** has improved, the response time can be measured in minutes, which is acceptable to the NA.

The **quantity of IT systems** (their number is 22 or more⁵²), the **failure of IT systems to function as a whole** (there is no data exchange between the systems) and the **complicated use** are the main issues. The specialists of the NA claim that they sometimes feel more like IT employees who have specialised in the particular IT systems than specialists of their respective sectors.

The biggest problems are related to Mobility Tool+. However, as a positive it was also mentioned that it is finally functioning at the level that allowed programme recipients to start obtaining necessary statistical information in the end of 2016.⁵³

A separate concern that was highlighted is that the problems with databases make it difficult to obtain the information required for the assessment, management and implementation of the programme activity. It must be kept in mind that the information obtained from database queries is not reliable and must be second checked. This in turn makes the management of the programme more difficult and has a negative impact on the efficient implementation of the programme, as more working time is required.

It must be separately emphasised that all (or at least the majority) of the changes made in the documents or regulations of the programme, even if they seem minor at first, require changes in the IT systems. If the change in the IT system is not made in time, the implementation of the grants becomes difficult (or impossible). The constant retraining required due to the changes takes a lot of time, but is inevitable when systems and guidelines are changed.

(Question 15) To what extent is the level of human and financial resources that is available for the implementation of the programme in your country adequate? What steps did you take to optimise the efficiency of the resources deployed for the Erasmus+ implementation in your country?

Approximately 392 working months were used to manage grants in the amount of 10,178,732 euros in 2012⁵⁴ and 388 working months were used to manage 13,681,810 euros in 2016. The amount of the grants managed has increased by 34%, but the number of working months has practically remained the same. This means that **the implementation of the programme has become more efficient**, as the quantity of grants managed with the same number of full time equivalent jobs has increased by a third.

The interviews carried out at the NA revealed that the work load is big, but they are coping with it at the moment. The employees were worried about the future and found that with the budget growth, there will be increase the number of applications. Therefore, it will be necessary to hire extra staff. The interviews revealed that the implementation of the youth field is already underfunded at the NA and there is a shortage of human resources. This opinion was based on the increase in the volume of grants in 2017 (the amount of youth field grants of Erasmus+ increased by 30% in 2017 in comparison with 2016). It was also revealed that the need for outreach, training and consultation work is bigger in the youth field than in the other fields. Introducing the programme to the target groups, outreach, consultation and training work, recruitment of new EVS organisations and their accrediting must continue even more actively in order to take the programme to young people and organisations without any experience of the project, and to support the quality of projects. The annual contribution from the state budget to the administrative expenses of the SANA remained the same at the level of 142,335 euros per year for five consecutive years until 2015, and increased by 10% in 2016.⁵⁵

The field of sport is different from the others, because it has not been included in projects of this scale before. Therefore, they have a shortage of people with experience in project writing and management. Being in the programme is a new practice for the field of sport, which is why creating and growing expert knowledge requires additional development in comparison with other fields.

Relevance

(Question 16) To what extent do the Erasmus+ objectives continue to address the needs or problems they are meant to solve? Are these needs or problems (still) relevant in the context of your country? Have the needs or problems evolved in such a way that the objectives of Erasmus+ or its successor programme need to be adjusted?

The objectives described in the programme regulation and the objectives of national development plans are largely the same, which means that the programme helps address important problems in Estonia and the programme and its measures are relevant. 93% of the interviewed programme recipients said that the programme addresses the objectives that are important for Estonia. 82% found that the objectives of programme should not be changed. Almost everyone agreed that Erasmus+ is a unique and necessary programme.

However, the survey also revealed that changes in the society requires Erasmus+ to be open to addressing new challenges. The establishment of the European Solidarity Corps is a good example of the capability to keep up with the changing needs of Europe. Additionally, it was separately highlighted that the increase in the number of the elderly could be considered more in Erasmus+ as well, e.g. by addressing challenges related to the group of elderly people (ageing population) via adult education. Elderly people could be included more via voluntary work, and their mobility could also be supported.

The general understanding of the Erasmus+ objectives is that they are broad enough to make it possible to address the actual challenges in the fields.

(Question 17) To what extent are needs of different stakeholders and sectors addressed by the Erasmus+ objectives? How successful is the programme in attracting and reaching target audiences and groups within different fields of the programme's scope? Is the Erasmus+ programme well known to the education and training, youth and sport communities? In case some target groups are not sufficiently reached, what factors are limiting their access and what actions could be taken to remedy this?

The programme as a whole is generally successful in reaching the various stakeholders of different sectors. The programme is well known as a result of the work of the NA and the programme recipients. **The objectives of Erasmus+ are generally related to the needs of stakeholders and sectors** (see also Question 16).

During the study, it was repeatedly revealed that the **participation of companies in the programme is minimal**, although schools (of all levels of education) are interested in the involvement of entrepreneurs in their projects. The main reason given for the lack of interest among companies is that entrepreneurs do not see the direct value that participation in the activities of Erasmus+ would bring to their business activities. Since the participation of companies would give added value to the projects, applying additional measures for the inclusion of companies (primarily outreach) would be worth considering.

The **field of sports, where Erasmus+ could do better in answering the field's needs**, deserves a separate mention. Erasmus+ offers more opportunities that comply with the field's needs than sports organisations have the capacity to use. Thus, organisations in the fields of sport

must be given additional support (especially advice), so that they can get the maximum benefits from the Erasmus+ programme to meet their needs.

Internal and external coherence and complementarity

(Question 18) To what extent are the various actions that have been brought together in Erasmus+ coherent? Can you identify any existing or potential synergies between actions within Erasmus+? Can you identify any tensions, inconsistencies or overlaps between actions within Erasmus+?

The analysis of actions and fields indicated that the actions brought together in the same programme are mainly valuable individually. Bringing different programmes together in one programme has not created noticeable synergies – the whole is still the same as the sum of its parts. The structure of the budgets and measures of Erasmus+ also indicates that the sectoral approach has not disappeared. It is important to emphasise that the emergence of synergies could have been obstructed by the transition difficulties at the start of the programme and it is possible that synergies will still emerge.

Possible area for synergy is using the know-how of the youth field for the development of the capability of the fields of sport and adult education in applying for grants and participating in projects. Organisations with experience in participating in projects and the employees of the SANA could participate in this. The focus group, consisting of the representatives of schools, mentioned that the representatives of organisations exchange information and ask for advice about applying for grants, implementing projects and reporting. **Including the field of sports in these networks** would probably increase efficiency.

The weakening of the borders between different levels of education in the new programme structure, the decrease in the number of target groups and the resulting simplification and clarification of the entire programme structure are all positives. The majority of the programme recipients see the change in the programme structure as a positive step. The prevailing opinion is that the present programme structure does not need any changes, it should be allowed to prove itself (however, work on the basis of the new structures has only been done for a short time).

It became evident that the integration of the former Youth in Action in Erasmus+ has brought along tensions. Experts of the field do not consider it justified and find that the integration has not been beneficial. The capability of the youth field in Erasmus+ is limited with the structure and rules of the programme and there were opinions that it would be more efficient as an independent programme. However, people in the youth field should also keep in mind that the changed structure has not been in effect for a long time. It is important to work on the inclusion of the specific properties of the youth field (e.g. the applicants can also be youth groups, not just organisations; there are more calls for proposals; the application forms may be less detailed; etc.) in the general rules of Erasmus+ and make sure that the capability of the youth field in the joint programme will not decrease.

(Question 19) To what extent does Erasmus+ complement other national and international programmes available in your country? Can you identify any tensions, inconsistencies or overlaps with other programmes?

The NA implements more than ten international programmes. The actions supported within the scope of the programmes vary according to the objective of the grant (learning mobility, cooperation project, knowledge alliances), target group (employees, learners, doctoral students, lecturers), field (general education, adult education, higher education), duration of learning mobility (from five days to doctoral studies abroad), region (Estonian, Nordic countries, Europe, global).⁵⁶ The SANA implements the national programme 'Youth Meetings', which organises meetings for young people with Estonian and non-Estonian backgrounds (in other words national youth exchange) and the European Social Fund action 'Development of Youth Worker Training'.

Erasmus+ differs from others programme because of the following:

- The learning mobility of thousands of young people is supported every year within the scope of the programme in the youth field. There are no other programmes that offer this opportunity in the same volume.
- Cooperation programmes in the youth field are supported within the scope of the programme, which are not supported in this format (and volume) by any other programme.
- The learning mobility of a thousand or more students lasting for several months is supported within the scope of the programme, mainly at the level of bachelor and masters studies. The support offered to learning mobility in other programmes is smaller and/or the target group is different (e.g. doctoral studies).
- The programme offers opportunities for pan-European and global partner searches plus cooperation in different areas. Other programmes do not offer similar opportunities (the volume of cooperation is smaller, it is project-based).
- Learning mobility in vocational education is supported within the scope of the programme, which is practically not done within the scope of other programmes.
- Cooperation between organisations in the field of general education is supported within the scope of the programme (mainly teachers), which is rather limited within the scope of other programmes.
- Projects that result in the use of new teaching methods, new study programmes and other outcomes that enrich the field of education and learning, and cooperation with organisations operating in similar fields are supported from the Strategic Partnership measure. The projects supported from this measure also allow the employees of the participating organisations to learn about the organisation of work in similar organisations based in other countries and meet specialists of the same field.
- The Key Action 3 'Support of policy reform' in the youth field brings together young people and the people who make decisions in the youth field; there is no systematic analogue for this.

- Cooperation and learning mobility in the field of sport was supported on project-bases when possible before the provision of Erasmus+ opportunities.

The survey revealed that different national and international projects and programmes function in good cooperation with Erasmus+, supporting and complementing each other. No conflicts or tensions were detected.

European added value and sustainability

(Question 20) To what extent Erasmus+ and its predecessor programmes produce effects that are additional to the effects that would have resulted from similar actions initiated only 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 value added?

The Erasmus+ programme, the preceding Lifelong Learning sub-programmes and the Youth in Action have a unique role in the internationalisation of the education and youth sectors, and the development of their quality over the last couple of decades. The budgets of the programmes have been a significant addition to the other budgetary funds offered in Estonia. It is likely that without Erasmus+ (and its predecessors):

- The support to the youth sector would be considerably smaller and different, and it would have no comparable international dimension. Erasmus+ has supported the learning mobility of young people and youth workers and international cooperation, thereby contributing to the development of the sector's quality to an extent unmatched by any other programmes.
- There would be no (or fewer) pan-European partner search and cooperation opportunities. Erasmus+ offers a unique opportunity through knowledge alliances; no similar systems that cover almost all European countries have been created within the scope of other programmes.
- The level of internationalisation of Estonian education and consequently the quality of education would be lower. The size of the grants allocated from the Erasmus+ programme exceeds the size of grants from other programmes.

(Question 21) To what extent Erasmus+ will be able to absorb in an effective way the sharp increase in the budget that is foreseen in the coming years up to 2020 in your country? Could the programme use even higher budgets in an effective way? Do you see challenges to effectively use more money for particular actions or fields of the programme?

The budget of Erasmus+ is set to increase, which creates the challenge of implementing the actions efficiently and cost-effectively, but the challenge is varies between fields. Estonia will probably be able to absorb the sudden increase in the budget effectively, but this calls for the realisation of certain preconditions.

The NA **needs more staff** to cope successfully with the increasing number of applications. The work of the NA was studied when carrying out the survey. It was seen that the NA will not be able to process a sudden increase in applications by using the resources of the organisation more effectively, as it is already relatively effective in its procedures. It would be possible to

process more with the existing resources if, for example, the Charter system was expanded, the faultless operation of IT systems was guaranteed or the **administrative burden related to implementation** was reduced in any other manner.

In the fields of adult education, general education and youth, the increase in the budget requires more outreach and consultations to mobilise new applicants. The need for this will also increase in Strategic Partnership. It must be kept in mind that in the field of higher education, the burden related to the use of bigger grants will fall on the university that have to find the students and teachers who will use learning mobility besides having the ability to take care of the necessary documents of these people (pressure on labour costs).

Below, the effects of the budget increase on the three key actions are looked at separately.

Key Action 1. Mobility of individuals

In the field of higher education, it is necessary to focus on increasing the motivation of students and teachers to take part in mobility, so that the target level of HK2020 can be achieved. Motivation can, among others, be increased with the actions implemented by institutions of higher education, which integrate learning mobility better in the existing curricula. On the other hand, however, it is also necessary to reduce the obstacles to the participation of students in learning mobility, such as the difficulties in transferring credit points to the home university and socioeconomic limitations. Both of them are long-term problems.⁵⁷

In the field of vocational education, use for the budget growth will probably be found without the implementation of additional measures that increase the likelihood.

In the youth field, the increased learning mobility grants will probably be effectively absorbed, because the limitation of the budget has been a hindering factor in the field until now.

In the fields of general education and adult education, the share of individual learning mobility has been small in comparison with other fields. In order to use the increasing budget in the future, it is necessary to expand the activities that improve the quality of applications.

In the field of sport, the successful and effective implementation of the present budget is already a challenge. It is necessary to improve the capability of sports organisations to apply for grants and carry out projects. If this is achieved, the field will probably be able to effectively use the bigger budget.

Key Action 2. Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices

In this key action, the number of applications exceeds the number of supported projects manifold in all fields, which is why the budget increase is welcomed and using the money effectively should not be a problem.

Key Action 3. Support for policy reform

The action for support for policy reform is only active in the youth field. Based on the survey, we found no circumstances suggesting that absorbing the increased amounts of support could become a problem.

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³³ Table 1. Share of people aged 18-24 with a low level of education who are not studying

	Target level	Actual level, aggregate	Actual level among men	Actual level among women
2010		11.1%	14.3%	7.5%
2011		10.5%	12.6%	8.4%
2012		10.2%	12.8%	7.5%
2013		9.9%	13.5%	6.1%
2014	11.4%	11.6%	15.4%	7.5%
2015		11%	12.9%	9.0%
2016	<10%			
2017	<10%			
2018	<10%			
2019	<10%			

Sources:

Target level: General Education Programme 2016-2019. Annex 6 to the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020. Approved with the Minister of Education and Research Directive "Approval of the programmes for 2016-2019 of the Ministry of Education and Research".

Actual level: www.haridussilm.ee, effectiveness of general secondary education.

³⁴ Table 2. Share of people aged 30-34 who have acquired tertiary education

	Target level	Actual level
2011		40.2%
2012	39.1%	39.5%
2015		45.3%
2016	40%	46%
2017	40%	
2018	40%	
2019	40%	

Sources:

Target level: Higher Education Programme 2016-2019. Annex 8 to the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020. Approved with the Minister of Education and Research Directive "Approval of the programmes for 2016-2019 of the Ministry of Education and Research".

Actual level: www.haridussilm.ee, share of people with tertiary education aged 30-34.

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