

Impact of Erasmus+ on the Adult Education Sector in Poland

National report RIA-AE network

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Introduction



Erasmus+

Erasmus+ is the EU flagship mobility programme for **education, training, youth, and sport in Europe**. The programme offers mobility and cooperation opportunities in the following **six main areas**: higher education (HED); vocational education and training (VET); school education (SE); adult education (ADU); youth (Y); and sport (SPO). It aims to reach out to a wide range of groups such as younger students, disadvantaged individuals, and smaller grassroots organisations.

The **general objective** of Erasmus+ highlights **lifelong learning** as an element underpinning the educational, professional, and personal development of people in education, training, youth, and sport, both in Europe and beyond. The programme Actions aim to contribute to sustainable growth, ensure that citizens have quality jobs, build social cohesion, facilitate innovation, and strengthen European identity and active citizenship.

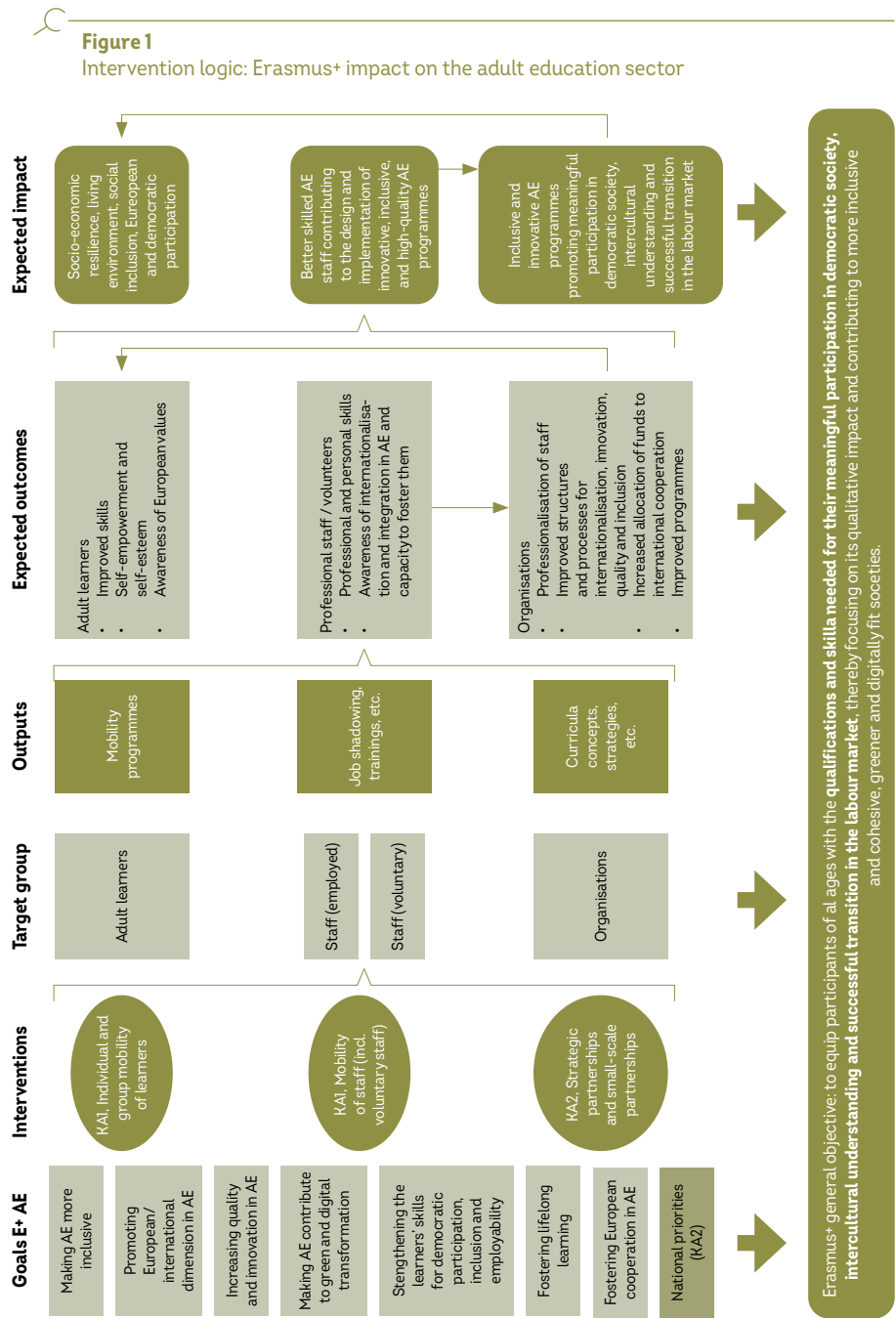
In 2021-2027, as with the previous edition of the programme, Erasmus+ comprises three **Key Actions**. Some Actions are managed at the **centralised** Commission level, either directly or through the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (**EACEA**). Other Actions are managed at the **decentralised** level through the network of **Erasmus+ National Agencies (NAs)**¹ whose role is to promote the programme, disseminate information nationally, support applicants and beneficiaries, assist the Commission in the selection process for funding, monitoring and evaluating projects, and work with other NAs and the Commission, for example through sharing high-quality practice and project achievements. Decentralised Key Actions include:

- **KEY ACTION 1: Learning mobility of individuals (staff and learners):** aiming to influence education, training, and youth systems, resulting in positive long-term effects on individuals, ultimately inspiring policy reforms and drawing new resources for mobility opportunities throughout Europe and beyond.
- **KEY ACTION 2: Cooperation among organisations and individuals (Previously: Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices):** aiming to develop, transfer, and/or implement innovative practices at the organisational, local, regional, national, and European levels, with beneficial long-term effects on the participating organisations and policy systems.

For the adult education sector, the Erasmus+ programme aims to strengthen the socio-economic resilience of adults who face difficulties in changing their personal situation through educational opportunities. Adult learning under Erasmus+ should lead to a greater sense of responsibility

¹ <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/national-agencies>

and autonomy among disadvantaged adults through improved language, numeracy, digital and other skills. The figure below provides the reconstructed Theory of Change (ToC) of Erasmus+ for the adult education sector.



The importance of impact monitoring

To date, little is known about the impact of Erasmus+ on adult learners, staff, volunteers and organisations in the field of non-vocational adult learning. To better coordinate research activities on strengthening the impact of international cooperation and mobility projects in adult education, and to enable further development and quality improvement of the Erasmus+ programme, a transnational research network has been established and funded by Erasmus+ (see box below with the mission statement of the RIA-AE network).



BOX 1

Mission statement RIA-AE network

Mission Statement RIA-AE Network

“Adult education matters” AND “To explore the unexplored”

Adult education provides skills development opportunities to help EU citizens find better jobs and improve well-being. Yet it remains a “poor cousin” of compulsory and higher education, often disconnected from social policy and the education system at large, receiving limited budgets and policy attention compared to other sectors. Nevertheless, research shows that adult education matters and that adult education plays a significant role in promoting personal, social and economic well-being.

The impact of Erasmus+ on adult learners has been less researched so far and little is known about the impact of the Erasmus+ programme on the environment and socio-economic resilience of adult learners. To better coordinate research activities on the impact of international cooperation and mobility projects in adult education and to enable the further development and quality improvement of the Erasmus+ programme, a transnational research network is to be established named: The Research-based Impact Analysis of Erasmus+ Adult Education Programme Network (RIA-AE Network).

The objectives of the RIA-AE network

The RIA-AE Network has various objectives:

1. to contribute to a better understanding of the impact of international cooperation and mobility projects in adult education within the Erasmus+ programme;
2. to strengthen cooperation and dialogue between research, policy and practice;
3. to contribute to further development and quality improvement of the Erasmus+ Programme by enabling high-quality and practice-oriented evaluation and impact research;

4. to enlarge the visibility of the benefits of adult education in the EU and Member States and the role of Erasmus+ (advocacy).

Means

In order to achieve these objectives, the RIA-AE network aims to establish cooperation between National Agencies of the Erasmus+ from different European countries interested in developing a new approach to programme evaluation and impact assessment in the field of adult education within the Erasmus+ framework.

This framework opens the possibility to take stock of existing research and knowledge on the benefits and impact of adult education (repository), curate this knowledge and update knowledge by implementing different research projects to evaluate the impact of mobility projects and partnerships. Research designs can focus on impact at individual, organisational or systemic level, and can explore core thematic areas such as the priorities of the Erasmus+ programme. One such research project is an impact study of Erasmus+ on adult education organisations, staff and adult learners in Europe.

Cooperation framework

Cooperation within the Network is based on shared responsibility and is always open to new members. The cooperation framework includes a number of national agencies and external research partner institutions (e.g. universities, research institutes). Each NA involved in the network can decide whether to carry out the research projects itself (depending on resources and staff expertise) or to commission a partner.

Values

To achieve the goal of high-quality research, network partners adhere to common standards of social and educational research that meet internationally recognised ethical standards. The methods used for the research activities may include all methods commonly used in sociology, political science and education – quantitative, qualitative or a mixture of different methods.

Multi-level framework

The RIA-AE network works on the development of a transnational monitoring study for programme evaluation and impact analysis in the field of adult learning. The monitoring focuses on the benefits of participating in Erasmus+ adult education projects, i.e. the identification

of factors that have contributed to positive or negative, short-term or lasting changes, e.g. in the personal, organisational and professional areas. In addition, it will be determined to what extent the objectives set by the EU in this framework (inclusion and diversity; digital transformation; sustainability/climate; participation in democratic life) could be realised. Based on this information, recommendations can be made for improving the programme.

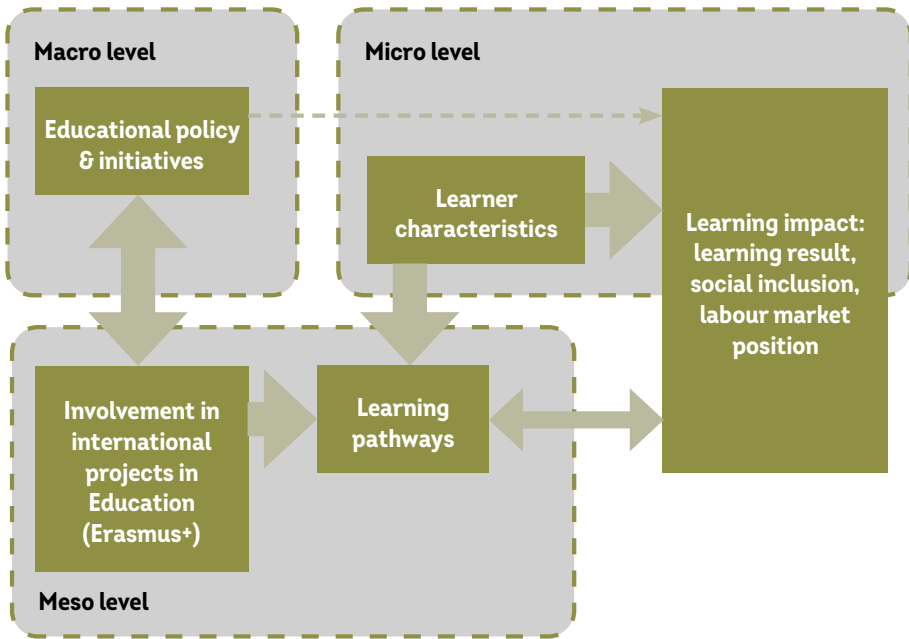
To be able to address the effects of Erasmus+ on the different programme levels (organisation, staff, learners), we propose to locate the monitoring study in a multi-level model of adult education. The model distinguishes between the micro, meso and macro levels, which can significantly influence access and uptake, as well as the impact of international projects in individual, organisational or systemic terms (Brüning and Kuwan, 2002). In particular, Brüning and Kuwan (2002) stress that the answer to the challenge of widening participation of learners lies in the alignment of activity structures at the macro, meso and micro level. To provide a basis for interdependence of these levels, “mobilisation strategies” and “clusters of instruments to increase the participation in learning or to mobilise specific target groups into learning” (Broek and Hake, 2012, p. 400), are necessary. The framework connects the following factors (cf. Brüning and Kuwan, 2002):

- the subjective and social barriers of the individual (micro level);
- the provision of educational services by educators, educational institutions and other organisations (meso level), taking into account the above-mentioned barriers at the micro level;
- the framework conditions and development opportunities of adult education organisations through participation in mobility programmes (meso level);
- and political decision-making (macro level) to create the necessary conditions for the meso level.

Figure 2 shows the interplay of these three levels influencing the impact of international cooperation and mobility projects in adult education within the Erasmus+ programme. For each of these levels, key factors can be identified to describe and analyse the specific effects of international cooperation and mobility projects in adult education within the Erasmus+ programme.



Figure 2
Interplay of key factors at macro, meso and micro levels



Purpose of the study and research questions

The main objective of the transnational monitoring study is to provide the National Agencies with information on the impact of the Erasmus+ Programme on (1) participating institutions, (2) staff and (3) adult learners who have participated in a mobility activity individually or in groups, as well as on the benefits for their living environment and socio-economic resilience.

Although the monitoring study aims to determine the impact of individual actions at micro, meso and macro levels differentiated according to the guiding principles of KA1 and KA2, in practice the beneficiary organisations often participate in several parts of the programme and projects (KA1 and KA2) and in different roles (e.g. as coordinators or partners). Such “double” participation has a cumulative effect on the organisation, staff and learners, making it difficult to attribute this impact to individual parts of the programme or projects. Instead, a link between these effects can be assumed. In this way, KA2 projects can directly strengthen the educational offer of organisations. Additionally, this provision also has an impact on adult education staff and individual learners. Staff and learner mobility could also have an indirect impact on organisations. Therefore, we jointly present the research questions to be addressed in Table 1.



Table 1:
Research questions

Research

How accessible/inclusive is the programme for the target groups?

What are the specificities and characteristics of the adult education organisations participating in the Erasmus+ programme?

What are the specificities and characteristics of participants, staff, volunteers and adult learners who, individually or in groups, participate or have participated in an Erasmus+ project?

What does this information say about the accessibility and inclusiveness of Erasmus+ internationalisation projects in the network countries (Erasmus+ priority: inclusion and diversity)? Are there any obstacles for organisations, professionals and learners to participate?

What is the impact of participation in KA1 and KA2 projects at the AE institution on the following areas of...

the quality of the organisation and, in particular, the organisational embedding of internationalisation in the organisations (strategy, finances, project management, networks, validation of international competencies)?

policies for the professional development of their staff in relation to individual needs and organisational objectives?

the introduction of new or adaptation of existing offers (programmes, activities, modules or new/adapted pedagogical, didactic and validation activities)?

the adaptation of (educational) activities and programmes to the needs of learners?

the involvement of learners in programme design?

improving accessibility for adult learners (inclusion)?

quality assurance policies?

the use of information and communication technologies and the digitalisation of programmes (Erasmus+ priority: digital transformation)?

the promotion of the teaching of international competencies and common values (inclusion and diversity; tolerance; sustainability / environment/ fight against climate change, digitalisation, global citizenship, equal opportunities, anti-discrimination, etc.) in the offers (see Erasmus+ priorities: inclusion and diversity / digital transformation / sustainability / participation in democratic life)?

sustainable cooperation and synergies between adult education institutions, charities, cultural institutions, labour market actors and civil society to promote the independence of adult learners?

the dissemination, exchange of knowledge and experience within the organisation and with other (more or less experienced) organisations?

the establishment and development of an international network?

how do the impacts differ between the different types of adult education institutions (formal, non-formal, governmental, civil society, private)?



What impact does participation in KA1 and KA2 projects have on staff in the areas of...

skills, knowledge, attitudes, competencies?

- Foreign language and intercultural awareness
 - Digital competencies, including enabling a shift towards digital education
 - Competencies linked to occupational profiles
 - Understanding of practices, policies and systems across countries
 - Understanding of and ability to address issues of social inclusion and diversity
 - Capacity to trigger changes in terms of modernisation and international opening within their educational organisations
 - Organising mobility projects
 - Managing cooperation with European partners
 - Management skills (mentioned only in KA2)
 - Sustainability competencies (mentioned only in KA2)
-

self-confidence, adaptability and perseverance?

the application and exchange of the international experience gained among the employees?

identification with European society and the values associated with it (integration, diversity, tolerance, anti-discrimination, etc.)?

professional development and career?

motivation and satisfaction in daily work?

What impact do KA1 and KA2 projects have on adult learners in the areas of...

skills, knowledge, attitudes, competencies?

- Foreign language and intercultural awareness
 - Awareness and understanding of the European Union and common European values (e.g. respect for democratic principles, human dignity, unity and diversity, intercultural dialogue, as well as European social, cultural and historical heritage)
 - Key competencies
 - Digital skills and media literacy
 - Sustainability-related skills and green transformation awareness
 - Self-empowerment and self-esteem
 - Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship
-

labour market outcomes?

- Enhanced employability, improved career prospects and economic independence
-

lifelong learning?

- Improved learning performance and motivation to take part in education and training
 - Enable learners to participate in training
-

social inclusion?

- More active participation in society and enhanced positive interactions with people from different backgrounds
 - Socio-economic resilience
-

Is there a difference in impact between participation in group and individual mobility?

What impact do KA1 and KA2 projects have on other organisations and policy developments?

Will the experiences from the KA1 and KA2 projects be taken over by other organisations that have not participated in Erasmus+ (dissemination of results)?

Do the results of the KA1 and KA2 projects contribute to policy developments at local, regional, national and European level?

- Policy reforms
 - Attracting new resources for mobility opportunities
 - Raising participation of adults of all ages and socio-economic background in adult education
-

Lessons to support the effectiveness and efficiency of future Erasmus+ programmes

How can the accessibility of the Erasmus+ programme for the target group of adult learners be improved?

Which AE organisations are pioneers and why (with which institutional peculiarities, including special features of the offers)?

What are the opportunities and challenges for the participation of target groups?

What are the first experiences with the KA1 individual or group mobility of adult learners and what are the opportunities and risks?

Besides the "participation reports", what monitoring information is needed annually in order to monitor the effectiveness of the Erasmus+ programme on the target group of adult learners? Can research provide a frame of reference that enables a sustainable improvement in effectiveness?

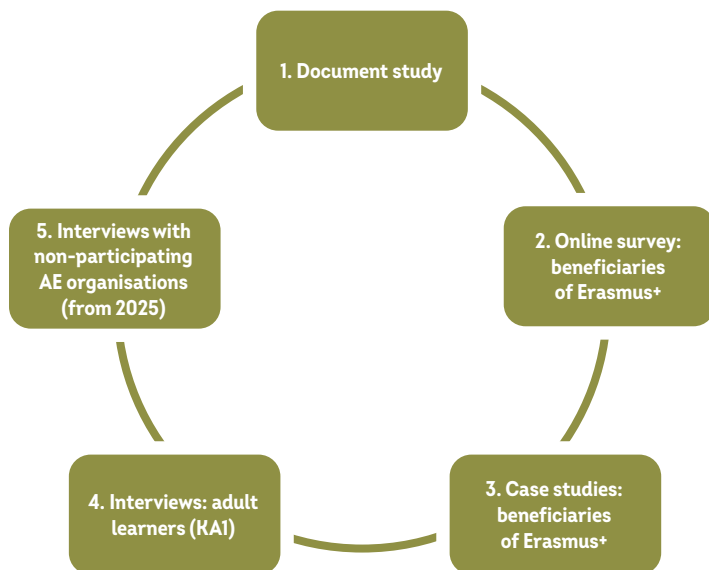
How can the NAs even more strongly support the AE institutions in reaching impact?

Research design



Introduction

The methodological approach of the national monitoring study includes five modules, which are repeated over the three waves (2023, 2025 and 2027) and thus enable an update of the impact monitoring:



Module 1: Analysis of existing impact studies and project documentation

Available existing impact research that has been carried out in the last decade on the impact of Erasmus on the adult education sector at national level was taken into account. Moreover, programme data were analysed on the type of beneficiaries that participated in Erasmus+ and the topics addressed in Erasmus+ projects, as well as impact data based on participant reports (making use of programme monitoring data based on QlikView and QlikSense).

Module 2: Survey among participating AE organisations

To get a good picture of the impact of Erasmus+ on AE institutions in Poland, all AE institutions which participated as coordinators in KA1 and KA2 projects in the previous (from 2018 onward) and current programming period (till the end of 2022) were invited to participate in an online

survey.² The questionnaire has been filled out by 92 coordinators of KA1 and KA2 projects (response rate = 17%).

Module 3: Case studies

In addition to the analysis of existing information in the NA and the survey, five case studies were conducted at AE institutions that participated in Erasmus+. Case studies were conducted in 5 organisations, varying in terms of Key Actions and types.

Module 4: Interviews with adult learners (individual and group mobilities)

To get a picture of participation, experiences and impact of mobility on adult learners (new component in the current Erasmus+ programme), a total of 15 adult learners that participated in a mobility action were interviewed, as well as the AE institutions that successfully applied for mobility for adult learners within KA1.

² Contact persons of beneficiary organisations of projects whose start date according to the grant agreement was no earlier than 1st of January 2018 and whose end date was no later than 31st of December 2022 were selected.



Short overview of the adult learning sector in Poland



Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the governance of the adult education sector in Poland, the adult education infrastructure, type of stakeholders involved and main policy priorities. It also provides an overview of existing impact research on the adult education sector, in particular the impact of Erasmus+.

Adult education policies in Poland

According to research studies, $\frac{2}{3}$ of adult Poles (aged 25-65) participated in at least one activity: formal education, non-formal education, informal education or learning occurring in the workplace (excluding compulsory occupational health and safety training) (Petelewicz et al. 2023). Only 2.5% of the respondents participated in formal education, about $\frac{1}{4}$ in non-formal education, and half of Poles aged 25-65 engaged in informal learning (Petelewicz et al. 2023). Participation in adult learning differs among socio-demographic groups. Educational activities (formal, non-formal or informal) were often undertaken by younger, employed, better educated individuals, and those in high-skilled occupations. Significantly greater diversity is observed when considering age groups. In the youngest age groups, 25-34 and 35-44, nearly three-quarters of individuals engaged in educational activities. However, among Poland's residents aged 45-54, around two-thirds of individuals participated in such activities, and in the oldest age group (55-65), only slightly more than half did so.

Attitudes towards learning in adulthood also vary. "Approximately half of Poland's residents aged 25-65 declared that they enjoyed learning and found it satisfying, while over 60% reported that improving their knowledge and skills was important. At the same time, almost 42% admitted that they no longer wanted to learn." (Petelewicz et al. 2023).

Similar differences between generations, though not as extreme, are found in the level of key competencies; cognitive competencies, interpersonal skills, intrapersonal competencies, and technological skills (usually related to the use of ICTs as a general-purpose technology).

According to the data from the International Survey of Adult Competencies conducted in 2013, the average level of skills among Poles aged 16-65 is still lower than the OECD average. However, it should be noted that there has been an improvement in Poland's average score in Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) study (by 35 points), compared to the results of International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) study, driven by an increase in the reading comprehension skills of all adults, across all age groups. While the

results of young people in PIAAC have already reached the average level of more developed countries, in subsequent age groups, Poland's results still remain below the OECD average. The greatest improvement in reading comprehension results was observed within the oldest individuals, aged 55-65 (by 56 points, compared to a 27-point improvement for the 16-24 age group), and at the same time, this age group experienced the most significant decrease in the percentage of individuals with the lowest level of competencies (level 1 or lower) (Burski et al., 2013, p. 109).

The analysis calls into question whether there is a coherent adult education public policy in Poland. AE is the most diversified area of education in terms of the characteristics of the beneficiaries: age, social and professional status, the institutions providing education, as well as the governing bodies. In general, adult education and training is a shared responsibility among various central institutions; however, the boundaries are blurred. The majority of adult learning is provided by different public institutions, and are either under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of National Education (MoE) or the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy (MoL). The MoE coordinates all schools and vocational training institutes (including schools for adults), as well as administers the implementation of Integrated Qualification System, while the MoL has under its jurisdiction public employment service (PES) which focuses on training of the unemployed, alongside the development of competencies of employers and their employees. MoL is also responsible for the education and training of unemployed adults and job seekers, and for on-the-job training. Additionally, the Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy and the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology play an important role in the distribution of EU funds related (among others) to adult education. The ministries do so through a variety of programmes and legislative instruments, and with funding combined from both national and EU sources.

The regional public policy in the field of adult education is the responsibility of 16 regions in Poland. There are three main institutions responsible for various areas and tasks in AE: the Office of the Marshal (a subsidiary unit of the Provincial Government, which serves as the executive body of local government), the Provincial Labour Offices, and the Education Offices. The goals and objectives of various public policies, including AE, are reflected in strategic documents prepared by the Office of the Marshal, mainly: 1) Provincial development strategies and 2) Regional EU programmes papers (European Regional Development Fund, ERDF).

Poland does not have a national adult learning policy framework; consequently the goals, directions and main assumptions have to be recapitulated from other documents. While existing legal acts, such as the School Education Act and the Act on Employment Promotion

and Labour Market Institutions, refer partially to adult education and skills, AE itself is a secondary area of interest. Moreover, the priorities mentioned in national policy papers related to adult education and skills are part of a broader concept of lifelong learning. As there is no coordination or coherent vision, clearly outlining and mapping AE goals seems to be problematic. It is necessary to examine strategic documents that at some point deal with AE:

- Lifelong Learning Perspective (2014),
- Strategy for the Development of Human Capital 2030,
- Act on the Integrated Qualifications System (IQS),
- Strategy for Responsible Development for the period up to 2020 (including the perspective up to 2030),
- Integrated Skills Strategy 2030.



Table 2
Priorities in policy of Adult Education in Poland

Adult education priority	Type of documents
Raising the basic, digital, transversal, and vocational competencies of adults, enabling individuals to fulfil social and professional functions/roles in various contexts.	Lifelong Learning Perspective (2014), Integrated Skills Strategy 2030, Strategy for Responsible Development for the period up to 2020 (including the perspective up to 2030), Strategy for the Development of Human Capital 2030
Increasing adult participation in various forms of education and training, particularly non-formal education, while also enhancing workplace learning or learning closely related to work, in various institutions engaging citizens outside of work, in the area of private life.	Strategy for the Development of Human Capital 2030, Strategy for Responsible Development for the period up to 2020 (including the perspective up to 2030)
Supporting access to education-vulnerable groups: the unemployed, persons looking for work, as well as other groups with disadvantages in the labour market, including people with disabilities.	Lifelong Learning Perspective (2014), Integrated Skills Strategy 2030

Promoting and developing adult learning through practice, especially organised in the workplace or closely related to work.	Lifelong Learning Perspective (2014), Integrated Skills Strategy 2030, Strategy for the Development of Human Capital 2030, Strategy for Responsible Development for the period up to 2020 (including the perspective up to 2030)
Adult education priority	Type of documents
Increasing the accessibility of educational offers and institutions operating within local communities (especially in rural areas and small towns); adjusting the offer to the needs of individuals of different ages, with varying levels of education, skills, and social competencies; including the widespread dissemination of short and flexible forms of education ensuring the modernisation or supplementation of skills in line with labour market expectations.	Integrated Skills Strategy 2030, Strategy for Responsible Development for the period up to 2020 (including the perspective up to 2030), Strategy for the Development of Human Capital 2030
Ensuring opportunities for competency validation, such as identifying and recognising skills acquired outside the education system, through professional, social, and personal experiences, including the introduction of the Upskilling Pathways model through individual assessment of skills (flexible adjustment of educational offers to this assessed skill level; developing voluntary assessment of adult skills as the basis for planning individual skills improvement pathways).	Act on the Integrated Qualifications System (IQS), Integrated Skills Strategy 2030, Strategy for the Development of Human Capital 2030, Strategy for Responsible Development for the period up to 2020 (including the perspective up to 2030)
Providing adults with information about the qualifications they can obtain within the territory of Poland. Creating a transparent and coherent qualifications framework as part of European lifelong learning model and consistent with the European Qualifications Framework.	Lifelong Learning Perspective (2014), Act on the Integrated Qualifications System (IQS).

Source: Polish strategic documents

It seems that those goals are coherent with the main direction and agenda of the European Union, especially in the areas of increasing the rates of adult participation in learning and training, developing digital and basic skills, including vulnerable groups in learning (especially the unemployed), and adjusting the offers to individual needs, along with an effective counselling system. The approach to the idea of lifelong learning became increasingly utilitarian and aligned with the demands of the labour market. In recent years, the economic context has been

complemented by elements of fair and social transformation, reflected in relevant documents such as the European Pillar of Social Rights and Ursula von der Leyen's Political Guidelines for 2019-2024. Education has also been acknowledged as a crucial element of building inclusive and cohesive societies. However, the overarching goal remains the achievement of economic growth, increasingly referred to as sustainable, or maintaining European competitiveness.

The category of "skills" is inseparably linked to the issue of adult learning and has been placed at the centre of the European political agenda for the next five years. Skills and lifelong learning are fundamental to long-term and sustainable growth, productivity, and innovation. Skills are becoming a key factor for the success of the overall transformation towards a digital and green Europe. Therefore, the "skills" category has been included in several strategic documents. The European Union needs a qualified workforce capable of meeting the challenges of green and digital transformation.

The overall framework is defined by six priorities of the European Commission, among which reference to adult education can be found in the goals of "Europe fit for the digital age", "An economy that works for people", and "Promoting the European way of life". Additionally, this framework is complemented by 20 principles of the "European Pillar of Social Rights" aimed at building a strong, social Europe. Two of these principles: (1) Education, training, and lifelong learning; and (4) Active support for employment, are crucial for the goals, directions of action, and programming of adult learning.

In the "European Pillar of Social Rights", the importance of the right to education for everyone is emphasised. This is one of the elements of the EU's current equality policy, which enables all adults to access opportunities for skills enhancement and development, regardless of their life or professional situation. This also stems from the assumption of the necessity for continuous skill upgrading by adults, as the success of both digital and ecological transformations depends on workers with appropriate skills. Persistent skills mismatches and qualification shortages in the labour market are already limiting the transition to a more ecological economy.

At the same time, specific provisions in various documents indicate the need for special treatment of different social groups, such as youth, women, disadvantaged groups (seniors, migrants, unemployed individuals (including long-term unemployed) or individuals with low qualifications/skills, refugees, people with disabilities, individuals with limited opportunities due to geographic reasons or unfavourable socio-economic circumstances), as well as individuals in specific employment situations (e.g. those working in non-standard employment arrangements), possessing certain statuses in the labour market (wage earners, non-standard

workers), employed in sectors heavily impacted by digital or ecological transformation, or in certain types of enterprises (e.g. micro-enterprises, SMEs).

One of the important documents in the area of adults learners is the new European agenda for adult learning 2021-2030. The document underscores the need for a significant increase in adult participation in formal, non-formal, and informal education. It also highlights the importance of developing skills needed in a world undergoing rapid changes (including digital and ecological transformation) and facing challenges related to demographics, technological advancements, and health. The document emphasises the role of lifelong learning, which can contribute to strengthening Europe's economies and societies. It emphasises the necessity of fostering a "new culture of learning" focused on basic skills for all and continuous acquisition of appropriate knowledge, skills, and competencies at all levels throughout life.

Increased EU funding presents unprecedented opportunities in the area of adult education: The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) will remain a significant source of financing for skills, education, and training. Currently, at the operational level, the goals of national and European policies are implemented through the 2014-2020 European structural and investment funds (ESIF). Additionally, the Erasmus+ programme, which focuses on mobility and has its own budget, serves as one of the instruments aimed at achieving the identified goals. Erasmus+ especially contributes to skill development and investments in education and training systems.

Reference to the programme can be found in many European documents. For example, in the recommendation adopted by the EU Council on November 24, 2020, regarding vocational education and training for sustainable competitiveness, social justice, and resilience, it is indicated that the percentage of learners participating in vocational education and training (VET) mobility abroad should amount to 8%. This indicator is based on data related to mobility from the Erasmus+ programme and data on VET graduates from UNESCO-OECD-Eurostat sources.

Existing studies on the impact of Erasmus+ on the adult education sector

To date, there have been no studies, whether reactive or non-reactive, focusing on the impact of Erasmus+ on the adult education sector in Poland. While there are data and project progress reports, which are obligatory activities of participating organisations, they have not been comprehensively analysed yet. Some experiences of individual organisations participating in

Erasmus+ can sometimes be found on their websites. One attempt to summarise the importance of Erasmus in adult education was a book "Wyzwania Edukacji Dorosłych" (Chodniewicz and Respondek 2016). It was an attempt to document the experiences and effects of selected organisations participating in Erasmus+ projects. However, it did not rely on a research methodology and did not include any results from research studies.

This report is perhaps the first attempt to use research methodology in order to gather the experiences of Erasmus+ project participants and collect their impressions regarding the effects of participation in projects.

Conclusions

Non-vocational adult education appears to be on the sidelines of adult education policy goals, although there are indications of increasing competencies for roles other than vocational ones, as well as the importance of informal learning. However, priorities related to vocational education and the acquisition of competencies are definitely more prominent. It seems that these goals are aligned with the main direction and agenda of the European Union, particularly in increasing adult participation rates in learning and training, developing digital and basic skills, including vulnerable groups in learning (especially the unemployed), and tailoring offers to individual needs, along with an effective counselling system.

If we analyse strategic documents through the lenses of priorities, we can notice that they are more focused on a knowledge-based economy as a condition of economic growth, emphasising access to vocational training and qualifications; some goals are directly related to employment, economic growth, and competitiveness. Some documents also mention increasing access to education for vulnerable groups through tailored offers, as well as strengthening the role of local communities, in order to improve skills in line with labour market expectations.

Adult education in Poland lies at the intersection of a variety of interests, objectives and actions, involving different groups of stakeholder and measures. At the same time, it is a secondary area of activity for the main institutional actors at the regional level. There is no overall governing body or institution solely coordinating AE. AE tasks related to the labour market are managed mainly by the provincial labour office, formal AE is under the supervision of the department which is also responsible for compulsory education, and departments of regional funds are in charge of strategic planning and financial issues. AE is not a priority for

either of them, but in turn it seems to be a minor, narrow part of their daily responsibilities (Petelewicz et al. 2024).

Understanding of adult learning and its significance in the regional strategic documents corresponds to the national and European objectives and aims. References to AE are abstract, not linked to each other, lacking achievable objectives, not taking into account regional problems, and missing implementation measures. In the regional documents, AE is treated more like a subsidiary measure to achieve developmental goals connected with economic growth and the labour market. The approach and objectives of the AE at regional level head towards economic models, and lifelong learning is perceived in terms of economic growth, enhancing productivity and innovations. Perception of AE is closer to the economic way of thinking, whereby, in general, it should supplement skills enhancing productivity, competitiveness and innovation of enterprises (and in principle regional development). The AE is mostly financed by external funding, the offer is not usually based on the insight into a local socio-economic situation, but on the general guidelines of the European Commission.



The accessibility and inclusiveness of Erasmus+



Introduction

Inclusion is one of the priorities of the Erasmus+ programme and it is therefore important that the programme attracts organisations that have not previously benefited from Erasmus+, as well as vulnerable participants who would otherwise be less likely to engage in internationalisation activities. This chapter discusses the characteristics of AE institutions that participated in Erasmus+ in the previous and current programming period, as well as the characteristics of adult learners who benefit from the developed outputs (KA2) and/or mobility (KA1). On this basis, statements can be made about the accessibility and inclusiveness of Erasmus+ within the AE sector in Poland.

Organisations participating in Erasmus+ in Poland

2018-2020 period

In the 2018-2020 period, the majority of Polish organisations participating in Key Action 1 projects (“Learning mobility of individuals”) belonged to the third sector. 39% of institutional beneficiaries were classified as non-governmental organisations/associations and 21% as foundations: these two most prevalent types constitute 60% of all participating organisations. Educational institutions (adult education – 5%, primary education – 5%, secondary vocational education – 4%) were also strongly represented, making up 14%. Data on share of particular type of organisations in Key Action 1 are available in Table 3. Due to the high number (15) of scarcely represented categories, with the maximum share of 2%, they are presented as one category – *other types*.

**Table 3**

Type of applicant organisations in Poland that participated in Key Action 1 in the period 2018-2020 (N=185)

Type of organisation	% of organisations
Non-governmental organisation / association	39
Foundation	21
Local public body	7
School / institute / educational centre – Adult education	5
School / institute / educational centre – General education (primary level)	5
Public service provider	5
School / institute / educational centre – Vocational Training (secondary level)	4
Other types	14

Source: European Commission, QlikSenseHub, <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/eacdashboard/hub/> [access: February 2024].

In the case of Key Action 2 projects (“Cooperation among organisations and institutions”), a similar dominant role of third sector organisations was also observed in the period 2018-2020. The most active were: non-governmental organisations / associations – (36%) and foundations (27%), making up together almost $\frac{2}{3}$ of all participating organisations. Activity of educational organisations can also be noticed (adult education – 6%, tertiary level – 4%), accounting for a total of 10%. Data on share of particular type of organisations in Key Action 2 are available in Table 4. Due to the high number (13) of scarcely represented categories, with the maximum share of 2%, they are presented as one category – *other types*.

**Table 4**

Type of applicant organisations in Poland that participated in KA204 in the period 2018-2020 (N=194)

Type of organisation	% of organisations
Non-governmental organisation / association	36
Foundation	27
School / institute / educational centre – Adult education	6
Small and medium sized enterprise	5
Higher education institution (tertiary level)	4
Publicly funded cultural organisations	3
Local public body	3
European NGO	3
Group of young people active in youth work	3
Other types	11

Source: European Commission, QlikSenseHub, <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/eacdashboard/hub/> [access: February 2024].

Organisations representing adult education sector that have been supported by Erasmus+ programme since 2018 were asked to complete the online questionnaire. In Poland, 92 surveys were accepted for further analysis. Out of 92 representatives of the institutions that answered the question concerning the category of the organisation, 57 (62%) have chosen the answer “non-governmental organisation / association”, making NGOs the main institutional beneficiaries of Erasmus + KA1 and KA2 projects. When comparing the questionnaire with contextual data from Table 3 and Table 4, it can be noticed that the option to choose the category “foundation” was missing, so it can be assumed that representatives of these types of institutions chose the wider category of non-governmental organisations. Furthermore, the following institutions are significantly represented: 10 libraries (11%), 9 art & culture institutes (10%), 9 adult education providers (10%), and 8 civil society organisations (9%). Other categories were less frequent (3% or less): 3 folk high schools, 2 enterprises, 2 local/regional governments, 2 higher education institutions (tertiary level), 2 sport clubs / associations / federations, 2 youth organisations, 2 social enterprises, 1 open university, 1 welfare organisation, 1 child day care / kindergarten, 1 think tank, 1 European network / association.

2021-2027 period

As with the previous perspective, in the period 2021-2023, the dominant role of NGOs (35%) and foundations (24%) can be observed among mobility projects (KA1) in the adult education sector, which together account for the majority of participating institutions (59%). Organisations providing adult education constitute 7%. Interestingly, the share of enterprises is similar to



the one in Key Action 1. There is a significant share (17%) of uncategorised institutions. Data on share of particular type of organisations in Key Action 1 are available in Table 5.



Table 5

Type of organisations that participated in Key Action 1 in Poland in the period 2021-2023 (N=284)

Type of organisation	% of organisations
Non-governmental organisation / association	35
Foundation	24
Undefined	17
School / institute / educational centre – Adult education	7
Public service provider	4
Local public body	4
Small and medium sized enterprise	4
Other types	4

Source: European Commission, QlikSenseHub, <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/eacdashboard/hub/> [access: February 2024].

Similar pattern can be observed when analysing data for Key Action 2 projects in the period 2021-2023. The vast majority is represented by two categories – NGOs and foundations. In KA210 (“Small-scale partnerships”), together they make up more than 80%, while in KA220 (“Cooperation partnerships”) – 71%. In KA210, local public bodies make up a notable 7%, while higher education institutions have a significant presence in K220. Data on share of particular type of organisations in KA210 are available in Table 6, and in KA220 in Table 7.



Table 6

Type of organisations that participated in Small-scale partnerships projects (KA210) in Poland the period 2021-2023 (N=120)

Type of organisation	% of organisations
Foundation	42
Non-governmental organisation / association	40
Local public body	7
Small and medium sized enterprise	3
Other type	8

Source: European Commission, QlikSenseHub, <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/eacdashboard/hub/> [access: February 2024].

**Table 7**

Type of organisations that participated in Cooperation partnerships projects (KA220) in Poland in the period 2021-2023 (N=62)

Type of organisation	% of organisations
Non-governmental organisation / association	39
Foundation	32
Higher education institution (tertiary level)	15
Small and medium sized enterprise	5
Other type	10

Source: European Commission, QlikSenseHub, <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/eacdashboard/hub/> [access: February 2024].

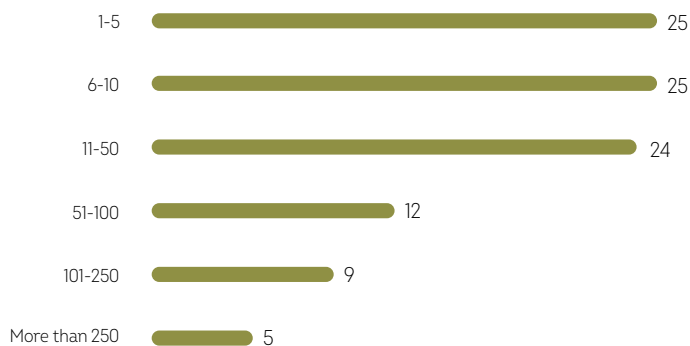
Size of participating organisations

The analysis of the data concerning organisations that took part in the online questionnaire reveals characteristics of this group. Mostly small or medium sized organisations prevail. For half of them, the number of staff is 10 or less, almost ¼ have between 11 and 50 employees, and this number exceeds 51 for only 26% of the organisations.

**Figure 3**

Size of the organisations - staff (N=92)

% of organisations due to the number of staff at the end of 2022



Source: own calculations, data from online questionnaire

Respectively, data concerning the number of adult learners that participated in learning activities provided by the organisations in 2022 can be presented. No linear pattern was observed. Almost ⅓ of the organisations that took part in the survey provided learning for 11 to 50 adult learners, and for 29% of them the number of adult learners was between 51 and 100. The largest institutions, dealing with more than 250 adult learners, make up ⅕ of the surveyed organisations.

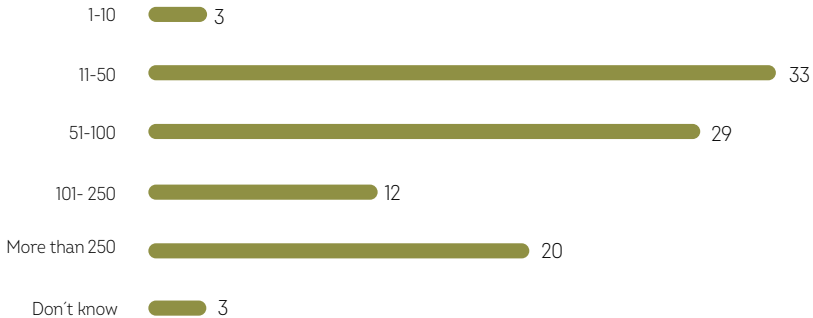




Figure 4

Size of the organisations – number of adult learners (N=92)

% of organisations by the number of adult learners in 2022



Source: own calculations, data from online questionnaire

Newcomers to the programme

Interestingly, having Erasmus+ experience usually encourages organisations to get involved further. 40% of the surveyed organisations participated in five or more projects, 23% in four, 14% in three and 17% in two. Taking part in Erasmus+ was a one-time involvement for only 5% of the organisations. 80% (73) of the respondents declared that their organisation has participated in Erasmus+ KA1 project since 2014, and 56% (52) in a KA2 project. This means that some participants have had experiences in both types of action: 64% (59) of the surveyed organisations participated in one type of projects, while 36% (33) in two. 27 surveyed organisations (29% of the total number that answered the question) currently hold an Erasmus+ accreditation for mobility in adult education, 64% (59) do not hold the accreditation, while 6 respondents are uncertain. An overwhelming majority (94%) of the surveyed organisations have experienced being a coordinator in KA2 Erasmus+ projects under the previous (2014-2020) and/or current (2021-2027) programme, while 67% has experience as partners, and one organisation as an associate partner.

Participation of adult learners

The possibilities of indicating a target group / final beneficiaries who profited from the intellectual output(s) within KA2 framework or insights and experiences gained through mobility support within KA1 framework were not disjoint, and multiple answers were possible. An overall picture can be painted of the interwoven characteristics of adult learners benefiting directly or indirectly through their engagement and outputs of the organisation. In the case of the sample of the organisations that took part in the survey in Poland, the category of elderly

(older than 65) has a particular relevance, as 61% of the respondents indicated them as the target group of their organisation. 41% of them pointed to women, 34% to the employed, and 32% to the group of young adults (15-29 years old). The following, less represented target groups are characterised by some dimensions of vulnerability: psychological or mental disabilities – 29%, living in peripheral areas – 29%, lacking basic skills – 26%, learning difficulties – 25%, limited income – 24%, low level of education – 20%, health problems – 20%. 22% of the respondents pointed to migrants and 18% to refugees and asylum seekers. In the Table 8, data on characteristics of final beneficiaries are presented, however only items indicated by minimum 20% of the respondents are included.



Table 8

Target groups of adult learners – characteristics of final beneficiaries (multiple choice questions; N=92)

	N	%
Elderly (older than 65 years)	56	61
Women	38	41
Employed	31	34
Young adults (15-29 years old)	29	32
Adults with physical or mental disabilities	27	29
Adults who live in a peripheral area	27	29
Adults who lack basic skills	24	26
Adults with learning difficulties	23	25
Adults with limited income	22	24
Migrants	20	22
Adults with a low level of education	18	20
Adults with health problems	18	20

Source: own calculations, data from online questionnaire

Obstacles for participating in Erasmus+

General mobility obstacles

Representatives of the organisations are optimistic regarding their future involvement in the Erasmus+ programme, as 89% of those who addressed the question declared that, based on previous experience, their organisation will apply again. Only 3% chose the opposite, while 9% were uncertain.

When answering the open-ended questions in the questionnaire and during in-depth interviews, respondents and interviewees usually referred to similar problems, based on their experiences with already finished projects within Erasmus+ framework. Obstacles and barriers can be classified into categories:

- **Language and cultural barriers** – low language skills are often mentioned as a main obstacle, which concerns both the staff and potential and actual participants. Lack of proficiency in English among representatives of the organisation hampers the planning and application phase, and causes anxiety that low language skills would cause difficulties during the project. Moreover, organisations have doubts whether they will manage to assemble a group of participants, as from their perspective, a language barrier would discourage them from even trying to participate in a mobility. Another concern of the organisations is connected with the initial anxiety of going abroad and meeting different cultures. However, the latter barrier, in the opinion of the participants of the research, is relatively easy to handle.
- **Organisational and administrative issues** – Problems with dealing with the whole process and its various stages were mentioned quite often, but they mainly concerned the application stage:
 - not sufficient resources in the organisation – lack of knowledge and proficiency in preparing applications and dealing with the complexity of projects and management process, low level of the professionalisation of the organisation, the necessity to undertake a large amount of work on a voluntary basis.
 - problems with electronic submission system (application forms), described as complicated, difficult, non-intuitive and too demanding in terms of necessary information.

I wrote projects in many electronic submission systems. And I simply haven't encountered such a bad generator even a few years ago. ADU_12_ORG

- demanding project reporting

Heavy workload at all stages – submitting an application, registration – unclear content of applications (it is not known what to enter), coordination, reporting (frequent changes), too long and too complicated – application and report, 400-page guide. (survey, open-end question)

- one application deadline for the whole year – not suitable timing

- **Difficulties in finding foreign partners**
- **Financial issues** – too low fees for travel costs – airplane tickets and accommodation. Unpredictability of the amount of funds received and, consequently, the scope of projects; *The biggest barrier is that we never know how much funding we will receive and we don't really know how many participants and where they can go. ADU_18_ORG*

Specific obstacles regarding KA1 mobility for adult learners

When answering the question regarding mobility activities for adult learners in the framework of a future KA1 project, the majority (71%) of the questionnaire participants stated that they plan to organise such activities, while 19% of them were uncertain, and 10% were reluctant and did not have such plans. Only 13 respondents addressed open-ended questions concerning factors that prevented them from planning mobility for adult learners. More information on this issue can be found in the in-depth interviews. In general, the barriers mentioned above cover the same issues as the reported problems with the Erasmus + programme as a whole, i.e. insufficient funding for accommodation, difficulties in finding partners, and for both organisations and participants – language barriers and general anxiety associated with mobility. The latter are especially sound in the case of organisations working with the elderly. Participating seniors also mentioned health concerns, technical problems with registration, and they were worried if long and demanding trip would not become too burdensome. Some general responses also appeared, such as: *we are not interested, it is not our field*.

Conclusions

In the case of Poland, there is a significant dominance of non-governmental organisations, associations and foundations, regardless of the analysed period (2018-2020 or 2021-2023) or the particular type of Erasmus+ programme (Key Action 1 – mobility projects, or Key Action 2 – Partnership projects). These types of institutions account for between 60% and up to 82% organisations involved, depending on the time framework and the project type. When looking at educational institutions in the period 2018-2020, the different types of such organisations combined accounted for 14% of all organisations in Key Action 1, and for 10% in Key Action 2. As for the period 2021-2023, there were 15% of higher education institutions in Key Action 1, and 7% of adult education providers in Key Action 2. Other types of participating institutions were scattered into different categories. In Poland, entities related to the labour market are hardly represented, as in the case of enterprises the share is between 2% and 5%, while other institutions from this field participate sporadically.

A similar picture can be painted based on the data from the questionnaire: 62% of the survey participants were representatives of non-governmental organisations / associations. After supplementing information concerning the types of organisations with the data on the size of organisations (2022) in terms of staff, as well as with the number of adult learners, it is possible to get a more complex picture. Small and medium sized organisation prevail: in ¾ of the organisations the number of staff was less than 51, while in ½ it was less than 11. Furthermore,

65% of the organisations had less than 101 adult learners, and 36% of them less than 51. Only 1/5 of the organisations provided educational activities for 250 or more adults. The majority of the surveyed organisations (61%) pointed to the elderly as their target group. Other characteristics were used less often, and some of them denoted different aspects, but were related to the same group, e.g. women. Other groups that were represented relatively frequently were: young adults (32%), and adults with physical or mental disabilities (29%). Some organisations focus on groups with different kinds of educational disadvantages, such as lacking basic skills (26%) and learning difficulties (25%).

It can be assumed that the above-mentioned characteristics are reflected in the obstacles identified by the participants. Smaller and less complex organisations are often less professionalised, which causes problems regarding the lack of sufficient skills, experience of the staff, and resources that are necessary for the smooth and successful operation at different phases. Additionally, some participants perceive the application procedure – using the electronic submission and reporting system – as very complex and demanding. It seems that initially, organisations do not feel comfortable in the international environment, resulting in problems with finding partners. What is more, concentration on seniors highlights the obstacles connected with language barriers and low language skills of potential participants, which intensify their anxiety concerning travelling abroad. It is especially sound in the case of KA1 projects. In this framework, participants also report financial issues concerning the fees for accommodation and travel expenses, as some of them claimed that they are not high enough to cover the costs of hotel accommodation or airline tickets.

However, it has to be underlined that cultural barriers, concerns about going abroad, and even initial anxiety concerning language barriers are described as relatively easy to overcome, and after the participation in the project they disappear completely.

To sum up, a typical Polish institution taking part in KA1 and KA2 projects in adult education sector can be described by the most common characteristics – it is a small/medium sized non-governmental organisation, whose target group are the elderly. It encounters obstacles concerning dealing with application process and project documentation, language barriers, problems with finding partners, and financial issues concerning travel costs. Sometimes, low level of professionalisation and lack of relevant resources within the organisation hamper dealing with these problems. However, at the same time, it is highly probable that an organisation which participated in more than one project is willing to take part in Erasmus+ again.



Impact of Erasmus+ at meso level



Introduction

In this chapter, we analyse the impact of Erasmus+ on organisations. It covers the issues of internationalisation and other Erasmus+ priorities, as well as looks into the quality of staff and the learning offer of participating organisations. As organisations could carry out various activities and projects with Erasmus+ funding, we first looked at the different types of products developed. We then asked what sustainable impact Erasmus+ participation had, including on the organisation and the learning.

Type of products developed and topics addressed

Type of topics addressed

Data on main topics addressed³ in Key Action 1 projects in the period 2018-2020 are scattered. The most represented category (19%) is intercultural/intergenerational education and lifelong learning, which can be related to the information on target groups of active organisations, as the majority of them deal with the group of the elderly. The main topic for 14% of projects is innovative curricula, and $\frac{1}{10}$ of them is dealing with teaching and learning of foreign languages. Data concerning the share of projects undertaking particular topics are available in Table 10. In case the percentage for the item did not exceed 3%, it was classified as "other topic".

³ Topics addressed by beneficiaries at the stage of application.

**Table 9**

Main topics addressed by Key Action 1 projects in Poland in the period 2018-2020
(multiple choice question)

	N of projects	%
Intercultural/intergenerational education and (lifelong) learning	66	19
New innovative curricula	51	14
Teaching and learning of foreign languages	37	10
Access for disadvantaged	22	6
Inclusion - equity	21	6
Creativity and culture	16	5
Disabilities - special needs	14	4
ICT - new technologies and digital competencies	14	4
International cooperation, international relations	14	4
Other topics	100	28

Source: European Commission, QlikSenseHub, <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/eacdashboard/hub/> [access: February 2024].

The other 26 topics were undertaken by 100 projects in Key Action 1 in the period 2018-2020. No more than 11 projects (max. 3%) were assigned to each of the remaining categories. Additionally, 9 listed topics were not undertaken by any organisation.

Data on main topics addressed in Key Action 2 projects in the period 2018-2020 are diversified as well. Only three categories are represented by 10% or more. As with Key Action 1, the most popular categories were: intercultural/intergenerational education and (lifelong) learning, as well as new innovative curricula (both categories 13%). At the third position is ICT - new technologies and digital competencies (10%). Data concerning the share of organisations undertaking particular topics are presented below. In case the percentage for the item did not exceed 3%, it was classified as "other topic".

**Table 10**

Main topics addressed by Key Action 2 projects in Poland the period 2018-2020
(multiple choice question)

Topic name	N of projects	%
Intercultural/intergenerational education and (lifelong) learning	66	13
New innovative curricula	65	13
ICT - new technologies and digital competencies	48	10
Inclusion - equity	39	8
Access for disadvantaged	27	5
Key competencies (including mathematics and literacy)	27	5
Health and wellbeing	22	4
Creativity and culture	19	4
Other topics	185	37

Source: European Commission, QlikSenseHub, <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/eacdashboard/hub/> [access: February 2024].

The other 33 topics were undertaken by 185 projects in Key Action 2 in the period 2018-2020. No more than 17 projects (max. 3%) were assigned to each of the remaining categories. Additionally, 3 listed topics were not undertaken by any organisation.

Each topic in Key Action 2 (period 2021-2023) projects was represented by less than 10% of the projects, which hampers the analysis. However, in line with other periods and frameworks, the most popular topic concerns the elderly – active ageing (9%). Data concerning share of organisations undertaking particular topics are available in Table 13. In case the percentage for the item did not exceed 3%, it was classified as “other topic”.

**Table 11**

Topics addressed by Key Action 2 projects in Poland in the period 2021-2023

Topic Name	n of projects	%
Active ageing	46	9
Inclusion, promoting equality and non-discrimination	43	8
Bridging intercultural, intergenerational and social divide	34	6
Digital skills and competencies	30	6
Creativity, arts and culture	27	5
Community development	22	4
Cultural heritage	22	4
Green skills	22	4
New learning and teaching methods and approaches	22	4
Physical and mental health, well-being	20	4
Creating new, innovative or joint curricula or courses	19	4
Environment and climate change	19	4
Other topics	272	49

Source: European Commission, QlikSenseHub, <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/eacdashboard/hub/> [access: February 2024].

The other 47 topics were undertaken by 272 projects in Key Action 2. No more than 16 projects (max. 3%) were assigned to each of the remaining categories.

Type of products developed

The question concerning outputs or products that have been developed as part of participation in Key Action 2 in Erasmus+ (from 2018 onwards till the end of 2022) was addressed by 52 respondents representing all of the surveyed organisation that declared taking part in KA2. The most popular way of application and dissemination of knowledge acquired during the KA2 activities is preparation of learning materials: $\frac{2}{3}$ of the organisations reported this kind of output (67%), while more than half mentioned manuals/handbooks and curricula (56%), as well as training modules, language courses and pedagogical concepts (54%). Items such as: websites, teaching materials for teachers/staff, online tools, publication/book/position paper were specified by around 44% of participants. More technologically advanced items were mentioned less frequently - development of films or instructional videos was chosen by 29% of the respondents, and development of Webinars or "blended learning" courses by 14%. This

was a multiple choice question, and available categories of outputs are not disjoint, which means that a single product could be addressed from different perspectives.

Further use of the products and outputs is a vital result of the Erasmus+. Online survey respondents declared that the results of KA2 since 2018 are still in use in their organisations: in 1/3 of organisations they are used to a high extend, in 53% quite frequently, in 12% to some extent.

Added value of Erasmus+ support

It is interesting how the respondents perceive the likelihood that actions supported by Erasmus+ would have been implemented had they not participated in the project. The assessment of this seems like a complicated and complex issue, and the number of influential factors is considerable. 17% of the respondents acknowledged that they do not know how to answer. this question, while 28% admitted that supported actions would not have been implemented. Only 9% answered that the actions would have been fully implemented anyway, while 20% responded that they would have been partially implemented, albeit in a different form or content. Additionally, 26% suggested that the actions would have been partially implemented in a truncated format.

Impact at organisational level

Impact on internationalisation

Participation in Erasmus+ programmes can be perceived as an opportunity for internationalisation in multiple aspects.

Respondents tend to agree with the majority of the statements concerning organisational embedding of internationalisation within their organisation. The growth of the awareness of the added value of international projects is identified by the vast majority of the participants – 68% fully agree, and 28% agree with this statement. Slightly lower, although still high, is the share of the respondents perceiving advancement in managing international projects, supporting adult learners and professionals in the area of internationalisation, and developing a better internationalisation strategy. The biggest uncertainties relate to support for volunteers, HR/ staff policy, and funding. Detailed data on the share of respondents addressing the particular statements are available in the Table 12.

**Table 12**

Answer to the question: To what extent do you (dis)agree with the statements presented below about the impact of participation in Erasmus+ since 2018 on the organisational embedding of internationalisation within your organisation? (N=92)

	Fully agree	Agree	Not agree/ not dis- agree	Dis- agree	Com- pletely dis- agree	Not appli- cable
...our organisation is more aware of the added value of international projects	68%	28%	2%	1%	0	0
...there is a better strategy for internationalisation within our organisation	35%	36%	18%	4%	0	7%
...there is more support for internationalisation activities for our professionals within our organisation	35%	45%	15%	3%	0	3%
...there is more support for internationalisation activities for our volunteers within our organisation	24%	30%	25%	2%	0	21%
...there is more support for internationalisation for our adult learners within our organisations	35%	48%	10%	4%	0	4%
...there is increased funding for internationalisation within our organisation	14%	31%	25%	13%	3%	15%

...HR/staff policy for internationalisation within our organisation has been strengthened	12%	33%	30%	10%	1%	14%
...the management of international projects (design, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and learning) has been improved	43%	44%	9%	3%	0	1%
...the international network of our organisation has been strengthened	41%	39%	14%	1%	0	5%

Source: own calculations, data from online questionnaire

Participants of the in-depth interviews highlighted that internationalisation is the most prominent general outcome for organisations. The answers in the online questionnaire reveal a more complex picture, as organisationally established activities facilitating internationalisation are relatively limited. Interestingly, four items (out of five) included in the questionnaire were chosen with almost the same frequency – around 40%: *The organisation has a policy/strategy for internationalisation, The organisation systemically participates in international networks and internationalisation activities, Guidelines or agreed processes are in place on how to manage international projects, Development of international competencies is discussed in performance appraisals and career talks.* It is certainly a less common practice to have a dedicated budget for internationalisation activities, as only 5% of organisations pointed to this item.

In the eyes of almost 90% of the organisations participating in the online questionnaire, conditions to facilitate internationalisation processes progressed: for 29% it “improved significantly”, and for 60% it “improved”. For 8% it has remained the same.

When answering the open-ended question, participants of the survey often mentioned internationalisation of their organisation as the greatest benefit for them and their organisation, and they perceive it as an asset for themselves, for the organisation’s staff, as well for the organisation as a whole. Internationalisation goes hand in hand with greater openness and getting experience in the international environment.

Impact on learning offer

Impact of the Erasmus+ on organisations can be evaluated from different angles. Based on the data from online questionnaire, the perception of representatives of the organisations on the impact in particular areas can be identified. The perceived impact on the development of the learning offer is particularly interesting. In general, respondents tend to agree with all of the given statements. However, there are some differences regarding the extent. The highest share of the respondents acknowledge the impact in the area of learning offer, including the output and insights into the provision of the organisation, and they are also optimistic in the area of digitalisation and collaboration with other organisations that support participants with fewer opportunities. The highest number of undecided respondents was in the area of green skills. Detailed data on perception on the impact of the Erasmus + on the development of the learning offer are available in the table below.



Table 13

Perception of the impact of participation in Erasmus+ since 2018 on the development of the learning offer within your organisation and beyond (N=92)

	Fully agree	Agree	Not agree/ not disagree	Disagree	Completely disagree	NA
...developed outputs and insights gained have been incorporated into new or existing provision in my organisation	46%	51%	0	0	1%	1%
...our learning offer is better aligned with the needs of adult learners	49%	43%	7%	0	1%	0
...the accessibility of the learning offer has improved for different groups of adult learners	41%	41%	16%	0	1%	1%

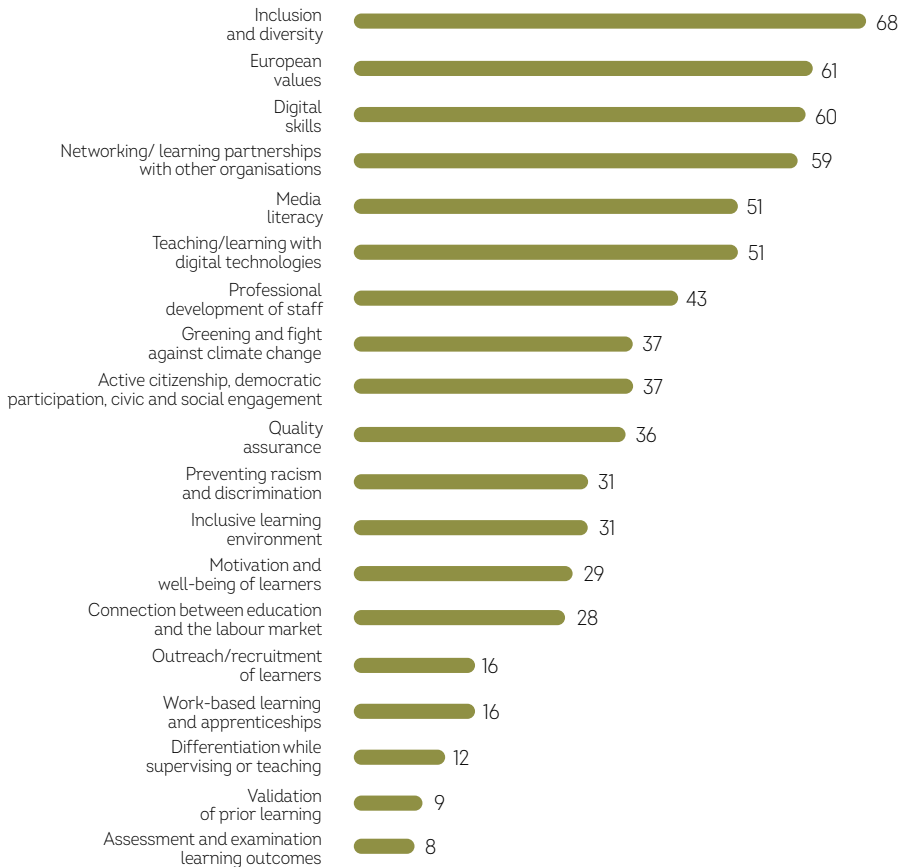
...my organisation is better able to include the "voice of the adult learner" in decisions about its provision	28%	57%	10%	4%	1%	0
...my organisation is better able to use digital devices and technologies in our learning offer	37%	51%	10%	1%	1%	0
...our learning offer pays more attention to digital skills	26%	51%	10%	1%	1%	0
...our learning offer pays more attention to green skills	28%	38%	30%	1%	1%	1%
...our learning offer pays more attention to participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement	28%	49%	19%	1%	1%	1%
...my organisation is better able to collaborate with other organisations that support participants with fewer opportunities	40%	40%	18%	0	1%	1%

Source: own calculations, data from online questionnaire

There are multiple factors influencing the topics that gain recognition within organisations. Among them is involvement in different projects enabling familiarisation with new ideas. Representatives of the organisations participating in at least one Erasmus+ project since 2018 were asked to indicate topics that are receiving more attention within the organisation than before. It was a multiple choice question. The most recognised issues are inclusion and diversity (68%), European values (61%), and digital skills (60%). Partnership with other organisations was chosen by 59% of the respondents, which seems especially valuable in terms of promoting internationalisation and networking. Detailed data on indicated topics receiving attention are available in Figure 5.


Figure 5

% of indication of topics receiving more attention within the organisation since participation in Erasmus+ (N=92)



Source: own calculations, data from online questionnaire

Impact on horizontal priorities

Inclusion and diversity

As mentioned above, "inclusion and diversity" was the most frequently indicated item within the question on the topics receiving more attention within the organisation since participation in Erasmus+. Participation in Erasmus+ contributes to attracting the attention of the organisations and making them more focused on key ideas and values within the delivery of adult learning. $\frac{3}{4}$ of the surveyed organisation admitted that they are substantively more attentive towards inclusion and diversity: 50% "rather much", 24% "very much". The answer "to some extent" was chosen by 18%, and "only a little" by 8%.

Improvement in the area of inclusion and diversity can be facilitated in many ways, and participation in Erasmus+ gives particular opportunities and favours paying more attention to those values. In the case of organisations that took part in the online questionnaire, the most frequently indicated condition facilitating inclusion and diversity is *the use of the voice of the learners for developing, monitoring and evaluating our offer*, which was chosen by 69% of the respondents. Almost the same share (68%) was reached by *cooperating with other organisations that support participants with fewer opportunities*. What is important, more than half (54%) of the respondents admitted that they train staff on inclusion and diversity. However, the activities requiring more established attitude and products are less common: procedures to assure that training offer is inclusive (41%), inclusion and diversity strategy and action plan (32%), and dedicated staff responsible for the coordination, communication and implementation of inclusion and diversity activities (25%).

In the interviews, respondents whose organisation participated in the mobility programmes underlined that contact with international partners and their target groups was meaningful for them in building openness to diversity.

Success where a participant with severe mental retardation, where some years ago experienced as a result of stereotypes, triggers, that he was stupid and felt inferior, then now through the fact that he is traveling, then his brother said to him, you are doing well, you go on these projects, you go abroad. It was a huge success, because he felt that it was cool, that he doesn't have a bad life at all, the fact that this disability, it's a privilege...that disability is not a barrier. ADU_11_ORG

We got to know how they take care of people of an age like me, especially women how they do over there, how they help them, and it was possible to compare how our pensioners live and how those pensioners live there (...) In Turkey we encouraged everyone to dance the Polonaise, well, as we started to dance the Polonaise all of us: the Turks, Slovenes and us it was a sensation. Also we showed ourselves and us. ADU_16_LEARN

Often the elderly are patronised in our society. This applies to families as well. The family cares a lot, but doesn't really look at what grandma or grandpa is doing there. On the other hand, this trip... The odds have simply gone up for grandparents. ADU_12_ORG

It gives a sense of equality, improves self-esteem, I think the participants of this project allow them to break even such internal resistance of people from the fact that I can't, I don't want to, because I don't know. It just gives a chance to develop even at this late age of life.... ADU_13_ORG

Digital transformation

60% of the respondents indicated that “digital skills” has been the topic receiving more attention within organisation since participation in Erasmus+.

In the case of organisations that took part in the online questionnaire, the most frequently indicated conditions facilitating digital transformation are related to the use of digital tools and resources in educational practices; statements: *we have digital devices to use for teaching* was chosen by $\frac{2}{3}$ of the respondents, and *we use digital resources for teaching and learning activities* by 70%. Organisations tend to improve skills of the staff: 59% indicated that their staff have continuing professional development opportunities in terms of the use of digital technologies. Availability of digital devices for learners was indicated by 43% of the respondents, and having physical spaces that support teaching and learning with digital technologies by 39%. The least frequently chosen option was the availability of assistive technologies for learners in need for special support (24%), and having a digital strategy and action plan (18%).

As far as digitalisation is concerned, $\frac{2}{3}$ of the respondents answering the question declared that their organisation had become significantly more thoughtful about the issue in regard to adult learning thanks to Erasmus+ (45% “rather much”, 22% “very much”). The answer “to some extent” was chosen by 30%, and “only a little” by 4%. In the IDIs and answers to the open-ended questions, representants of the organisations mentioned that thanks to the participation in the project, their organisations had become more advanced in digitalisation and had implemented some solutions in the organisation on a daily basis; however, it is more related to dealing with organisational and administrative issues. It should also be highlighted that in some cases, organisations claim that since taking part in the Erasmus+ they are less afraid of digital technologies and are able to identify their benefits.

Green transition

Green transition is among the horizontal priorities and gains more attention in Erasmus+ programmes. In the case of Polish organisations that took part in the online survey, it does not seem to be the main priority; greening and fight against climate change was indicated by 37% of the participants, as the topic gaining more attention since participating in Erasmus+. But at the same time, 74% of the respondents checked the statement *we embed green skills in our learning offer*, and 54% *we train staff on good environmental practices*. 40% declared that they collaborate with organisations/individuals to strengthen sectoral capacity to operate more sustainably. The other conditions facilitating green transition were chosen less frequently: *specific training offer for green skills* by 23% of the respondents, and *greening / sustainability*

strategy and action plan by 20%. 9% of the organisations introduced more advanced and demanding actions, i.e. environmental certificates/ecolabels, and 8% mentioned calculating ecological footprint.

Participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement

When it comes to conditions that are in place in the organisation to facilitate participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement, the most common one according to participants in the questionnaire is the offer of activities that empower learners to develop and express own opinions (71%). Relatively frequently present is the offer of activities that activate democratic participation of learners (61%), and available spaces to learners in which they can take/experience responsibility (55%). 41% of the respondents claim that staff is trained on active citizenship. Other conditions, involving more institutional resources, were chosen rather rarely: structures in place that allow learners to influence the learning offer (e.g. learners council) was chosen by 16% of the respondents, and strategy for promoting active citizenship and democracy by 15%.

According to the participants of the survey, attention to participation in democratic life, common values and civic engagement in the delivery of adult learning improved – for 24% “very much”, for 40% “rather much”, “to some extent” for 28%, and “only a little” – for 8%.

Factors hampering or stimulating impact

The fact that the developed outputs and products are used in the organisations in long-term perspective is an encouraging sign. Almost all of the respondents with experience in partnership projects (98%) declared that tangible results of KA2 are still being used, though the extent varies. $\frac{1}{3}$ of the organisations very much agree with such statement, 53% rather much, and 12% to some extent. One respondent did not know how to answer the question. When answering the open-ended question (28 responses collected) about the factors that hampered or stimulated the take-up and use of outputs and products developed with Erasmus+ support since 2018, the majority of respondents highlighted the hardships they encountered. The most frequently mentioned obstacle referred to the Covid-19 pandemic, which was an external, unpredictable condition. Others were concerned about the way organisations work – rapid changes among the staff and voluntary-based work hampers continuity and the use of formerly developed results. In the case of factors stimulating impact, the higher level of openness of the staff and widening the perspectives of the organisation were mentioned. During interviews (IDI),

in some cases respondents referred to particular products (i.e. learning materials) that were significant for the organisation.

Digital education tools for seniors and these tools we still use, or at least we used for a project funded by another source. ADU_07_ORG

We learned about a very cool method called Learning Circles. We translated it into Polish as knowledge clubs. And it's a method that connects the online world with the offline world. We take materials, online courses, or any materials from the Internet, but we invite a group of adults to face to face meetings just to learn together. ADU_23_ORG

A lot of these effects such tangible ones have been created, that is, our various publications, manuals, descriptions of these methodologies, descriptions of research, all of this is very valuable, all of this is used. ADU_23_ORG

Conclusions

In general, organisations admit that thanks to Erasmus+ they gained the opportunity to undertake actions that otherwise would not have been possible, so it can be stated that the programme provides new perspectives and widens horizons for many of the participating institutions.

Aspects that seem especially valuable in terms of promoting internationalisation and networking are recognised by the organisations, as partnerships with other organisations was mentioned by 59% of them.

Erasmus+ programme is definitely perceived through the lenses of internationalisation, and participants see it as an inevitable part of taking part in the projects. Internationalisation can be seen from different angles; however, the most profound seems to be the relationship with other European organisations. Implementation of the projects enhances organisational openness and sets expectations for future international activities. Staff become aware of opportunities to enhance internationalisation and its associated benefits. Nevertheless, improvements in this area can be seen more clearly in terms of intangible aspects; however, when considering particular dimensions of operating of an organisation, such as strategy and budget, such improvements are less present.

Interestingly, experiences gained during the mobility programmes are present in enriching, updating and improving the offer. Some practices that were presented during the visits to partner organisations were implemented in the educational offer of Polish organisations. Participants declare that the offer benefited in terms of alignment with the needs of adult learners, and is more diverse, which facilitates reaching different groups.

The topics that have gained more attention since participation in Erasmus+ can be perceived as an indicator of areas that are especially important and supported within the organisations engaging in the projects. Most frequent responses were: inclusion and diversity (68%), European values (61%), and digital skills (60%).

A deeper look at the horizontal priorities (inclusion and diversity, green transition, digital transformation, and democratic values and participation in civic life), reveals a more complicated picture. On the declarative level in the online questionnaire it can be assumed that organisations recognise these priorities and provide multiple conditions facilitating development in line with them. Analysis of the answers to open-ended questions show more nuanced attitudes. The higher level of openness and the benefits of cooperation with international partners lead to a higher level of inclusion and acceptance for diversity. Participants in the interviews and open-ended questions quite often referred to the improvement in the area of digitalisation, especially when it comes to modernisation of the attitude in the organisation in that matter, and in higher level of digital tools usage within educational activities. However, as far as green skills and democratic life and civic participation are concerned, those aspects are almost absent in the answers to the open questions and hardly mentioned in the interviews.

The most significant factors stimulating impact are higher openness and broadening of the horizons, while influence of engagement of staff and participants can also be mentioned. On the other hand, factors hampering the impact can be described as external and unpredictable, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, low level of professionalisation of the organisations, risks of rapid changes in the internal environment, and different aspects of uncertainty.

Impact of Erasmus+ at micro level



Introduction

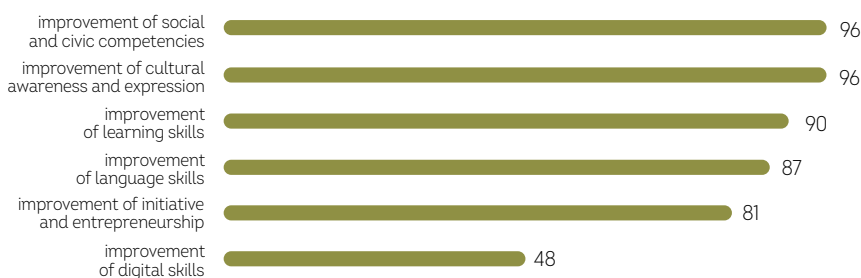
In this chapter, we look at the impact of Erasmus+ on staff and adult learners within participating organisations. Aspects of professionalisation include the guidance of learners, the mapping of learning outcomes and the focus on inclusion and diversity.

Impact on staff

According to the statistics from participant reports 2018-2020 in Poland there is a huge, overwhelmingly positive impact on different competencies of staff over this period. The vast majority of participants fully agree or agree with the statement that they have improved their social and civic competencies (96%), cultural awareness and expression (96%), and their learning skills (90%). Only a slightly lower number declared that thanks to participation in Erasmus+, their language skills (87%) and initiative and entrepreneurship (87%) have increased. In comparison to these optimistic declarations, only just under 50% of the respondents acknowledged the improvement of their digital skills.



Figure 6. Learning outcomes of staff that participated in mobility exchange in the period 2018-2020 (in %) (N=3172)



Source: own calculations, Mobility Tool+, Participant reports 2018-2020.

A similar, very positive effect can be observed when looking at the results of the survey conducted among the representatives of beneficiary organisations (participating in KA1 or KA2). In the survey, respondents were asked to what extent they agree or disagree with the statements regarding the impact of participation in Erasmus+ since 2018 on the professionalisation and development of staff working in their organisation. There were 14 statements measuring manifested declarations towards different aspects of impact on staff.

Before delving into the results, it is important to note that we cannot draw conclusions about the objective impact on different competencies of staff, but rather about individuals'



impressions of the changes that participation in Erasmus+ has made on the organisation's staff. Since the variable reflects the respondents' perception of the changes in staff, it is referred to as "perceived impact" in the further analyses.

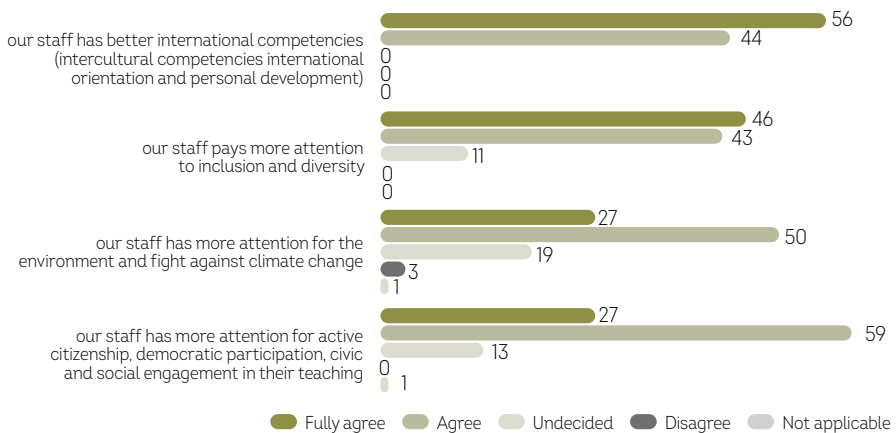
Generally speaking, we can conclude that people notice positive changes in most aspects they were asked about in the survey (the answers "fully agree" and "agree" in almost every statement reach around 90%). This is why the further analysis will focus on comparing only extremely positive answers ("fully agree"). For the purpose of the analysis, we divided the 14 statements into three categories: the perceived impact on European values and competencies of the staff, the perceived impact on other staff's professional competencies, and the perceived impact on staffs' teaching and pedagogical skills.

European values and attitudes are important aspects of Erasmus+ projects. The staff of organisations that participate in KA1 and KA2 actions have an opportunity to become a part of a group of people from different countries and cultures. The most significant change noticed by the respondents was that the staff have better international competencies (56% fully agree with this statement), while 46% of them fully agree with the statement that the staff pay more attention to inclusion and diversity. The least extreme positive responses relate to the following two statements: the staff has more attention for the environment and climate change, and that the staff has more attention for active citizenship, democratic participation, civic, and social engagement (both 27%).



Figure 7.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statements presented below regarding the impact of participation in Erasmus+ since 2018 on the professionalisation and development of staff? (in %) (N=92)



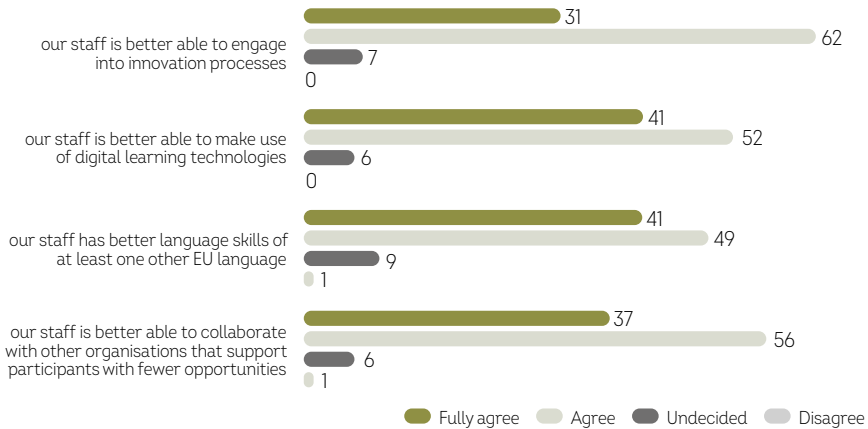
Source: own calculations, quantitative survey amongst beneficiary organisations

In relation to the questions categorised as “the perceived impact on other professional staff’s competencies”, we can observe that respondents answered most positively (fully agreeing) to the statements characterising the improvement of language skills and the improvement in using digital learning technologies (both 41%)



Figure 8.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statements presented below regarding the impact of participation in Erasmus+ since 2018 on the professionalisation and development of staff? (in %) (N=92)



Source: own calculations, quantitative survey amongst beneficiary organisations

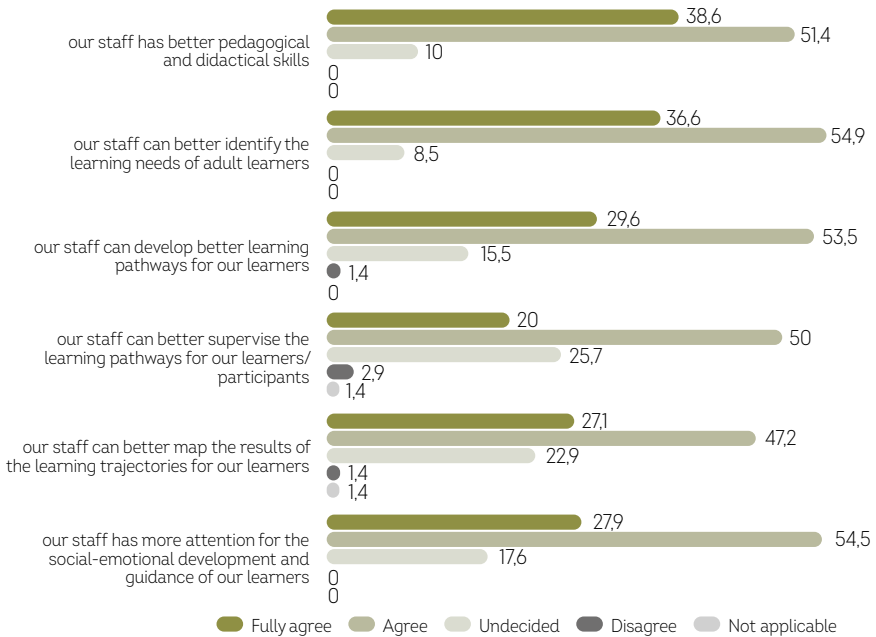
The very important aspect of teaching adult learners is not only transmitting knowledge, but also transferring skills related to identifying learning needs and outcomes and setting directions for further learning that should result from the learning process.

In relation to the questions categorised as the perceived impact on teaching and pedagogical skills, we can conclude that the most significant changes that respondents noticed are in improving the pedagogical and didactic skills of the organisation’s staff (39% of the respondents fully agree with this statement). A little bit less (37%) fully agree with the statement that the staff can better identify the learning needs of adult learners and can better develop learning pathways for their learners. The lowest results in fully agreeing responses are observed in the statement regarding the staff’s ability to supervise the learning pathways for learners (20%).



Figure 9.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statements presented below regarding the impact of participation in Erasmus+ since 2018 on the professionalisation and development of staff? (in %) (N=92)



Source: own calculations, quantitative survey amongst beneficiary organisations

Now we are going to delve deeper into the impact on staff by bringing particular examples from the five case studies.

A general conclusion is that the impact on staff usually differs when we look at the type of organisation, the target group and the type of project they participated in (KA1 or KA2). Differences and specific benefits for the staff in each case study will be described, followed by a summary of common effects.

The case study 3 KA1

In this small organisation, where the main target group of its activity is seniors and the primary activity is teaching foreign languages, we consider staff as members of this association. Some of these members have roles as coordinators of mobility projects, while others are also educators and have participated in mobility projects to enhance their language skills.

The outcomes of participating in mobility can be divided into two categories: planned outcomes and unexpected outcomes. The outcomes also differ depending on the role the staff played in the projects.

In the case of unexpected outcomes for project coordinators, interviewees indicated that working on projects strengthened their organisational skills and increased their ICT skills. Due to this organisation's extensive experience in participating in various projects, we can observe the accumulation of capital – participation in one project enhances staff's skills in writing good project proposals for subsequent projects.

Another group of staff in this organisation consists of educators who teach foreign languages. Respondents generally reported that they had the opportunity to learn about new methods and tools for teaching, which they applied in their own classes. The interviewees mentioned additional benefits for staff members of the association, such as gaining cultural experiences and openness to different cultures. On a personal level, respondents emphasised feeling more confident, having better self-efficacy, and being more courageous in undertaking new challenges.

The case study 4, KA1

This type of organisation – public service providers – is rarely represented in Erasmus+ in Poland, which makes this case particularly interesting. According to European Commission Qlick Sense data, only 4.9% of these types of organisations participated in KA104, and even fewer, 0.5%, in KA204.

In this case, the outcomes for the staff employed in this institution (particularly job advisors and trainers) who participated in trainings organised abroad have wider effects, especially for the clients of this institution, mainly vulnerable groups such as the unemployed, migrants, and students in the last stage of school who are at risk of future unemployment. By taking part in a mobility project, the staff learned different methods and tools in the area of trainings, job advising, and validation of learning outcomes for their clients.

According to interviews, participation in training abroad has primarily allowed the staff to:

- Improve skills, methods and tools for conducting training for unemployed individuals and better adjust activating methods to various target groups. These methods, techniques, and tools are also used in schools and enable earlier activation of youth at risk of future unemployment.
- Learn new, foreign solutions and apply them in their own work.
- Improve skills related to creating a balance of competencies and conducting individual entrepreneurship plans for clients.

One of the respondents particularly valued the knowledge gained in supporting migrants from more experienced countries. These experiences are related to supporting and integrating

this group of individuals into the job market. This seems crucial, especially considering the increase in the influx of immigrants to Poland as a result of the Russian aggression in Ukraine.

For the interviewee, not only new tools and methods tailored to this group of individuals are important, but also breaking down barriers and patterns, as well as fears associated with the influx of immigrants to Poland. For them, it also includes an increase in sensitivity and willingness to help less privileged groups.

Showing the issue of immigrants, foreigners who are arriving in such numbers, was a particularly important experience for me. ADU_15_LEARN

Because of the duties I perform here, the first projects focusing on the issue of immigrants were very interesting to me [...] Now Ukraine, it's a special situation. We don't see those boats approaching the shore, those thousands of people with children in their arms. I was struck by the openness of those associations and various foundations that are so strongly focused on helping these people, the least. ADU_15_LEARN

The analysis of interviews conducted within case studies indicates that stronger and more enduring effects of project participation are observed in organisations with more diverse and longer project experience.

In the case of **Case study 5 KA1**, a large organisation mainly conducting educational activities for seniors, participating in both KA1 and KA2, it is worth emphasising the impact on educator-volunteers, participants, and coordinators. Respondents highlight that educators have improved their skills in using various methodological tools to work with seniors, such as gamification. Their public speaking skills have also improved, as well as language skills and digital literacy. From the organisation's development perspective, it has become important for the staff to acquire project coordination skills, collaborate with partners, promote the organisation's offers, and enhance management skills.

Another organisation with long traditions and experience in Erasmus projects dating back to 2008 is the **Case study 1 KA2**. In this case, it is worth emphasising that the involvement of staff in more complex and long-term projects, and in partnership with foreign entities, certainly contributes to the development and consolidation of new competencies among the staff. It should be noted that the professionalisation of staff in terms of working in project mode has led to an increase in digital skills and language proficiency, including writing, reading, and fluent speaking.

Similar experiences can be observed in another case of a non-governmental organisation – **Case study 2 KA2**. The rich experience of participating in various projects, not only Erasmus+ ones, as well as leadership roles, has enabled the staff to increase their openness, strengthen their values, and enrich their experiences in an international environment, different work cultures, and also in building social capital and networking.

Aside from those specific cases, there are also common benefits for staff that can be observed in most analysed cases. Regardless of the project, respondents usually mention breaking down their fears in the area of foreign language and generally improve their language skills.

In all cases, especially when it comes to mobility, we can speak about the increase in motivation to learn. Many respondents claim that knowing about taking part in educational activities abroad motivated them to prepare – so they willingly improved their language skills and took part in courses about the culture of the country they were going to.

Interestingly, voluntary learning, in this case language learning, is associated with additional positive aspects such as the opportunity to be in a different place and experience different culture, which has the potential to resonate even after the actual learning process is completed.

A high level of commitment also manifests itself in extending the practices of learning. We can notice a phenomenon of cumulative learning. If the learning process brings effects and can be easily applied by adults, it is more likely to be continued in the future. Participation in training and job shadowing is just a part of the whole process, which also involves self-learning and learning from the other participants, as well as building information resources. It is therefore learning how to learn.

In English, I'm trying to be more independent, especially after coming back, even in my education, or when I'm still studying at university. I've downloaded an app on my phone and I try to practice vocabulary. ADU_20_LEARN

No less important is developing social capital, establishing relationships, and creating communities around certain topics, especially in the form of closed groups in the digital sphere. It gave the opportunity to improve their communication and teamwork skills, as well as provided them with a greater sense of efficacy and the ability to establish cooperation with external entities.

Additional effects observed among the staff include increased motivation to engage and greater receptiveness to new initiatives. Notably, participants from smaller towns or rural areas demonstrate a reduction in barriers related to using mobile applications and acquiring navigation skills in large urban areas.

Representatives of the staff emphasised in interviews that new skills are not only useful at work, but also in their personal lives, especially collaboration skills, emotional management, and greater openness to experiences.

Impact on adult learners

Empirical findings indicate that adult learning is most often undertaken in relation to work (Petelewicz et al. 2023; Czarnik et al. 2022). However, from an individual perspective, participation in educational activities offers a much broader range of functions and benefits. As noted by T. Schuler and D. Watson, “learning reinforces the power to take control of one’s own life” (Schuler, Watson 2009: 7-15).

When it comes to participation in Erasmus+, the most targeted group is seniors (61% according to the quantitative survey amongst beneficiary organisations).

According to the interviews with learners, we can characterise this group as active in participating in various activities organised for them by different non-governmental organisations such as foundations, Universities of the Third Age, and senior social clubs. Usually, they are retired or nearing retirement. They identify themselves as open-minded, seeking opportunities to remain active, and with particular hobbies and interests.

My wife and I are people who are very... well, we enjoy traveling both within Poland and abroad. Besides that, I always like meeting new people and discovering new places. ADU_24_LEARN

It is very important for me to fulfil myself in life. Erasmus simply gives me that. ADU_20_LEARN

Therefore, it seems that currently, the beneficiaries of Erasmus+ programmes among adult learners are mainly active seniors. It can be assumed that this is the result of the recruitment process for projects, in which participating organisations, whose services are focused on educational activities targeted at older individuals, are involved.

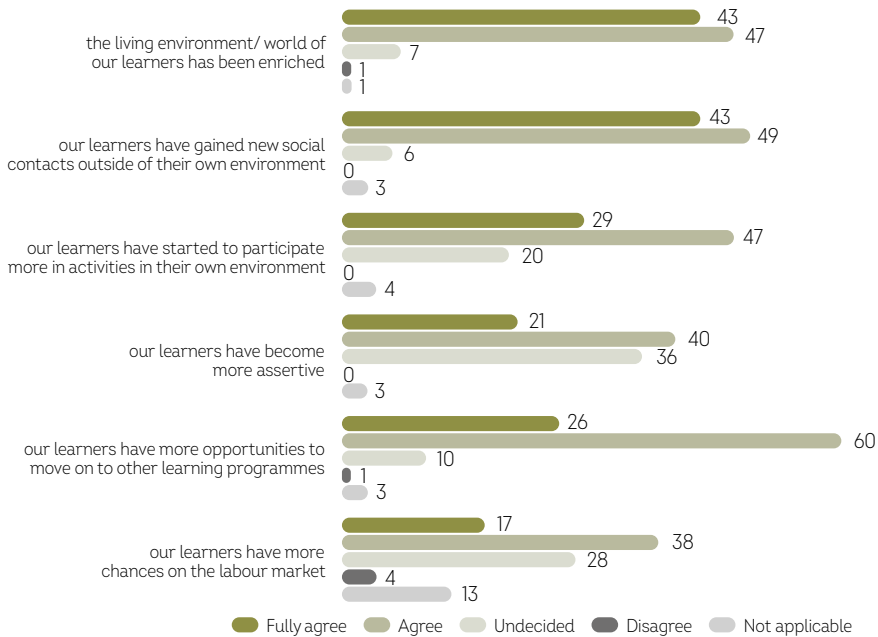
When discussing the benefits, we focus on those that are intended by the organisers to be gained through participating in different trainings (primarily referring to the achievement of specific learning outcomes), and on those that arise from hidden, often unintended, and unconscious functions of learning (Illeris, 2007).

If we look at the results of the survey, we can observe that around 90% of representatives of organisations fully agree or agree with the statements that their learners have gained new social contacts outside of their own environment, the living environment/world of their learners has been enriched, and that their learners have more opportunities to move on to other learning programmes. The least optimistic responses were related to the statement that the learners have more chances in the labour market (55% fully agree or agree).



Figure 10.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statements presented below regarding the impact of participation in Erasmus+ since 2018 on adult learners in your organisation? (in %)



Source: own calculations, quantitative survey amongst beneficiary organisations

According to the data from interviews with learners, typically, the act of travelling to another country and participating in the training motivates participants to start learning earlier. Participants willingly take part in language and cultural workshops organised before the

trip, they acquaint themselves with materials prepared for them by the organisers. Some of them initiate informal learning before the trip by preparing specific useful language phrases. This is not surprising; andragogical findings indicate that adults learn differently, they are more motivated if they see direct application possibilities.

Interestingly, informal learning, in this case language learning, additionally associated with positive stimuli such as the opportunity to visit different places and experience different cultures, has the potential to resonate even more after the proper learning process has ended.

In some narratives, we can note additional motivation to continue learning in different forms. Interviewees mention the desire to enrol in a language course, greater motivation for various informal activities (e.g. solving Sudoku), or even starting volunteering. There are individual examples of intergenerational learning – passing on the knowledge acquired during the trip to younger family members.

During the training, above all, engaging with a group that is diverse in terms of life experiences and professional backgrounds, and especially in cultural diversity, allows for a better understanding of the surrounding reality, different cultural values, and social processes. It provides an opportunity to broaden the range of cultural codes, enabling active participation in conversations, training in engaging in discussions, and presenting arguments. This helps individuals overcome the fear of communicating in a foreign language and feel more confident in various communication and cultural contexts. Usually, this phenomenon is referred to in the literature as learning from one another or peer learning (Briggs, 2013; Gogus 2012).

Adult learning during Erasmus+ activities seems to be a tool for empowerment. Interviewees mention that they were able to learn to work in a group, to interact within a group, and to react to unexpected situations.

Before the project, I definitely wouldn't have coped with it, especially in terms of contacts with people, I mean, such inhibitions like, I don't know, whether to speak up, engage someone in conversation, or something, yet when you go through something like this. ADU_20_LEARN

This is particularly important for individuals who, due to health deficits, have experienced a lack of confidence, feelings of inferiority, and being treated as such by others for most of their lives. Among the conducted interviews, we found one case of a person for whom multiple participations in Erasmus+ projects significantly improved the quality of life in many dimensions. In this particular case, we identified that the initial difficulty of breaking the spiral

of negative events due to their mental disabilities could be to some extent alleviated thanks to participating in Erasmus+. According to the interviewee, their sense of self-worth has changed, and they have managed to overcome the stigma of being inferior.

I feel more confident in what I'm doing. Contacts have improved and expanded, I have new acquaintances, I maintain them remotely. ADU_11_LEARN

Participating in Erasmus+ strengthens the sense of control over one's own life, self-confidence, and courage to take action, encompassing various dimensions: cognitive, emotional, and social.

Educational activities and the trip itself also contribute to expanding networks and developing social relationships, thus building social capital. Interviewees mention that they could open up new paths for personal development, provide information on navigating less familiar areas of social reality, and can influence the overall well-being and their own confidence.

Some interviewees, thanks to particular topics of the training or inspiration of local cuisine, get motivated to start a healthier lifestyle. Additional cognitive skills arise from the necessity of coping with different environment during the trip, for example using mobile applications, learning how to navigate through larger agglomerations, or communicating in institutions.

An interesting case involves participants of KA2 projects who took part in international exchanges. It seems that these experiences of integrating with a linguistically and culturally diverse group are very fulfilling because they require much greater involvement and preparation: deepening knowledge of one's own culture to showcase attractive places and presentation skills.

Conclusions

Participating in projects under Erasmus+ provides numerous benefits both to the organisation's staff and the adult learners involved. The primary effect as perceived by staff includes better international competencies and increased attention to inclusion and diversity. There is also noticeable improvement in language and digital skills. Similarly, according to the respondents, various aspects related to teaching and learning in adult education have improved.

Regarding adult education participants, firstly, we can say that they are more active in social life, feel a greater influence on their own lives, and consequently perceive that their lives have

better quality. During mobility, interviewees not only acquire new knowledge and expand their cognitive horizons, but also enhance their social competencies and personal development through learning and encountering new experiences.

On the micro level, the decision to participate in Erasmus+ for both staff and adult learners is complex. In the case of senior learners, this group can be challenging to persuade to participate in Erasmus+. Some seniors may have more available time because they are not bound by professional obligations. However, they also often have personal responsibilities, such as caring for grandchildren, pets, or other dependent individuals.

For this group in particular, the values adopted and previous educational patterns become important, as well as limitations stemming from their habits. Our interviewees mentioned fears associated with the necessity of undertaking learning in a more formalised formula (patterns of compulsory education), language barriers, fears of participation in the international environment, and concerns about managing the challenge of the trip itself. These individuals also often fear for their health condition. For some, additional expenses of travelling may be a barrier.

It is also worth mentioning the digital barriers that create difficulties in the process of project registration and navigating in different environments, for example when using digital applications is necessary.

In the case of the interviewees, the above-mentioned fears or anxieties did not prevent them from participating in Erasmus+. In some cases, interviewees made the decision to participate in a mobility with the help of other people, such as relatives or friends. This arrangement seems very supportive and gives the advantage of mutual motivation throughout the learning journey. It also provides a sense of security and reduces uncertainty when facing new challenges.

The factors mentioned by the interviewees may constitute significant barriers to participation, especially for economically excluded groups with lower cultural capital. It seems that for these individuals, the trip abroad should not be the only element of broader activities involving educational engagement, and should be preceded by a series of motivating actions to encourage participation in the journey. Regarding staff, the main barriers mentioned by the interviewees include the language barrier and personal commitments. Additional motivation and encouragement to participate by supervisors or colleagues who have already participated in projects, are especially necessary in this context.

Another factor that may influence the participation in the project is the low awareness of Erasmus+ being a project for adult learners in Poland. It is intuitively associated with student exchanges. Potential beneficiaries who could participate in it, especially those who come from less privileged groups and could strengthen their empowerment, have limited opportunities for participation. Although participating organisations promote their activities related to project participation, they usually reach a narrow audience. When promoting activities, the focus should be on the specific effects that individual groups of adults can achieve from participating in the project, by showing photo relations, particular cases, and changes that the participants have undergone thanks to the project. It would also be necessary to involve public services, local government units, and local activists more actively in promoting activities related to participation in Erasmus+.

Impact of Erasmus+ at macro level



Introduction

In this chapter, we look at the impact of Erasmus+ beyond participating organisations. It addresses aspects such as how other organisations benefited from the project outcomes, adjusting their provision/offer, but also whether adjustments have been made to policies (government and/or sectoral) at the national and regional level thanks to Erasmus+ projects.

Impact on other organisations

Organisations participating in the Erasmus+ project do not operate in a social vacuum. Typically, their activities are rooted in the local community. They collaborate with other non-governmental organisations or local authorities. They promote their activities and the effects of participation in the project.

According to the survey results, 74% of the respondents fully agree or agree with the statement that similar organisations (who did not participate in the project) benefited from the project outcomes, adjusting their provision or offer. 17% are undecided and only 1% disagree with this statement.

Organisations that did not participate in Erasmus+ were not included in the study, making it difficult to infer the effects that could occur in this case. However, in narratives from the representatives of beneficiary organisations, we can conclude that the effects of participation in Erasmus+, can resonate both within the local community and among other organisations.

We share our knowledge all the time. During the conferences we organise, during trainings we inform about the fact that our library is an Erasmus+ beneficiary. And we engage participants in various events that disseminate knowledge about the project (...) I think there will be more and more initiatives (...) Simply put, this good news are spreading among the librarians. ADU_18_ORG

And thanks to these experiences, we share them with libraries or other organisations and they too know that from us they can get just the up to date knowledge, the latest inspiration, some innovative solutions, so it strengthens our brand. ADU_23_ORG

Once you enter this world of Erasmus, (...) then these subsequent projects flourish. There is a cluster of organisations that live on this type of project. If they catch a partner once, on whom they can rely, then they invite them to further projects. ADU_07_ORG

Firstly, participation in projects, especially those involving mobility, motivates some organisations to seek participants among members of other organisations with similar profiles. Local social networks also play a significant role, for example, volunteers or members of a particular organisation simultaneously collaborate with other local organisations (e.g. the farmer's wives' association, local government units). Thanks to local network connections, the achieved effects can have a broader reach through disseminating information about participation in the project and implementing specific solutions in other organisations.

Secondly, organisations participating in the project become ambassadors of Erasmus+ in the local environment. They naturally serve as sources of information about the programme for other organisations interested in engaging in projects, as well as for potential participants. Promoting the effects of project participation occurs through various methods and channels.

This is mainly done through:

- Publishing project outcomes in the informational bulletins of the organisation,
- Attending conferences with entities of similar activity profiles,
- Special stands with Erasmus+ materials prepared for the conferences,
- Uploading information about the outcomes on organisation's websites and social media,
- Organising dissemination meetings where representatives of local governments and other organisations with similar profiles are invited.

Additionally, the very fact of participation in projects, especially long-term, in the opinion of the interviewees makes their organisation more recognisable within the local community, thereby exerting a greater influence on other local organisations. This is a significant benefit for the development of Erasmus+ in terms of its visibility.

Impact on national, regional and sectoral policies

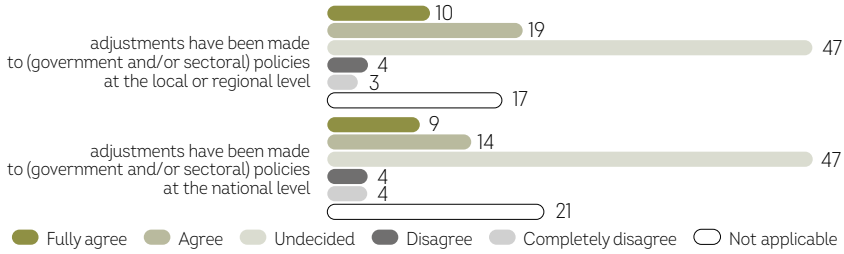
On the basis of research results, it can be stated that the impact of projects on national, regional, and sectoral policies is much less pronounced. Considering the generally optimistic responses of the respondents regarding the perceived impacts of Erasmus+ project participation at the meso (organisational) and micro (staff and adult learners) levels, positive responses are much less frequently indicated in this context. Only 29% fully agree or agree with the statement that adjustments have been made to policies (government and/or sectoral) at the local or regional

level, and even fewer (23%) believe that adjustments have been made to policies (government and/or sectoral) at the national level. Nearly half are undecided about whether adjustments have occurred in local, regional, or national policies. Interestingly, negative responses also appear for these statements.



Figure 11.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statements presented below regarding the impact of participation in Erasmus+ beyond your own organisation? (in %)



Source: own calculations, quantitative survey among beneficiary organisations

In qualitative interviews, apart from isolated statements regarding collaboration with local government units, we do not find any information about any Erasmus+ impact on public policies, whether at the local, regional, or national levels. However, participating organisations are usually concentrated on their surroundings and only notice the influence on and around them. Therefore, the analysis of the impact of mobility programmes on broader external environment and macro context should be undertaken at further steps of the research project.

Conclusions

Based on the data from qualitative and quantitative research, we can conclude that the main impact at the macro level is noticeable in other organisations (in adjusting their provision or offer) or in local communities by disseminating information about the effects of participation in Erasmus+. The impact on governmental policies is almost negligible.

This may be caused by two reasons. Firstly, the scope of activities undertaken within KA1 and KA2 projects is still too limited to significantly influence solutions in the field of non-formal adult education at both national and regional policy levels. Beneficiary organisations are typically small, non-governmental organisations or foundations that focus on activities for seniors. Secondly, in terms of regional-level adult education, it is a secondary area of activity for the main institutional actors. There is no overarching governing body or institution solely coordinating adult education. Tasks related to adult education in relation to the labour market are mainly managed by provincial labour offices, formal adult education falls under the supervision of the department responsible for compulsory education, and regional fund departments are in charge of strategic planning and financial issues.



Support of NA: strengths and challenges



Key findings and policy pointers

General conclusions

One of the most significant obstacles to expanding the programme among organisations dealing with adult learning and educational services is **the low recognition of Erasmus+** as the initiative accessible to such organisations. In respondents' opinions, Erasmus+ is commonly associated with higher education and youth sectors. Awareness of the opportunities it creates in other areas is perceived as relatively low. Thus, the measures to disseminate information to a wider range of potential beneficiaries should be undertaken.

There are some dominant **characteristics** of Polish **organisations** participating in Erasmus+ programme which reveal some patterns. They show which types of organisations are mostly represented. On the one hand, identifying the most common participants can be used to pinpoint the types of organisations that are not reached (or reached to a little extent) and try to figure out ways for widening accessibility and inclusiveness. On the other hand, it also gives the chance for a deeper understanding of the problems and barriers for the most common users, and to prepare tailored solutions supporting them on different stages.

- **Non-governmental** organisations, associations, and foundations are predominant, with a low representation from the public sector and institutions. However, it should be noted that public cultural institutions (e.g. libraries and museums) that are involved in Erasmus+ are usually very active.
- The majority of the surveyed organisations (61%) point to **the elderly as their target group**. Directing support towards this group, activating them in various areas of life, including engaging them in educational activities, is important, especially considering that seniors tend to engage in learning activities much less frequently than younger people (Petelewicz et al. 2023). Moreover, the older generation is generally the least active within the local community, even though for most of them, this is essentially the only environment in which they operate after retiring from professional work (Social Diagnosis 2000-2013). However, according to the in-depth interviews with adult learners, those who had been involved in Erasmus+ activities, especially mobilities (KA1), are engaged in various activities organised for them by different types of non-governmental organisations, such as foundations, Universities of the Third Age, and senior social clubs. It can be concluded that Erasmus+ supports the most active part of the generally non-active group.
- The majority of the organisations are rather **small and medium sized**. Those organisations are rather local, connected with particular areas (both in terms of interest, as well as geographically). It is a great advantage of Erasmus+ projects to involve those types of

organisations, support their internationalisation and widen opportunities for their development. At the same time, it is worth mentioning the problems that they encounter at different stages: application, managing the project, and reporting. They stem from complicated procedures (especially application and reporting), while such organisations do not have much human resources, are often based on voluntary work, and their staff is overloaded. In some organisations, the staff demonstrates low digital skills and needs more time and help while dealing with EU systems. Those types of organisations are prone to personal changes, which can lead to the lack of continuity of the impact of projects.

Policy pointers

Based on the analysis, following issues for further consideration might be raised:

- It should be considered how to broaden access to Erasmus+ among more diverse groups, including less active seniors and other vulnerable populations. This can be achieved by incorporating public and non-public institutions and various entities into the Erasmus+ framework, including those targeting disadvantaged groups, such as labour market institutions, social assistance centres, and social economy entities (e.g. reintegration institutions). Erasmus+ could, for example, be dedicated to training the staff of these institutions to enhance their competencies in working with vulnerable groups, including seniors, people with disabilities, migrants, and the unemployed.
- Enhancing diversity of the organisations. Active measures aiming at including institutions that have the potential to take part in international projects, in order to expand the participation of the public institutions. Communication measures and support dedicated to this sector.
- Continuation and intensification of tailor-made support for small, local organisations lacking resources and confidence to participate. Above all, clear directions concerning application, easy to follow tutorials, and more local consultancy points and meetings enabling face-to-face contact, which is crucial for vulnerable groups like seniors or low-skilled individuals.

Impact at meso level

The most significant impact at the meso level is connected with the **internationalisation** of the organisation. This process takes place in many dimensions, and is frequently highlighted by the participants of the conducted research. The more projects are undertaken by the organisation, the more open and eager for other international activities it becomes. No less important is **better understanding of the project rules**, especially the application procedure. Involvement in mobility and partnerships contribute to the **reinforcement of inclusiveness and**

diversity. It is also the chance to **enhance social capital and networking of the institutions.** Recognisability and strengthening the position in the local environment is perceived as the additional value of the international projects.

The impact of the project can be identified in the area of the learning offer. Methods, inspirations and ideas gained during the projects are used by the organisations in learning materials and the ways of approaching learners. Participation in Erasmus+ definitely contributes to the awareness and attention to the horizontal values, but there are problems with organisational and administrative actions supporting this impact (like budget, dedicated staff or strategy).

Policy pointers:

Based on the analysis, following issues for further consideration might be raised:

- Active engagement of former participants in Erasmus+ in popularising ideas and projects. Organisations that took part in the projects before can effectively act as “ambassadors”, able to share their success stories and their experiences connected with the initial anxiety and dealing with different kinds of obstacles.
- Supporting strategy for continuation and long-lasting impact. Working with organisations after the “Erasmus+ action plan”, covering particular steps enhancing chances for persistent incorporation of the values, ideas and results into functioning of the organisations.

Impact at micro level

Key findings

On the micro level, respondents clearly identify significant benefits for both staff and adult learners from participating in Erasmus+ projects, both KA1 and KA2. A greater effect could be achieved in terms of European values (e.g. more attention to the environment and combating climate change, or greater emphasis on active citizenship, democratic participation and civic and social engagement in their teaching).

It appears that benefits in the area of **cultural awareness, language, and digital skills** are more visible among staff who participate in **KA2 projects**.

Barriers to participating in Erasmus+ among staff of organisations and to maintaining its effects:

- Individual barriers include fears related to **language skills and personal obligations** that can hinder participation. Personal commitments that may impede travel include various

responsibilities or obligations that make it difficult for individuals to leave their current location, for example: **family responsibilities, work commitments, health issues, financial constraints.**

- Limitation of opportunities to apply new solutions and methods achieved during Erasmus+ directly to professional tasks, as indicated by qualitative interviews, due to the fact that the organisation's staff also consists of volunteers. Staff turnover and the lack of continuity of Erasmus+ within the organisation may diminish the long-term impact of its effects.
- In the case of adult learners, we identified obstacles that can prevent adult learners from participating.

On the personal level, those are:

- Anxiety related to language skills barrier
- Entrenched patterns and habits related to acquiring knowledge
- Concerns related to travel
- Apprehension related to different cultures and participation in a group of strangers
- Personal commitments
- Health problems
- Barriers related to digital skills- registration requirements (registration issues)
- Health issues
- Anxiety related to additional travel costs

These barriers and fears may be more severe and visible in groups that have fewer resources, lower socio-economic status, are less active in their communities, have a negative attitude towards learning, and have less experience with learning and traveling abroad.

Policy pointers

Based on the analysis, it seems that efforts should be made to encourage participants from more vulnerable and more diverse groups, while not overlooking those individuals who may initially be less motivated to participate in projects, i.e. individuals with low basic skills. Some ideas that could increase the impact at micro level, expanding the reach to underperforming categories of potential participants, might be considered for implementation:

- To overcome confidence-related fears and adapt to an international environment, it is worth considering an additional step and securing additional funding to organise integrative meetings and trips within Poland, combined with skills training before the mobility project.

- Organising a series of workshops covering digital skills, overcoming barriers related to using internet applications, and online registration, should be considered. It is worth strengthening the support for adult learners during the registration process and simplifying the registration procedure.
- Providing information about healthcare and travel insurance so that participants feel safe. It is worth considering organising informational meetings on mental health and stress management.
- Promoting Erasmus+ outcomes by: sharing success stories and testimonials, together with photographs, from those participants who have taken part in Erasmus+ projects for adults in order to showcase benefits and inspiring experiences; emphasising specific benefits and skills that can be gained through participation in the programme, such as developing intercultural, language, and professional competencies; fostering connections with organisations that have participated and can share their best practices. This can highlight organisational benefits and specific advantages for participants (staff and adult learners).

Impact at macro level

Key findings

Based on the results of the research, it is hard to say whether Erasmus+ has an impact on governmental policies at the regional or macro level.

The main impact is noticeable in the area of cooperation among participating organisations with other local entities by promoting the Erasmus+ and informing them about the benefits of participating in the projects.

Policy pointers

Based on the analysis, the following issues for further consideration might be raised.

To enhance the impact of Erasmus+ on other organisations engaged in adult education activities, it is advisable to consider creating a network of beneficiary organisations participating in Key Action 1 (KA1) and Key Action 2 (KA2), and establishing joint actions that could contribute to the sustainability and promotion of knowledge about Erasmus+. This includes overcoming procedural barriers and challenges related to acquiring and maintaining partners, as well as sharing examples of best practices.

In terms of impact on regional and national public policy, it should be considered how to strengthen cooperation of beneficiary organisations with local and regional public institutions responsible for coordinating Adult Learning Education (ALE), such as local government units

responsible for social policy, and public cultural institutions offering development of key competencies.

Given the current structure of entities participating in Erasmus+, with a dominant role of non-governmental organisations providing services for seniors, the impact on educational policy at the regional or national level may be limited. Solutions should be implemented to encourage participation and promote Erasmus+ offers among entities responsible for implementing public policy tasks related to adult education. Entities providing non-formal education for adults in non-vocational skills and competencies, such as schools and educational institutions offering non-vocational educational activities, should be encouraged to participate in programmes, for example in Local Centres of Knowledge and Education (LOWE).

Furthermore, organisations providing informal learning and integration programmes for vulnerable adults (e.g. people with disabilities, migrants, individuals living in poverty) should become more visible in Erasmus+. It applies, for instance, to family assistance centres and social assistance centres providing support for adults in acquiring non-vocational life skills.

A significantly greater role in Erasmus+ programme in Poland should be given to entities that coordinate general (non-vocational) adult education, such as local government units and their agencies, government administration bodies managing educational facilities for adults in the general (non-vocational) field, and those defining and implementing adult learning strategies in the general (non-vocational) area. These include coordinating bodies for adult learning strategies, including regional and local authorities and labour market institutions. Currently, they have the opportunity to participate in Erasmus+ programmes, but they represent a minority.

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This report provides a Polish summary of the study conducted within the framework of the transnational network „Research-based Impact Analysis of Erasmus+ Adult Education Programme” (RIA-AE Network). To date, little is known about the impact of the Erasmus+ on participants, staff, and organizations in the field of non-vocational adult education. This publication aims to fill this gap by offering one of the first research-based analyses in Poland. The authors examine both the planned and unintended effects of Erasmus+ Key Actions, including the learning mobility of individuals and cooperation among organizations and institutions, from micro-, meso-, and macro-structural perspectives. The publication also highlights the specific characteristics of the adult education sector in Poland, presenting common types of participants and organizations, as well as different patterns of participation in Erasmus+.

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